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### **British Virgin Islands Tourism Sector Starts 2008 on Positive Note**

**Road Town, Tortola, British Virgin Islands, Tuesday May 27 2008**, – The BVI Tourist Board announced that its crucial tourism sector performed well in the first quarter of the year in spite of many challenges, with a 3.58% percent increase in overnight visitors during the January to March 2008 period. Overall the BVI welcomed 415,004 visitors in the first quarter of 2008 which represents a total growth of 14.6% compared to the same period in 2007.

Preliminary data from the Development Planning Unit (DPU) indicated that the number of international overnight visitors topped the same period of 2007 by 3,968 visitors thereby making this two successive first quarter growth periods as 2007 also saw growth over 2006 by 3,189 or 2.97%. The official credited lots of focus on joint partner marketing, training programmes to specialist agents and more synergies in our international public relations efforts in generating increased knowledge of the destination and closing more bookings.

Janis Braithwaite Edwards, Director of Tourism, indicated that this positive start to the year is very encouraging as everyone in the sector globally are working within the constraints of certain economic slowdown in the BVI's largest source markets of the USA and some rumblings in the UK also.

According to official preliminary statistics from DPU, the month of February recorded a slight slow down in Overnight visitors of less than 1% being 0.29% whilst January and March grew by 9.83% and 2.28% respectively thereby leading to an overall growth position.

This first quarter performance comes after a positive year of total performance for 2007 when the sector's arrivals grew by 15.4% over the year 2006 and contributed some US\$ 39 million or 7.29% more estimated visitor expenditure than in 2006.

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According to Mrs. Braithwaite Edwards, "we recognize the challenges which we are up against and acknowledge that events such as the Beijing Olympics in August and the USA elections in November are additional issues besides the economic slowdowns which all seem inevitable. But we will press on towards growing this very important economic sector thereby helping to improve the lifestyle of all BVIslanders."

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