

TRAVEL WEEKLY

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CARIBBEAN

St. Kitts and Nevis hitting its tourism groove

By Gay Nagle Myers

New hotels, a cruise port expansion and the emergence of the destination as a market both for the luxury golf and yachting segments highlight recent industry happenings in the two-island Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis.

While these developments are still a ways from fruition, what's got Ricky Skerritt, St. Kitts and Nevis' minister of tourism and international transport, excited this month is the lineup for the 18th annual St. Kitts Music Festival June 26 to 28.

Grammy-winning reggae/dancehall performer Beenie Man is returning to the festival once again, and Skerritt expects a great performance from the star.

"I expect that Beenie Man will do what he has done every time he has performed in St. Kitts in the past: electrify the crowd and make an indelible mark on the event," Skerritt said.

Other reggae artists who will perform



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St. Kitts Tourism Authority CEO Racquel Brown, left, and Director Claire Rawson at Caribbean Week in New York.

at the festival include Tarrus Riley, Capleton, Chronixx and Freddie McGregor.

The lineup also includes "The Voice" winner Tessanne Chin as well as Deniece Williams and Bill Champlin.

"These performers embody what this festival is all about: the mix of musical genres, age ranges and the unifying power of music that our festival has grown to represent," the minister said.

By air and sea

The lineup of tourism developments is equally impressive.

A new private jet terminal, officially named YU Lounge, opened last month next to the Robert Bradshaw Airport.

The facility offers VIP arrival service, a crew lounge, arrival and departure lounges for passengers and ground handling services.

With an eye toward the megayacht market, the marina at Christophe Harbour on St. Kitts' southeastern peninsula is set to open 12 of an eventual 300 slips

on June 27, with a late 2015 completion date.

"The yachting industry holds so much potential for St. Kitts," said Racquel Brown, CEO of the St. Kitts Tour-

ism Authority. "Our location is perfect for island-hopping north to the U.S. and British Virgin Islands, and south through the Grenadines."

The Christophe Harbour project will

include an 18-hole Tom Fazio-designed golf course, restaurants, home sites, villas and several hotels set on 2,500 acres.

The Park Hyatt will be the site's first
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property, expected to open in late 2015.

The 224-room Royal St. Kitts Hotel will complete its \$20 million renovation next year and will include studios, one- and two-bedroom units, a new Indian restaurant and a gym.

As for airlift, American has added a seasonal Friday flight operating through Sept. 5 to complement its year-round Wednesday and Saturday nonstops from New York Kennedy. The carrier also has a daily flight from Miami.

Finally, a new cruise pier could break ground by the end of July, according to Brown, enabling St. Kitts to accommodate

one megaship and two other cruise ships at the same time. The country expects 1 million passengers for the 2015-2016 cruise season.

As for stayover arrivals, tourism officials hope for an increase of between 3% and 4% this year over 2013's 100,000-plus visitors, 70% of whom were from the U.S.

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