ESCAPE TO A NEW WORLD OF FREEDOM.
Arrivals rising, and so are hotels on St. Kitts

By Gay Nagle Myers

Riding a wave of hotel developments, a 6.5% increase in air arrivals in 2014 over 2013 and a projected rise of 5.1% in cruise passenger arrivals, which would top 1 million this season, St. Kitts is well positioned for a "strong, solid year of growth," according to Jacques Brown, CEO of the St. Kitts Tourism Authority.

The dramatic-shaped island in the eastern Caribbean and neighboring Nevis constitute one country called the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis.

Although a recent election replaced the party that had held court for 30 years, Brown is confident that the momentum that has attracted visitors and investors in recent years will continue.

"St. Kitts is in a good place now, although we always push for more airlift," Brown said. Ease of connectivity and access, coupled with an authentic, product offering and marketing initiatives that target specific sectors, are key to the destination's growth, according to Brown.

Currently, Delta offers Saturday flights year round from Atlanta; US Airways has a weekly nonstop from Charlotte; American has a weekly nonstop from New York; Kennedy and a daily flight from Miami; Seaboard Airlines has daily service to the island from San Juan.

New resort development includes Belle Mont Farm at Kittitian Hill, the first chapter of a contemporary, sustainable Caribbean community, set on 400 acres on St. Kitts' northern tip.

The first 134 rooms of the 200-room Park Hyatt at Banana Bay on the southeastern peninsula are scheduled for completion early next year.

Construction is underway on the 298-unit Kitt Resort & Residences in Frigate Bay area adjacent to the Royal St. Kitts Golf Club. Opening is targeted for late this year.

Also on tap are Pelican Bay Resort, a condo/hotel mix with 210 units, two infinity pools and two restaurants, and Imperial Bay Beach & Golf Residences, adjacent to the Kitt site.

"By 2017, room stock in both St. Kitts and Nevis will total 2,000 rooms, up from the 1,400 we now have," Brown said.

Christophe Harbour, the 2,500-acre luxury residential resort development on the southeastern peninsula, opened its 24-slip marina last month for megayachts, marking completion of phase one of the project.

Salt Flats, one of Christophe Harbour's two beach clubs, opened last year; it has a dock located around an old salt factory at Whitehouse Bay.

Drinking in

By Felicity Long

You would never have known it was Georgia's Thiblis Airport when the plane landed. Fights were arriving, passport control was packed and port was brightly lit.

In fact, most air service is in and out of Georgia takes place in the middle of the night, and locals are clearly used to these arrivals, for, like the airport, the Holiday Inn Thiblis was fully staffed and busy when I checked in.

Admittedly, these quicky arrival times, along with a few other drawbacks we encountered in the days to follow, such as long stretches of roads without basic amenities and an unsophisticated tourism infrastructure, could be an issue for the casual or inexperienced Europe visitor.

For the right traveler, however, these inconveniences are minor in return for what Georgia has to offer: ancient castles and churches that Thiblis was as beautiful as anything in Italy and France, but without the crowds; a wine culture of increasing international renown; a stellar cuisine; and a warm reception from locals, who seem to have hospitality in their DNA.

"We know this is an unusual trip," said Max Johnson, founder and head of product development for the Great Canadian Travel Co., which, together with the Georgian National Tourism Administration and Living Roots, an inbound travel company, arranged the itinerary.

"We know travel agents may have only one or two clients who are looking for new, interesting programs like this, and we focus on them," he said.

Wine culture

The biggest highlight of the tour was a day spent at Viro, a wine cellar in the city of Tbilisi, where we were able to taste a number of wines and learn about the history of tourism and wine production in Georgia.

Georgia is known for its ancient wine traditions, and the country has been producing wine for over 5,000 years. This makes it one of the oldest wine-producing regions in the world.

The wineries in Georgia are known for their high-quality wines, which have been praised by wine critics around the world. Some of the most famous wines in Georgia include Rkatsiteli, Glencairn, and Saperavi.

One of the highlights of the tour was a visit to Vino Selini, a winery in the outskirts of Tbilisi. The winery was founded in the late 1990s by a group of young wine enthusiasts who were passionate about the traditional wine-making techniques of Georgia.

The winery produces a variety of wines, including Rkatsiteli, Glencairn, and Saperavi, which are known for their unique flavors and aromas. The winery also has a tasting room where visitors can sample the wines and learn about the winemaking process.

Another winery we visited was Kvevri, which is also located in the outskirts of Tbilisi. The winery produces a variety of wines, including Rkatsiteli, Glencairn, and Saperavi, which are known for their high-quality and unique flavors.

The wineries in Georgia are a popular destination for wine tourists, and the country is known for its excellent wine culture. Georgia has been recognized by the World Wine Academy as one of the top five wine-producing countries in the world, and the country has been working to improve its reputation in recent years.

In conclusion, Georgia is a wonderful destination for wine lovers, and the country has a lot to offer in terms of wine culture and tourism. Whether you are a wine connoisseur or just looking for a unique travel experience, Georgia is definitely worth a visit.
Bursting at the banks

A slight slowdown in demand hasn’t deterred river cruise lines from adding capacity and ports throughout Europe.

BY MICHELLE BARAN  PAGE 14

Genting to buy Crystal Cruises and add vessel

By Tom Stieghorst

Crystal Cruises will sail forward under new ownership following a $550 million sale that also comes with a commitment to build a much-desired third ship for the two-ship luxury line.

The agreement to sell Crystal to Genting Hong Kong provided an exit for Japanese shipping giant Nippon Yusen Kabushiki Kaisha (NYK), which founded Crystal 27 years ago.

NYK recently decided to focus its strategy on its cargo shipping business, and analysts said Crystal had been known for some time to be for sale.

In a way, Genting’s purchase of Crystal will put it in direct competition with its equity in Oceania and Regent.

Stuart tapped as president of Norwegian

By Tom Stieghorst

Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings (NCLH) continued its whirlwind of executive changes last week by promoting company veteran Andy Stuart to be president of its rapidly evolving flagship line.

Stuart, 51, succeeds Drew Madsen, who resigned March 3 after only five months on the job.

With the appointment of Stuart, travel agents gain a strong advocate for their channel atop one of the fastest-growing and most popular cruise brands in North America.

Until being named president, Stuart held the title of executive vice president of sales. He has been the top sales executive at Norwegian Cruise Line for most of the past 15 years.

Unlike Madsen, who came to Norwegian from Darden Restaurants, Stuart is well known within the cruise industry, especially within the travel agent community, where praise for his appointment was immediate and enthusiastic.

Andy Stuart
Norwegian

“He’s proven time and again to be an erogenous advocate for the travel agency community.”

Stuart, who was promoted by new NCLH CEO Frank Del Rio, helped turn around Norwegian under previous CEOs Colin Veitch (2000-2008) and Kevin Sheehan (2008-2015). In particular, he spearheaded the Partners First initiative that in 2011 became one of the first branded outreach programs to travel sellers.

Included in Partners First was a commitment by Norwegian to not make See STAYRT on Page 57

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Bursting at the banks

Though there were some early signs that 2015 might be relatively slower than the previous three boom years for European river cruising, not a single player in the market is wavering in its confidence that demand remains as strong as ever and that expansion will continue well into the foreseeable future.

By Michelle Baran
Stylish sustainability at Belle Mont Farm hotel on St. Kitts

By Gay Nagle Myers

ST. KITTS — Belle Mont Farm, a farm-to-table hotel, marks the first chapter of Kittitian Hill, a sustainable community development in the foothills of Mount Liamuiga on the northern tip of this island.

On a recent visit, I instantly loved the place, but I also realized it is not for everyone. For one thing, it’s not on the beach, although it does have a beachfront outpost in the nearby village, down a rutted dirt road.

If staying in a cottage minus the flat-screen TV — and with the loo, shower and clawfoot tub on the side veranda secluded by only a privacy hedge of palm fronds — gives you qualms, it’s not the place to spend a Caribbean vacation.

Inside the style-savvy sanctuary, however, a cinema-size screen unrolls at the push of a button, and a rear-view projector has been built discreetly into the wall.

Using the iPad on the writing desk, guests can select from hundreds of movies and TV shows on Netflix. They also can use the iPad to scan newspapers, check email and order from Rolling Mango room service. Meals are delivered in solar-powered golf carts and are cooked on site.

Belle Mont Farm is outside the envelope. Think dining al fresco at a 30-foot table out in the field where the after-dinner activity is lounging around a fire pit listening to West Indian elders spin tales.

Forget menus. You’re handed a list of ingredients just plucked from the trees, pulled from the ground or hauled from the sea. The day’s harvest dictates the menu. The wait staff guides you through the list.

My breakfast one morning consisted of a garden eggplant and pepper frittata with lemongrass tea and thick slices of gluten-free bread smeared with mammy’s sapote jam. Beets weak coffee and a bagel.

Instead of motorized water-sports on the beach and loud music by the pool, you are offered the chance to meditate with gentle, Jamaican-born Nikky.

During a meditation session on a slightly overcast morning, she told me to focus on a color and one word and to treat each thought that intruded as a cloud that would drift away.

I picked yellow as my color, sun as my word and as I came out of my trance, the skies were as clear as my mind.

I foraged with Yahson Tafari, a Rastafarian organic farmer who walked me through the rows of herbs and vegetables and fruit trees on the farm. The greens he collected along the way appeared in my salad at lunch.

Kittitian Hill is all organic. “We don’t use insecticides,” Tafari said. “Spring water from the mountain irrigates our crops. We handpick the words.”

On the golf course below the tiered rows of crops, he pointed out several dozen sheep ambling along the fairways, which are former sugar cane fields.

“We like the sheep,” he said. “They eat the weeds.”

Kittitian Hill is a work in progress, although all exterior construction, including 15 villas, seven farmhouses and 84 cottages, is complete.

Val Kempadoo, a Trinidadian entrepreneur and the founder of the development, put it this way: “Kittitian Hill will constantly evolve. We are competing on the world stage. This place is not for everyone, but I believe that a fair amount of people know that they do not have to compromise on an authentic experience.”

Kittitian Hill was born from Kempadoo’s deep commitment to sustainable development.

“When I decided 10 years ago to become involved in the hospitality and resort sector, I was surprised that many hotels were being developed and operated by way of exploitative business models with little regard for our social, economic or physical environment,” Kempadoo said.

He decided that a luxury hotel and resort development based on a different model could serve as an agent of change for a more sustainable future.

Still to come is the Village component with its 100-room hotel, featuring lodgings above the pool or on shops where locals are making herbal soap, roasting coffee from beans grown on the farm and baking pastries. A farmers market on the cobblestone plaza in front of the chapel and town hall will offer farm produce. Narrow back streets behind the hotel will mimic the Caribbean towns of old.

The Mango Walk Spa, on the highest point of land on the site, will feature treatment rooms sandwiched between large mango trees.

“We have agents [to come] down here to see for themselves,” said General Manager Carlos Salazar. “Kittitian Hill is off the grid, and you have to see it to understand it.”

I saw it, I understood it, and I plan to return.