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SINT MAARTEN

Delivering change for a brighter future

From stabilising the energy grid to overhauling education and housing, Prime Minister Luc Mercelina is steering Sint Maarten into a new era of resilience, opportunity and national pride

From the moment Dr. Luc Mercelina was elected as the eighth Prime Minister of Sint Maarten, the former surgeon began delivering on his promise to bring change. Determined to make impactful strides in steering the country through a critical era, he immediately set to work on strengthening disaster resilience and infrastructure, making socio-economic investments and introducing legal and procedural reforms.

"Within just two weeks of taking office, we introduced new ideas about how the country should be governed," reveals Prime Minister Mercelina.

"The Unified Resilient Sint Maarten Movement (URSM) is not a traditional political party — it was newly founded by young, dynamic and educated individuals determined to do things differently and we are still working hard to bring meaningful change to our country."

While Sint Maarten remains a constituent country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the local government handles domestic matters such as education, healthcare, housing and taxation. The European nation has provided key financial assistance, but it is Prime Minister Mercelina who has determined where these funds will be best spent.

"Energy security is a major challenge and we recently went through a significant energy crisis that destabilized our electricity grid. To address this, we are now purchasing large generators to replace the aging infrastructure. At the same time, we are developing alternative and sustainable energy solutions for Sint Maarten," he outlines.

"Now that we've reestablished basic energy stability, the next step is to pursue greener options. Looking ahead, our focus will be on solar energy. Because Sint Maarten is located in the hurricane belt, wind farms are not a viable option — making solar power the most practical and resilient path forward.

"Another critical area of focus is education. While our thriving tourism industry has helped the economy tremendously, it has also overshadowed other key sectors like education. We are now prioritizing education reform and developing a system tailored to meet the needs of the local labor market.

"Our goal is to ensure that we no longer need to import doctors, nurses or lawyers. Instead, we want to cultivate local talent and strive for self-sufficiency in these essential professions. Building our nation requires professional expertise. As a young, autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, we govern ourselves in almost all areas except defense, international relations, and passport issuance. Our biggest challenge remains securing enough financial resources to transform Sint Maarten and bring this vision for our future to life."

Sint Maarten is home to more than 120 nationalities.

Dr. Luc Mercelina
Prime Minister

While the government is working hard to strengthen various sectors across the country, tourism remains the main driver of the economy. That is why the URSM is determined to create a skilled workforce that can help the sector grow. To achieve this, a major focus is on improving education across the country.

"Tourism is our most important economic sector. Initially, we focused on attracting high-end tourists, but over time, we lost that market segment. We are now reassessing our strategy to determine whether we should also cater more to mass tourism. Personally, I believe the ideal approach lies in finding a balance between both," explains the Prime Minister.

"To achieve that, we need a skilled and specialized workforce — something we currently lack. We have a strong tourism product, but we don't yet have the sales force to match. The sector needs more finesse and professionalism, including well-trained waitstaff and bartenders, to meet the expectations of wealthier visitors. That's exactly what we're working on. Improving the service level will increase the likelihood that high-end tourists return to Sint Maarten.

"Closely related to this is one of our government's top priorities: alleviating poverty. Poverty remains relatively high in Sint Maarten and is deeply linked to the high percentage of residents without a secondary education. For this reason, I believe the most effective long-term solution to poverty is education."

Another area of focus for the government is prioritizing social and affordable housing. This comes after the waiting list for houses grew to 4,000 families.

"On the housing front, a significant portion of the residential stock has been geared toward investors. Striking the right balance is key. We need a housing policy that protects our most vulnerable residents — the very people who keep our economy and tourism sector functioning," says Patrice Gumbs Jr., the Minister of Public Housing, Spatial Planning, Environment and Infrastructure.

With the URSM bringing meaningful change to the country, the future looks bright for the Caribbean nation. And while Sint Maarten may be competing with its neighbors for visitors, Prime Minister Mercelina believes there is something unique about the country.

"Today, we are home to more than 120 nationalities. We are an inclusive and peaceful society where diverse communities — representing different nationalities, religions and ethnicities — live together harmoniously. Sint Maarten has become a true melting pot," adds the Prime Minister.

"There's something unique about Sint Maarten that makes people feel at home. Visitors often become deeply attached to the island, captivated by its contrasts, energy and emotional vibrancy. It's this unique blend that makes Sint Maarten so attractive and unforgettable."

Strong US ties helping to deliver economic growth

Increased tourism flows, direct flights and expanding business links highlight a relationship that drives opportunity

Arrival numbers to Sint Maarten are on an upward trajectory.

Over the course of the last several years, the relationship between Sint Maarten and the United States has grown even stronger, thanks in no small part to the support the US provided in the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma in late 2017.

Providing logistical coordination, emergency relief distribution and critical evacuation efforts in days, weeks and months after the natural disaster, the US has also played a major role in the island's recovery efforts. Support from institutions such as USAID created the foundation for effective recovery, enabling the World Bank and European Investment Bank to deliver large-scale investments into Sint Maarten.

These were vital to improving infrastructure across the country, most notably in reconstructing and modernizing Princess Juliana International Airport. Thanks to these efforts, arrival numbers are growing year on year and the US remains the island's largest source market for visitors.

"At night, you'll find our restaurants filled with American and Canadian tourists, many of whom have been returning since the 1980s and 90s," states Prime Minister Luc Mercelina, who last year embarked on an important trip to Washington, DC, to secure support for Sint Maarten's development initiatives.

While the US remains a key trade partner and investor in Sint Maarten, it is the strong tourism ties that have proved particularly fruitful for the island. There are an increasing number of direct air links to major American cities and regular calls from leading US-based cruise lines position the country as a prominent Caribbean destination.

Sint Maarten has become a gateway to the Northeastern Caribbean for many US travelers and the two countries are constantly working to strengthen their tourism ties, recognizing the importance of this sector for both economies.

"There are many political shifts taking place in the United States right now, and we fully respect that process. Sint Maarten has always been — and will continue to be — a close and loyal friend to the US. We remain committed to welcoming American tourists and ensuring they feel at home here," says the Prime Minister.

"Sint Maarten is a safe and peaceful destination, where visitors can enjoy a relaxing vacation surrounded by sun, sand and beautiful beaches. But more than that, we offer a warm and genuine hospitality, something we hope every visitor has the chance to experience."

> DR. LUC MERCELINA
> PRIME MINISTER
>
> **"Sint Maarten has always been a close and loyal friend to the US. We remain committed to welcoming American tourists and ensuring they feel at home here."**

Explaining why Sint Maarten is such an attractive proposition for those across the US, May-Ling Chun, the director of tourism at the Sint Maarten Tourism Bureau, says: "Here, you can relax, recharge and immerse yourself in our culture, food and warm community. Explore the island freely and safely, making stops along the way to experience its many vibrant faces."

While tourism remains the major driver of the economy in Sint Maarten, the government is also working closely with its US counterparts to expand economic opportunities, particularly for entrepreneurs. This was highlighted by a visit from a Sint Maarten delegation to Atlanta, sponsored by the US Consulate, that focused on strengthening ties in the fintech sector.

The delegation, which included four young entrepreneurs who won Sint Maarten's National Youth Pitch Competition, spoke with founders and investors at organizations and universities devoted to fostering entrepreneurs and encouraging the growth of the fintech sector.

These included Atlanta Tech Village, the Advanced Technology Development Center and the Russell Innovation Center for Entrepreneurs, a unique business generator and innovation lab for Black-owned businesses.

In addition to strengthening ties through education, Sint Maarten has been showcasing its investment opportunities to investors across the US. As Patrice Gumbs Jr., the Minister of Public Housing, Spatial Planning, Environment and Infrastructure, explains, this has included high-lighting sectors such as clean energy and real estate.

He adds: "Sint Maarten offers much more than just the traditional 'sun, sea, and sand' Caribbean appeal. We are a cosmopolitan, open society, and I truly believe we present a unique opportunity for investment in real estate, infrastructure and green energy."

With American investors exploring real estate and fintech opportunities, airlines helping to drive tourism appeal and US-backed initiatives supporting key infrastructure developments, Sint Maarten's relationship with the US is set to deepen in the years ahead.

TOP 5 REASONS TO INVEST IN SINT MAARTEN TODAY

Location:
The island offers easy access to major markets in the US and Europe

Government support:
There is an investment-friendly regulatory framework

Tourism:
World-class hotels, marinas and airports attract high-value visitors year-round

Economic opportunities:
Sectors such as yachting real estate and green energy offer significant returns

Highly-skilled workforce:
Trained staff in a host of sectors ensure smooth business operations

Sustainability at the heart of tourism plans

From new hotel developments to smart city projects, the government is charting a careful path toward long-term, balanced growth across the tourism industry


Infrastructure developments are taking place throughout Sint Maarten.

Riding a wave of momentum that began in late 2024, Sint Maarten's tourism sector has registered significant growth in the first quarter of 2025, with the island welcoming 256,923 arriving passengers — a 10.8% increase over the same period last year. This comes amid improved connectivity, the implementation of targeted marketing strategies and significant upgrades were made at Princess Juliana International Airport.

The impressive figures are particularly significant as they mark the first time that the country has returned to pre-Hurricane Irma levels of tourism. This is largely being driven by visitors from North America, with the United States accounting for 54% of arrivals and Canada contributing another 13%.

While Sint Maarten hopes to see tourist arrival numbers continue to rise, the government is ensuring that the growth is sustainable. "We've launched a comprehensive carrying capacity study to assess how much tourism, traffic, and hotel development the island can realistically support. The results will guide our long-term planning and marketing strategies," explains Grisha Heyliger-Marten, Minister of Tourism, Economic Affairs, Transport and Telecommunication.


Grisha Heyliger-Marten
Minister of Tourism, Economic Affairs, Transport and Telecommunication

"A carrying capacity study conducted in the early 2000s estimated that Sint Maarten could support around 7,000 hotel rooms. After Hurricane Irma, that number dropped to 4,000, but platforms like Airbnb helped bridge the gap. During this government's current term, we anticipate the addition of 1,500 to 2,000 rooms through five upcoming hotel developments, including both major and boutique properties. Our goal is not mass tourism, but rather balanced and sustainable growth.

"That's why the new carrying capacity study is so crucial — it will help define responsible limits for hotel development, infrastructure, transportation, and even potential initiatives like airport pre-clearance. As the Minister also responsible for transportation, I'm actively working on a plan to regulate the system and enhance mobility across the island."

In line with ensuring any growth is sustainable, the ministry is also looking to diversify its tourism base. "From a marketing standpoint, we are targeting South America and German-speaking countries such as Switzerland and Austria, focusing on higher-end travelers," outlines Heyliger-Marten. "To support this shift, we are revitalizing our capital to reflect a more premium visitor experience. This includes active engagement with local stakeholders and the broader community."

Creating an attractive proposition extends to potential investors, with the government working to highlight the many opportunities available in Sint Maarten.

"Together with the Ministry of Finance, we are also working to establish a robust Investment Promotion Agency (IPA) to attract high-quality investors," says Heyliger-Marten. "However, our current direct taxation system poses a challenge. We are pursuing fiscal reform to transition to a more competitive, indirect tax model. This process will take another year or two, and until then, we are holding back the full launch of the IPA — because without a competitive tax structure, attracting the right investors is not realistic."

One of the ways that the government plans to reshape and rebuild Sint Maarten in a resilient and sustainable way is by transforming the capital of Philipsburg into a smart city. The hope is that this attracts innovators and those willing to invest in emerging technology.

"Our capital's beautification project aims to transform it into a smart city with free Wi-Fi kiosks for easy access to information. We are investing in high-speed internet and supporting local talent to achieve this," reveals Heyliger-Marten. "Sint Maarten wants to attract unique, world-first innovations, like a floating farm similar to Rotterdam's, and renewable energy projects. We already have a farming container supplying local restaurants. We welcome out-of-the-box ideas and are open to public-private partnerships to make them happen."

Another technological advancement that has taken place across Sint Maarten is the introduction of a virtual concierge service across hundreds of vacation rental properties. These provide information about restaurants, activities and attractions, as well as acting as an early warning system when natural disasters strike.

GRISHA HEYLIGER-MARTEN
MINISTER OF TOURISM, ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, TRANSPORT AND TELECOMMUNICATION

"We are working to establish a robust Investment Promotion Agency to attract high-quality investors."

"In collaboration with Alexa's virtual assistant technology, we have equipped participating hotel rooms with Alexa devices to send real-time push notifications to visitors during hurricanes — providing crucial evacuation and safety updates. This direct communication channel allows us to keep tourists informed and protected during emergencies," outlines Heyliger-Marten. "We are also expanding the use of push notifications to promote local businesses, including restaurants, travel agencies and tour operators — highlighting top tours and dining experiences. Our hurricane preparedness is among the strongest in the Caribbean — surpassing even Curaçao and Aruba.

"Additionally, for a sustained period, we've implemented fixed pricing on essential items such as batteries to prevent price gouging during hurricane season. The Alexa platform now plays a dual role: enhancing public safety and supporting local economic activity."

In line with these digital advancements, the government is working on rolling out 5G across the country to ensure that travelers have reliable telecommunications, something that is especially important for those visiting the island to conduct business.

"The government is working to support its state-owned telecommunications company. While the company has undergone significant restructuring, including job cuts, it now provides fiber-optic coverage to approximately 80% of the island," says Heyliger-Marten. "Expansion to all remaining districts is underway, with full island-wide coverage expected. By 2026, we anticipate having 5G fully operational.

Another priority area for Heyliger-Marten is the agriculture sector, particularly ensuring that the country has food security. This is especially important given the difficulty the island faced during COVID-19, when importing goods became extremely challenging.

"We are making significant investments to help local gardeners transition into full-time farmers. This includes offering loans ranging from $5,000 to $50,000 at just 2% interest, as well as reducing utility costs," she says. "Additionally, we are establishing a dedicated agency, which will focus on developing farming, livestock and fisheries sectors. This will also serve as a regional trade hub. The ultimate goal is to complement our existing trade relationships by strengthening regional trade, thereby promoting access to fresher, more affordable and more sustainable food options."

Cruise, cargo and yachting driving growth

The port in Sint Maarten is helping to power economic expansion across the Caribbean


Sint Maarten has emerged as a hugely popular cruise destination.

An economic powerhouse leading the charge in transforming Sint Maarten into a world-class hub for cruise, cargo and yachting, the Port St. Maarten Group consists of 13 entities that generate close to a third of the country's GDP.

Operated and managed as a private entity, with the government as a shareholder, the group operates under four core business pillars: cruise, cargo, yachting and supporting real estate. These sectors reflect Port St. Maarten's central role in the country's economic landscape, particularly within the maritime industry.


Alexander Gumbs
CEO, Port St. Maarten Group

"The port expects to close 2025 with 1.55 million cruise passengers — an extraordinary figure for a small island nation. This growth can be attributed to the destination's strong tour and experience offerings, its strategic logistics capabilities and a robust distribution model that have made it a top-rated cruise port in the region," explains Alexander Gumbs, CEO of the Port St. Maarten Group.

"The port also plays a critical role as a regional transshipment hub. It facilitates the movement of containers not only for local consumption but also to neighboring islands. This central logistics role has driven major infrastructure investments over the past decade, with further modernization and expansion on the horizon.

"The port is actively transitioning into a smart port, leveraging AI and emerging technologies to optimize operations, simplify procedures and enhance the overall passenger and client experience. These innovations are vital in maintaining competitiveness and sustainability in a rapidly evolving maritime sector."

Acting as a transshipment hub for some of the smaller islands in the region, Sint Maarten plays a key role in aiding the economies of these islands by delivering imports and exports.

"Our role in the cargo sector is centered on ensuring that we have the right equipment, technology, and skilled personnel in place to efficiently manage the movement of goods in and out of the port," says Gumbs.

"Beyond serving Sint Maarten, we are a critical link in the logistics chain for several neighboring islands. Territories such as Saba, Sint Eustatius, Saint Kitts, Antigua and Anguilla rely heavily on our port operations. These smaller destinations lack the infrastructure to accommodate large cargo vessels, so goods are first shipped to us on larger feeder ships and then transferred to smaller vessels for final delivery.

"This transshipment model makes our port an essential regional logistics hub. It's our responsibility to ensure seamless coordination and minimal turnaround times so that these islands receive their supplies — everything from food to hardware and construction materials — on time. In this way, Port St. Maarten plays a vital role not only in our own economy, but also in supporting the day-to-day functionality and economic stability of several neighboring economies across the Northeastern Caribbean."

Beyond the cargo sector, Sint Maarten has emerged as a prime choice for the yachting industry and has become a popular stopover destination for mega-yachts. This has led to the evolution of a first-class maintenance industry that offers a range of services and is increasingly busy throughout the year.

"Yachting is another key pillar, closely tied to the island's thriving private jet sector. Sint Maarten serves as a launchpad for the Eastern Caribbean yacht charter season and is a preferred stopover for mega-yachts en route to high-profile destinations like St. Barts during the holiday season," outlines Gumbs.

"The island's superior provisioning capabilities and maritime services make it an attractive port for maintenance and refueling, drawing high-value clientele and boosting container throughput as yachts and cruise ships increasingly provision from the island."

Due to the island's popularity among the yachting community, a host of growth opportunities have emerged, leading to interest from investors around the world.

"Infrastructure to support this growth continues to evolve," says Gumbs. "The Simpson Bay Lagoon Authority Corporation — one of the group's 13 companies — manages vital maritime infrastructure like the Simpson Bay Drawbridge and the large Causeway Bridge. Current initiatives are also exploring how to improve lagoon access for larger yachts, which could open up new opportunities in the ultra-luxury segment.

"Recent investments in Philipsburg's marina facilities now cater to superyachts unable to enter the lagoon, further elevating Sint Maarten's profile as a yachting destination capable of competing with regional peers welcoming vessels over 90 meters. These developments are expanding the market and reinforcing the island's reputation as a true maritime hub."

Due to the rise in prominence of the yachting industry, Sint Maarten has developed a skilled workforce that can expertly maintain vessels. However, a few factors need to be overcome in order for it to become the leading destination in the Caribbean, especially when it comes to the off-season.

ALEXANDER GUMBS
CEO, PORT ST. MAARTEN GROUP

"Beyond serving Sint Maarten, we are a critical link in the logistics chain for several neighboring islands."

"There's growing potential for Sint Maarten to widen the scope of its yachting services, particularly during the off-season. For instance, while owners with yachts docked in Miami can easily access engine replacements and specialized maintenance due to proximity to major franchises and suppliers, Sint Maarten may face longer lead times because such parts need to be shipped. This logistical delay — typically a week or two — can be a challenge," notes Gumbs.

"Still, the yachting industry in Sint Maarten is taking important steps in the right direction, offering off-season incentives such as competitive dockage rates and services like electricity and water. There's also room to further elevate the island's global profile through participation in international yacht shows."

A logistics leader powering trade

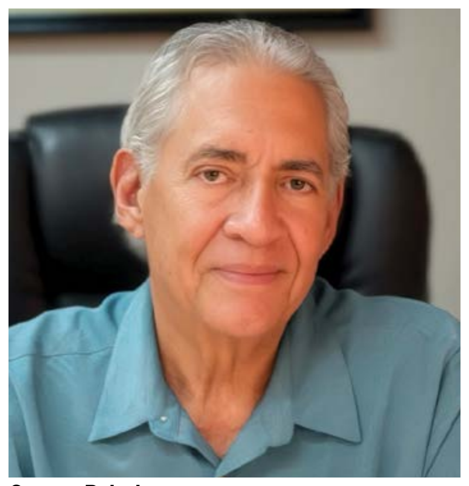
With AI-driven port infrastructure and an eye on global trade, INTERMAR organization is charting a bold course for Sint Maarten's maritime future


Cargo operations underway at Port St. Maarten.

Over the past 40 years, INTERMAR has been at the heart of Sint Maarten's maritime transformation. First established in 1985 when the island's port consisted of a single finger pier, the company has gone from a shipping agency and cargo handler to offering a range of services that now include 3PL warehousing, inland transportation logistics and public storage facilities.

Overseeing this remarkable evolution has been INTERMAR's president and founder, George Pelgrim. He first arrived on the island in 1976 and, after working for a number of years for a Dutch shipping and trading company, recognized that there were significant opportunities within the maritime and logistics sectors.

"I've always embraced opportunities as they arise, aiming to meet the island's growing demands. Our growth has been closely tied to that of Sint Maarten; as the local economy expands, so do we," explains Pelgrim.


George Pelgrim
President and Founder, INTERMAR

"Our core business is the handling and representation of cargo lines. When a vessel is scheduled to arrive, my company manages the entire logistics process — from boarding the ship, overseeing cargo operations, and coordinating dockworkers, to managing container handling and inland transport.

"Back when I first arrived, the Dutch side of Sint Maarten had a population of around 30,000 to 35,000. Today, that number has more than doubled. We've consistently worked with shipping lines that believe in the island's potential. The more confidence they have in Sint Maarten, the more we adapt to meet their logistics needs, whether through expanded warehousing or more efficient cargo handling solutions.

"From containers to individual Amazon packages, we manage the full spectrum of port handling. The Port of Sint Maarten is internationally connected, with access to global shipping routes. This connectivity is a key strength as it allows us to import, export, and facilitate trade worldwide. That foundation is what has brought us to where we are today."

GEORGE PELGRIM
PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER, INTERMAR

"Across the industry, businesses and shipping lines are embedding AI into various operations. We are actively investing in digital port infrastructure as we speak."

Having played an integral role in the evolution of the country's maritime sector, Pelgrim is accustomed to adapting and embracing new technology. Currently, there is a growing trend within the industry to introduce tools that can improve route planning, predict demand and optimize resource allocation.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is also becoming a vital instrument in the sector, and INTERMAR wants to ensure it is positioned as a leader in this fast-moving and ever-evolving field. "This year, the port is investing in an entirely new online infrastructure that will integrate AI technologies," reveals Pelgrim.

"Across the industry, businesses and shipping lines are embedding AI into various operations, including ship planning, stowage, discharging terminals and overall port terminal logistics. We are actively investing in digital port infrastructure as we speak."

This approach to modernization is vital and it is something that is being replicated by the port itself, with the Port St. Maarten Group planning to invest north of $65 million into infrastructure and developments in the port and the surrounding area.

The port's new infrastructure developments also has a knock on effect for INTERMAR, as Pelgrim explains: "The port is what you might call a landlord port. It provides the real estate and cranes, while our role begins the moment any cargo container is offloaded from the ship onto the quay.

"We work closely alongside the port's development. Whenever the port expands or introduces new infrastructure, our group is there to provide the necessary equipment to handle incoming cargo, as well as the logistics, manpower, and expertise required."

Navigating challenges

Having successfully operated for the last four decades in Sint Maarten, INTERMAR has been forced to overcome its fair share of challenges. It was heavily impacted in 2017 when Hurricanes Irma and Maria caused significant damage to Port St. Maarten, while the COVID-19 pandemic caused a huge reduction in imports and exports.

Despite being faced with testing times, the company was able to navigate the substantial challenges and has played a crucial role in helping the economy recover.

"During the pandemic, we were one of the few companies that did not send anyone home. Despite facing some internal financial challenges, we continued our operations. Although COVID-19 caused a reduction in imports, we were prepared for it, so our business remained unaffected," says Pelgrim.

"Our team was also the first to return to work at the port after Hurricane Irma in 2007, playing a crucial role in reopening the port and receiving essential goods for the island, despite the widespread destruction of the surrounding infrastructure. These were challenging times, and so was the COVID pandemic, but halting our work was never an option."

This ability to adapt has been crucial to the success of INTERMAR and Pelgrim is fully aware that the future is likely to present more challenging scenarios, especially with the maritime sector constantly evolving.

Shifting global trade patterns and emerging technologies require new approaches, while the looming threat of US tariffs could also require attention.

"The current US tariff climate will not hinder tourism growth — we will adapt, as our people are known for their resilience," declares Pelgrim. "Having faced numerous challenges, we are ready to overcome whatever lies ahead."

Creating a legacy

Back in 1985 when INTERMAR was initially founded, the Port of St. Maarten had minimal infrastructure and limited communication channels, with incoming ships having to contact Saba Radio just to speak with the harbor master. INTERMAR was also a very different company back then. In fact, it began with just three employees, but Pelgrim had faith in the potential of the island.

This faith has been rewarded, as not only has Sint Maarten flourished over the decades, but the company has grown into a cornerstone of the economy, now handling massive container vessels and operating within one of the Caribbean's most advanced ports.

GEORGE PELGRIM
PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER, INTERMAR

"From containers to individual Amazon packages, we manage the full spectrum of port handling."

"Currently, five major shipping carriers operate at the port. Thanks to the port's strategic geographical location and our ability to operate around the clock, every day of the year, incoming vessels use us as a transhipment hub. As the economies of neighboring islands grow, so will our transhipment activities," says Pelgrim.

"Due to our strategic location and strong work ethic, our port has established itself as a leading transshipment hub for many of the Northeast Caribbean islands. In fact, all shipping lines calling at our Port use it as a transshipment hub."

Not only has the cargo and cruise port experienced huge growth, but the Simpson Bay Lagoon has become increasingly popular among the yachting community, leading to demand for new facilities. "Yachting is a growing industry, and there are new yacht facilities that have been built over the years, and there are more and more every year," says Pelgrim. "St Maarten is undeniably a yachting hub with more than 10 recognized marina facilities equipped for superyachts.

"Two of them were built in the past five years and are busy and growing. If Sint Maarten had more real estate, it would grow even faster in this sector."

With the fortunes of INTERMAR and Sint Maarten entwined and with both experiencing rapid growth, Pelgrim is not just excited for the future but is determined to ensure that the local community also thrives.

Deeply committed to philanthropy and community service, he has actively supported underprivileged children and families through various charitable initiatives. Furthermore, his previous tenure as a Rotarian board member for over a decade exemplifies his dedication to fairness in all endeavors.

With this commitment to supporting the community and leading his company forward, Pelgrim sees it as an exciting time for Sint Maarten and believes there is no better time to invest in the country.

He adds: "Thanks to our dynamic structure, Sint Maarten is an excellent place to invest and live. Tourism is expanding and our economy is growing alongside it. Our GDP, now at $1.83 billion, has surpassed pre-Hurricane Irma levels, which is a strong indicator of the island's growth."

INTERMAR ORGANIZATION CORE SERVICES

- Stevedoring and port terminal operators
- Expert container operations
- Full port representation services
- Reliable cargo movement
- Inventory, distribution and value-added services
- Secure storage for businesses and residents

Visitors to Sint Maarten can easily explore nearby islands.

Walter Plantz Square is known for its colorful architecture.

Setting the stage for tourism potential

Sint Maarten is investing heavily in its transport network to ensure the island can sustain growth and deliver a seamless travel experience

From the moment the Unified Resilient St. Maarten Movement was formed in 2021, the party was determined to create a more sustainable future for the country. It was one of the key objectives that helped Dr. Luc Mercelina win the election in 2024 and it remains a driving force for the party.

One of the major areas that comes under this remit is building up the tourism sector in a responsible manner. The island has experienced a significant rise in the number of visitors in recent years, with new investments flowing into hotels, retail and services. However, this success has also exposed some pressure points, such as congested roads and overstretched utilities.

Therefore, to sustain momentum and keep its edge in a hugely competitive market, the government is tackling transport head-on by resurfacing major roads, revitalising the airport and expanding ferry and public transport options. This will ultimately deliver a smoother experience for the growing number of travelers heading to the island.

"Traffic remains a key concern: nearly every resident owns a vehicle, and with a growing number of dealerships, we're exploring the introduction of caps and improved regulation," reveals Grisha Heyliger-Marten, the Minister of Tourism, Economic Affairs, Transport and Telecommunication.

"As I am responsible for transportation, I'm actively working on a plan to regulate the system and enhance mobility across the island."

The government has also been working closely with the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to develop a comprehensive action plan to alleviate traffic congestion on Sint Maarten. This is especially important as tourism is poised to exceed pre-pandemic levels.

"Our initial priority was to build more roads. However, UNOPS advised us that without proper policy and planning, road expansion alone wouldn't solve congestion — it would just perpetuate inefficient resource use," reveals Patrice Gumbs Jr., the Minister of Public Housing, Spatial Planning, Environment and Infrastructure.

"So now, together with UNOPS, we're looking closely at how we use our current road network. Simple but strategic tools like road use regulations and one-way systems can significantly improve efficiency. This focus on optimizing existing infrastructure is a critical step before launching larger-scale projects.

"UNOPS has been a valuable partner thanks to their technical expertise and structured approach. We're also looking at integrating green infrastructure, such as urban parks, into the plan. It's all about making the most of what we have while using public funds wisely and sustainably."

In addition to the work being carried out on the roads, Princess Juliana International Airport underwent a sizeable redevelopment to enhance capacity, efficiency and the passenger experience.

Equally important to accommodating continued tourism growth is the port in Philipsburg, which is expected to welcome 1.6 million passengers in 2025. "We maintain strong partnerships with major cruise lines like Royal Caribbean and Carnival, and we're expanding by offering dedicated berths to accommodate even more vessels. As a platinum member of The Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association, cruise tourism remains a top priority — it is a vital pillar of our economy," says Heyliger-Marten.

"Over the next year or two, you will witness a more vibrant and welcoming Sint Maarten as we continue to reinvent our identity and solidify our position as the true gem of the Caribbean."

Alexander Gumbs, CEO of the Port St. Maarten Group of Companies, adds: "The number of cruise ships homeporting in Sint Maarten has increased over the past three years.

"This emerging segment allows cruise passengers to fly into the island and spend a few days exploring before embarking, further boosting tourism revenue and creating new business opportunities for both the hospitality and retail sectors."

With the cruise sector booming, it is important that the infrastructure around the port can handle the increase in passengers. That is why the government has introduced dedicated bus lanes, ferry links between key zones and a central bus terminal, all aimed at reducing congestion and improving mobility around the port.

The port has also introduced a host of green initiatives as it aims to achieve zero emissions by 2030 and net-zero by 2050.

Ongoing efforts include electrifying port operations, introducing electric vehicles, exploring waste-to-energy solutions and investigating the provision of shore power for cruise ships to reduce emissions during docking. The addition of a long-awaited waterside walkway, designed to separate arriving visitors from roadside traffic for improved safety, is also underway and is set to be completed this year.

Another upgrade has come at the Makana Ferry Service, which offers inter-island travel among other Caribbean islands. The popular service now offers a more frequent schedule and a new route has been added, meaning that visitors can now easily travel to St. Kitts, as well as to its existing connections with Saba, Statia and Saint-Martin.

This improved infrastructure and the ability to easily travel to other nearby islands further boost the appeal of Sint Maarten.

GRISHA HEYLIGER-MARTEN
MINISTER OF TOURISM, ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, TRANSPORT AND TELECOMMUNICATION

"Sint Maarten may be small, but it's a unique Caribbean hub. Visitors can easily explore nearby islands like St. Barts, Saba and Anguilla."

"Sint Maarten may be small, but it's a unique Caribbean hub," adds Heyliger-Marten. "Visitors can easily explore nearby islands like St. Barts, Saba and Anguilla by boat or plane. On the island, you can cross freely between the Dutch and French sides — just minutes apart — with no border control, offering a blend of European and Caribbean cultures.

"Known as the Caribbean's melting pot, Sint Maarten's 16 square miles host over 100 nationalities, with diverse cuisine and rich cultural variety."

Regional connectivity fueling economic growth

A rebuilt airport and expanded flights make Sint Maarten a key Caribbean destination

Tourism is the heartbeat of Sint Maarten's economy and aviation is at the center of it all. At Princess Juliana International Airport (PJIAE) and aboard regional carrier Winair, thousands of visitors arrive and connect every day, making these two partners the cornerstone of the island's connectivity and growth. From welcoming international travelers to linking neighboring islands, PJIAE and Winair together ensure that Sint Maarten remains one of the Caribbean's most dynamic gateways.

At PJIAE, a dedicated team of ambassadors, customer service professionals, security staff, and operations experts work tirelessly to ensure every traveler feels right at home. Together, they are the island's first impression, the heartbeat of a destination that thrives on hospitality.

Since the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma in 2017, a full-scale reconstruction of the airport terminal has taken place. "Princess Juliana International Airport has undergone substantial expansion and modernization," reveals Michael Cleaver, CEO and President of PJIAE.

"Delayed further by the COVID-19 pandemic, the project is now complete with a renewed focus on resilience and passenger experience. The new terminal features energy-efficient infrastructure, advanced security systems and expanded capacity from 2.0 to 2.5 million passenger movements annually.

"We partnered with Vision-Box to implement electronic entry gates, and with self-service kiosks, biometric passport control, automated boarding pass scanning, and three spacious baggage belts, we can now deliver a smoother and more seamless journey for our travelers."

Beyond technology, PJIAE has elevated comfort with a fast lane for business class, an upgraded lounge, and more shopping, dining, and duty-free options, including a pharmacy in the meet-and-greet hall. Air service is growing rapidly, supported by Sint Maarten's strategic location as the gateway to the Windward Islands. Just under three hours from Miami and 3.5 hours from New York, the island offers daily flights from major US cities, as well as regular service to Europe, up to 14 flights per week to Amsterdam and Paris, depending on the season. Travelers also enjoy seamless connections to 14 Caribbean destinations via Winair.

On this strong base, Southwest Airlines will launch nine weekly flights in April 2026, while Air Caraïbes returns with three weekly flights from Paris-Orly. Meanwhile, the airport is preparing to open a new luxury FBO facility for private jet passengers, cementing its role as the premier hub in the Northeastern Caribbean.

"Our goal is to make the airport experience reflect the island, friendly, seamless, and enjoyable. What truly sets Sint Maarten apart is its cultural mix. We are Dutch and French, yet English and Spanish are also widely spoken, making us a natural crossroads of the Caribbean. Building on this diversity, Princess Juliana International Airport is shaping a strategy to attract new South American carriers, positioning Sint Maarten as the hub of choice for regional and international travel," says Cleaver.

MICHAEL CLEAVER
CEO, PRINCESS JULIANA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

"PJIAE acts as a regional hub, connecting North America, South America and Europe to 14 Caribbean destinations."

Michael Cleaver
CEO, Princess Juliana International Airport

Hans van de Velde
CEO, Winair

A successful flag-carrier

If Princess Juliana International Airport is the gateway, Winair is the bridge. For nearly 60 years, Winair has played a vital role in connecting Sint Maarten to its neighbors and beyond. Operating in a region where profitability is particularly challenging, Winair has undergone a period of robust development that has included a strategic fleet expansion, tourism partnerships and route growth. These have helped to affirm its critical role in bolstering regional travel and supporting the country's tourism ambitions.

"While Caribbean aviation presents many challenges, being based in Sint Maarten also gives us key advantages. One of the most important is our geographic location. Princess Juliana International Airport is, alongside Barbados, one of the main hubs in this part of the Caribbean and is capable of handling some of the world's largest aircraft," outlines Hans van de Velde, the CEO of Winair.

"Our long-standing partnerships with major international airlines allow us to serve both local travelers and connecting passengers efficiently. With the government acting solely as a shareholder, Winair is able to focus on commercially viable routes — an approach that has made us sustainably profitable. At Winair, we understand the importance of regional connectivity and remain committed to reliable, on-time performance."

With regional connectivity high on the priority list, Winair has worked tirelessly to expand its route network, adding more connectivity to Curaçao, as well as launching flights to Dominica and St. Lucia. This is particularly important as many of the smaller islands depend on aircraft with short take-off and landing capabilities.

"Operations at several Caribbean airports require specialized aircraft, and Winair has been operating Twin Otters for over 50 years — perfectly suited for these conditions. During high season, we operate more than 30 flights per day to nearby St. Barths, an island where larger aircraft cannot land due to limited infrastructure and short runways," says Van de Velde.

While these regional routes are important, Winair has also been entering into partnerships with American and European airlines and is part of KLM's Flying Blue program. Now, the airline is seeking to explore opportunities in Central and South America.

"For two years now, we have been in talks with all the major airlines from South America, like LATAM and Avianca. Copa Airlines is already flying here, and the other airlines are eyeing Sint Maarten," outlines Van de Velde. "So far, it has not resulted in direct flights to Sint Maarten, but in Curaçao and Aruba, we do have commercial links with Go and Azul. We are confident this will happen.

"Jet from the Dominican Republic is also developing quickly, and we are currently in discussions on how to connect our networks."

Playing a key role in boosting tourism not just in Sint Maarten but throughout the Caribbean, it is an exciting time for Winair and there are big plans for the future.

"The Caribbean is a beautiful and diverse region, with each island offering its own unique heritage and cultural identity. At Winair, we've successfully built a network that connects these islands, and in recent years, we've experienced significant growth. Encouraged by this success, we are now preparing to expand further with the introduction of a second Caribbean hub in the near future," adds Van de Velde.

"Next year marks our 60th anniversary, a testament to the strength and sustainability of our business model."

At Princess Juliana International Airport, every detail is designed with travelers in mind. From fashion and duty-free shopping to a variety of dining options and a convenient pharmacy, passengers can enjoy a seamless experience.

Winair also connects travelers to 14 Caribbean destinations, making inter-island travel effortless. At PJIAE, you're not just passing through an airport, you're being welcomed to the Caribbean.

HANS VAN DE VELDE
CEO, WINAIR

"At Winair, we understand the importance of regional connectivity and remain committed to reliable, on-time performance."

Visitor focus delivers tourism gains

Sint Maarten Tourism Bureau is successfully broadening the island's appeal and helping to sustain steady growth year-round

Sint Maarten is known for much more than just its sandy beaches and clear waters.

Tourism has long been the lifeblood of Sint Maarten's economy, regularly generating close to half of the country's GDP and providing employment for around one-third of the working population. However, the sector is also highly vulnerable to natural disasters, as was witnessed in 2017 when two category five storms struck within weeks of each other, leading to the industry suffering one of the sharpest collapses in its history.

Cruise ships stopped calling at the island for several months due to port damage and most hotels and resorts were forced to close due to structural damage. During this time, the Sint Maarten Tourism Bureau reassessed its entire approach to tourism — and the country has been reaping the benefits ever since.

"Following Hurricane Irma, we reimagined our approach to tourism. The focus shifted toward rebuilding and reintroducing Sint Maarten as a refreshed, vibrant destination, complete with new hotels, upgraded infrastructure and renewed energy," reveals May-Ling Chun, director of tourism at the Sint Maarten Tourism Bureau.

"Being in the hurricane belt, resilience is part of who we are. Sint Maarten has one of the most experienced emergency systems in the Caribbean, with a well-structured response plan. Since Hurricane Irma, we have rebuilt stronger — improving infrastructure, building standards and insurance awareness.

"Preparation starts early. By April, we check in with all stakeholders, ensuring generators, supplies and plans are in place. From homeowners to businesses, everyone is involved. The airport and the entire island have learned from past experiences, and with better communication systems and readiness, we are confident in facing future storms with less damage."

The work carried out by the Sint Maarten Tourism Bureau has been paying dividends in recent years, with tourism numbers continually rising. The most recent data available shows that in August 2024, the country welcomed 30,844 stay-over tourists — a 21.5% increase from 25,396 in August 2023. Cruise tourism has also rebounded steadily since 2017, with forecasts predicting that 1.5 million passengers will arrive in the country throughout 2025.

This rise in visitors has been supported by the bureau's ability to recognize global tourism trends and market the island to key destinations such as Canada and the United States, as well as country's across Europe and the Caribbean.

May-Ling Chun
Director of Tourism
Sint Maarten Tourism Bureau

"This industry is constantly evolving, and staying ahead means keeping a close eye on trends and consumer behavior. Our current strategy is centered around targeted marketing, particularly in key gateway cities," says Chun.

"The Tri-State area — New York, Boston and Philadelphia — along with Atlanta, Charlotte, Miami and Fort Lauderdale, remains our core market, largely thanks to the convenience of direct flight connections. Proximity plays a vital role, but we're also seeing increasing interest from emerging markets like the West Coast and the Midwest. We're prioritizing areas where we know we can achieve strong, measurable results."

Enhancing the visitor experience is also a priority, with the country introducing a new electronic travel form to ensure all arrivals at Princess Juliana International Airport enjoy a smooth, stress-free entry.

"We're excited to introduce entry.sx, our new digital entry form designed to streamline the arrival process. Travelers can complete the form up to seven days before arrival, allowing for faster, smoother processing through our eGates," outlines Chun. "While not yet mandatory, those who chose to use the digital form will find their arrival far more streamlined and efficient. Beyond basic passport information, the form gathers valuable insights such as travelers' actual place of residence and their reason for visiting.

"This deeper level of data allows us to sharpen our marketing strategies and make smarter decisions about resource allocation. It ensures we're reaching the right visitors, with the right offers, at the right time."

Attracting US visitors

Another key objective for the Sint Maarten Tourism Bureau is repositioning the country to appeal to a variety of travelers across North America. This has led to Chun seeking to improve connectivity through additional direct flights and embracing new forms of media, such as partnerships with prominent influencers.

"The US remains our largest tourism market, accounting for 69% of arrivals — mainly from the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and South Florida. We are also seeing growth from the West Coast, including California, Arizona and Nevada," she says.

MAY-LING CHUN
DIRECTOR OF TOURISM
SINT MAARTEN TOURISM BUREAU

"The US remains our largest tourism market, accounting for 69% of arrivals."

"Working closely with the airport, we have expanded our airlift through active engagement with airline partners. New direct flights are coming from Chicago via American Airlines and from Orlando and Baltimore via Southwest Airlines. Miami now offers three daily flights during the high season (November to June) and two the rest of the year, and we have year-round service from JetBlue (Boston, New York), United (Washington, DC, Newark), Spirit (Fort Lauderdale) and Delta (Atlanta, with seasonal service from New York and Minneapolis).

"Our targeted US marketing strategy includes PR, influencer partnerships and curated media trips. We focus on quality over quantity, not mass tourism. Our PR firm helps position Sint Maarten through carefully selected media, while our digital campaigns have strengthened our online visibility. We are also launching major out-of-home promotions in New York, Atlanta and Miami. Our focus now is to reduce seasonality and maintain steady visitor numbers year-round. It's unusual to see May and June this busy, but businesses are pleased and even the International Monetary Fund noted the continued momentum. Q1 this year outperformed last year, with March setting a new record. To support this, we have spread festivals across the calendar — like the SXM Festival in March, Carnival in April, the Soul Beach Music Fest in May and Oualichi Festival in August.

"We are also investing in smart digital campaigns, working with online travel agencies. These platforms have delivered strong returns, and new campaigns launching soon will run through the end of the year."

These targeted marketing campaigns highlight the appeal of Sint Maarten that extends far beyond its sandy beaches and crystal-clear waters. Instead, they focus on the country's rich multicultural identity and highlight the island's position as the culinary capital of the region.

"What truly sets us apart is our rich multicultural identity. Dutch, French and more than 120 nationalities come together to shape our island's character, especially through our cuisine. That's why we proudly embrace the title of culinary capital of the Caribbean. Whether it's gourmet fine dining or flavorful street food, the quality and diversity of what we offer are second to none," adds Chun.

"We've also made it a priority to spotlight our heritage and local stories, celebrating the people, culture and traditions that define Sint Maarten. Today's travelers seek more than just beautiful beaches; they crave authentic experiences and meaningful connections with the places they visit. That's why so many visitors return. They don't just come for a vacation, they form real bonds, feel genuinely welcomed and leave with lasting memories. Often, it's not something they can fully describe — just a feeling that brings them back again and again."

Family fun drives success

With activites for all ages, Divi Little Bay Beach Resort has mastered the art of the family vacation

Positioned as a family-friendly resort and boasting three swimming pools and a children's activity center, Divi Little Bay Beach Resort has managed to stand out in a crowded market and regularly attracts return visitors.

"I think what really makes us stand out is that we don't just call ourselves family-friendly, we live it," states Anne-Marie Brooks, general manager at Divi Little Bay Beach Resort.

"When families arrive, they're not trying to fit their vacation into something built for adults; the experience is already designed with them in mind.

"Our kids' center and meticulously crafted activity schedule give parents space to actually relax. And there's enough variety that everyone, from toddlers to grandparents, can find something they enjoy. I've seen the same families return year after year and some of those kids are now adults coming back with their own children. That's the kind of place this is."

This focus on delivering outstanding service for the whole family has led the hotel to introduce a host of activities both inside and outside the resort. One of the most popular, launched last year, offers guests the opportunity to go scuba diving and explore the clear waters surrounding the island.

"The Caribbean is suffused with incredible dive sites and Sint Maarten is no exception," says Brooks. "Near us, there are shipwrecks perfect for underwater exploration, often families of sea turtles just offshore, numerous other fish, and even an underwater sculpture park.

"Plus, we are lucky to be so close to numerous other islands that are a quick boat ride away — ideal for snorkeling and diving along the way. What makes Divi Little Bay special is that on any given day, there's something fun for everyone. Adding scuba diving to our lineup means guests can try something new or pursue their passion, while others in the group snorkel, paddleboard, jetski, or simply relax."

She adds: "We've tried to create a space where you can slow down, reconnect and enjoy the moment, whether that's a drink at sunset, a morning dive, or just sitting on the beach."

Mapping out a sustainable future

The ministry at the heart of driving a bold agenda to boost conservation, modernize waste systems and improve governance


Aerial view of downtown Philipsburg in the Dutch Caribbean.

Leading one of the most hands-on ministries in Sint Maarten's government, Patrice Gumbs Jr. is using his position as the Minister of Public Housing, Spatial Planning, Environment and Infrastructure to push an agenda focused on conservation, waste reform and better governance.

Overseeing everything from environmental policy and infrastructure management to housing schemes, Gumbs Jr. is working tirelessly to strike the right balance between keeping the island running and shaping its future without damaging its natural beauty.

"One of the defining features of the new governing term is our focus on quality of life, a broad concept that encompasses conservation and sustainable development," he explains. "For too long, many Caribbean nations have prioritized tourism, often at the expense of the environment. But tourism and environmental preservation shouldn't be at odds, they should complement each other.

"Sustainable development means fostering both. One of our key priorities is the creation of more green areas on the island. Sint Maarten is highly developed and urbanized, with limited space left for nature, yet it's this balance between natural beauty and tourism that we're now actively seeking."

Putting conservation high on the list of priorities, Gumbs Jr. believes that tourism and environmental protection should work hand-in-hand. "In line with this, we're introducing policies around waste management, zoning, and the creation of green zones," he reveals.

"It's ironic to see the environment being sacrificed to build condos for tourists who are coming to enjoy our natural beauty.


Patrice Gumbs Jr.
Minister of Public Housing, Spatial Planning, Environment and Infrastructure

"Infrastructure is another critical concern. Since our first economic boom some 60 years ago, development has outpaced maintenance. We're now focused on upgrading our road capacity and improving drainage systems to mitigate erosion and climate-related impacts — issues that are extremely important to me."

Recognizing the growing trend toward authentic travel experiences and cultural immersion, the ministry is ensuring that it aligns economic growth with environmental protection. It is also looking to introduce a number of incentives to help attract green investment.

"A major part of our conservation effort involves promoting renewable energy. Today, Sint Maarten has zero renewable energy penetration, which presents a significant investment opportunity. Our energy provider, GEDE, is currently undergoing a transformation to expand renewable energy sources on the island," says Gumbs Jr..

"Small island states like ours are especially vulnerable to external energy shocks, such as oil price volatility. Strengthening our energy resilience, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and improving air quality are vital. Though our global carbon footprint is negligible, we can still reap the benefits of clean energy and offer a more sustainable tourism experience."

Another area of focus high on Gumbs Jr.'s list of priorities is ensuring better governance through engagement with the public. Traditionally, public input into planning decisions was limited, but that is now changing. The ministry is digitizing the permitting process, simplifying access to information, and creating more ways for citizens to participate before decisions are finalized.

A public-awareness campaign, "Think Green," was designed to get residents involved in waste management and environmental protection, while Sint Maarten remains one of the few countries in the world offering free waste collection. "This creates a unique opportunity to engage citizens, and we make it a point to maintain open lines of communication with both the media and the public," states Gumbs Jr.

"We've also hosted regular pop-up sessions where residents can share their feedback directly with the ministry. This grassroots approach is a major improvement over past government practices, which were often seen as opaque or disconnected. When people feel included, they're more likely to support reforms and even offer solutions."

Creating an open dialogue with the public is important for the ministry as it aims to balance economic growth with environmental stewardship. It wants to ensure that Sint Maarten remains open for investment in numerous sectors, but not at the cost of the environment.

"Sint Maarten offers more than sun, sea, and sand. We are cosmopolitan and open, and we present unique opportunities for investment in real estate, infrastructure and green energy," he adds. "However, we are a small island with limited resources, so sustainable development is the only viable path forward."

Powering ahead with big plans for cleaner energy

NV GEBE is investing millions in new generators, underground grid upgrades and clean energy to help keep costs stable

Set to mark 65 years as Sint Maarten's sole provider of electricity and water, NV GEBE serves more than 40,000 residents and the millions of tourists who visit the island each year. Responsible for both the generation and distribution of power and the distribution of potable water, the company is seeking to modernize its infrastructure and prepare for a cleaner energy future.

The development of infrastructure is particularly important as the company aims to tackle the issue of rolling blackouts, a problem that has been compounded by aging engines and insufficient backup capacity.

"Even with the most modern plant, if you rely solely on single-source engines and lack adequate backup, blackouts can't be entirely eliminated. One core issue is that our base rate hasn't changed since 2010, which has limited our ability to invest in new infrastructure," outlines Thomas Roggendorf, the interim CEO of NV GEBE.

"We're operating with engines that are nearly 30 years old, long past their intended lifespan. Furthermore, our island's energy demand is around 55 megawatts, with peaks reaching 61. Our plant has a maximum capacity of 80 megawatts if everything is running perfectly."

Last year, engine breakdowns led to some outages, but this has been addressed through the rental of a 10-megawatt diesel park and the purchase of an additional 20 megawatts. "We now have 90 megawatts of potential capacity and no more blackouts, though occasional brownouts can still occur," adds Roggendorf.


Thomas Roggendorf
Interim CEO, NV GEBE

Looking ahead, demand is projected to reach 80–85 megawatts by 2035. To meet it, NV GEBE plans to maintain the diesel park, add three more engines and ensure that 25% of generation comes from solar and wind.

While Sint Maarten's geography makes large wind farms impractical, a study is underway to determine how small turbines can be used. Three major solar projects are also in the works, expected to generate up to 2.1 megawatts.

"Additionally, through Power Purchase Agreements, we plan to install solar panels on rooftops of businesses, casinos and hotels," explains Roggendorf. "We're transforming into a hybrid energy model, combining traditional generation with distributed solar power.

"We're exploring several innovative solutions. For example, we plan to use elevated water tanks to generate hydroelectric power. As the water flows down through the pipes, small turbines will generate electricity. This could provide up to one megawatt of clean energy. We're also exploring partnerships with US startups, universities and SMEs to co-develop sustainable solutions."

Another focus area has been on building resilience against natural disasters, a factor that is especially important as Sint Maarten finds itself in the hurricane belt. This has led to a $5.1 million agreement to move mid-voltage cables and water pipes underground.

"It's not just about surviving the storm — it's about bouncing back quickly," stresses Roggendorf. "Above-ground lines can take three to six months to repair after a hurricane. Underground infrastructure cuts that time drastically.

"The project aims to be completed by the end of the year and it involves removing overhead electrical lines, upgrading streetlights, and installing fiber conduits. In total, there are 77 minor and two major projects, involving 28 contractors. Once complete, 100% of our high-voltage and 90% of our low-voltage systems will be underground. We're also looking to work with telecom providers, who may use our conduits for their fiber optics, creating a potential new revenue stream for NV GEBE."

More changes will also arrive in the years ahead as NV GEBE aims to install smart meters in every home and business by the end of 2026. These devices will allow customers to track and manage usage in real time and help the utility respond more flexibly to demand.

THOMAS ROGGENDORF
INTERIM CEO, NV GEBE
"We're transforming into a hybrid energy model, combining traditional generation with distributed solar power."

"Instead of full blackouts, we can implement controlled reductions — ensuring some appliances still work. They can also detect streetlight failures and allow for remote control of lighting systems," says Roggendorf. "We're exploring exporting this technology to neighboring islands, and the fiber infrastructure being installed with underground cabling will support future upgrades and services."

The company also hopes to take over the production of water in 2027 when the government's current contract with Seven Seas comes to an end. Roggendorf adds: "We want to be able to cut costs for customers or return dividends to the government. We're also planning broader investments of $100–200 million over the coming years. This includes the three new engines, expanded fuel storage, a new office building to replace the one lost in the storm and significant grid upgrades."

Modernizing networks for the future

TelEm Group has transformed its networks, paving the way for more reliable connectivity

With the telecoms industry changing and growing faster than ever before, TelEm Group has undergone an unprecedented transformation over the last 18 months as it bids to modernize its entire network.

Having previously operated largely on an outdated production and support network, the company — which connects families, businesses and institutions across Sint Maarten with future-ready communications — has upgraded both its mobile and fixed networks.

"On the fixed side, we've laid fiber across a significant portion of the island and have just finalized the new Internet Service Provider core, which enables us to offer very high-speed packages," explains Randell Hato, CFO of the TelEm Group. "On the mobile side, we've recently migrated to a new 3G and LTE core, and we're currently working through the final adjustments. The next step will be to replace the radios. The network is already 5G-enabled, and we plan to officially launch 5G in the first quarter of 2026. By then, we will have the most modern telecommunications network in Sint Maarten."

Another pivotal moment came in August last year with the repair of the SMPR-1 undersea fiber cable, which restored critical connectivity and enabled a host of upgrades.

"We expect to have island-wide 5G coverage within a few months, as Sint Maarten is not a large island. Our top priority is to deliver a stable and reliable network, something we believe we owe to our customers," says Hato.

"We've been working hard to transform our network, and users will soon begin to experience noticeable improvements in both voice and LTE services, with higher speeds and reduced congestion."

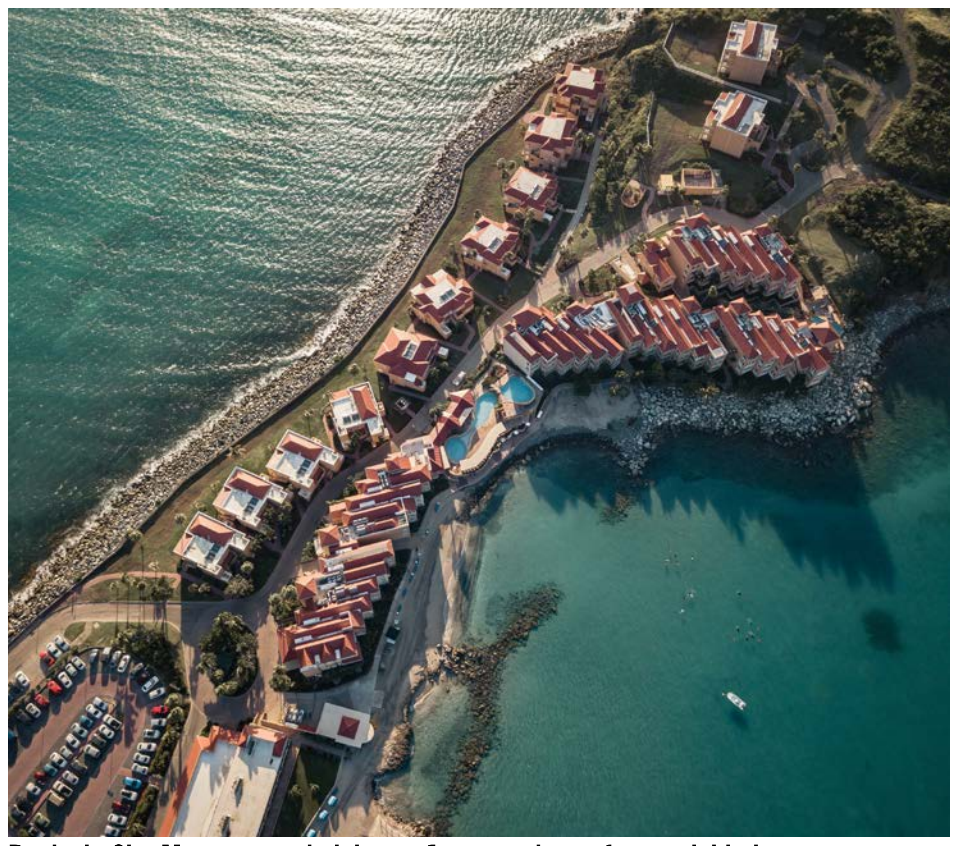
TelEm Group is also innovating when it comes to its service delivery as it attempts to meet rising consumer demands. "We've improved the speed of our fixed-line service and will soon launch new, ultra-fast packages," outlines Hato. "Our top-tier package offers speeds of 250 Mbps, for comparison, Starlink offers 260 Mbps. Our upload speed is 75 Mbps, which is actually faster than Starlink, making our offerings very competitive.


Randell Hato
CFO, TelEm

"We want our customers to experience the full potential of the network. Once mobile core migration issues are resolved, we'll introduce even more competitive packages."

Helping to power the island's economy

Resilient, ambitious, and future-focused, the country's financial sector is ready to lead in sustainability and digital banking


Banks in Sint Maarten are helping to finance a host of green initiatives.

Even in the face of external shocks such as Hurricane Irma and the COVID-19 pandemic, the financial sector in Sint Maarten has demonstrated resilience and stability. Backed by stable monetary governance and a diverse range of financial institutions, it has positioned itself as a key industry that can help deliver long-term economic growth.

"Sint Maarten is financially stable in large part due to the support we receive from the Dutch government. After the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma — when about 75% of the country was destroyed — support from the Dutch government, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund was essential in restoring stability," explains Wayne Johnson, president of the Sint Maarten Bankers Association.

"Their assistance helped our people rebuild, resettle and return to work. Without that intervention, recovery would have taken much longer. In fact, compared to other economies that experienced similar shocks, Sint Maarten was back in business within a couple of years, which is a testament to our resilience and the strength of our partnerships."

In addition to its resilience, the financial sector in Sint Maarten is also recognized for its willingness to support entrepreneurship and small businesses. This is seen through the banking industry's commitment to unlocking capital through numerous schemes that support small and medium-sized enterprises.

"We've supported loan programs in partnership with the World Bank, where entrepreneurs can submit business plans for evaluation. If approved, the World Bank provides up to 50% financing, with the remaining loan facilitated by partner banks such as Windward Islands Bank and Bank of the Dutch Caribbean," outlines Johnson.

"These initiatives are designed to foster small business growth. We're especially focused on enabling new sectors, such as small-scale manufacturing, retail and even agriculture-based startups — what I sometimes refer to as 'carpet businesses' — which have strong potential for expansion."

Banks in Sint Maarten are also playing a crucial role in channelling capital into national development projects, with PSB Bank positioning itself to support major investment opportunities in areas such as infrastructure, digital transformation and green growth.

"We're fortunate to be backed by the Curaçao Pension Fund, one of the largest in the Caribbean, which gives us a solid capital base," says Johnson, who also acts as the CEO of PSB Bank.

"With our parent company and headquarters in Curaçao, we're well-positioned to scale in both Curaçao and Sint Maarten. This gives us increased lending capacity and flexibility to support infrastructure, green energy and technology-focused businesses, including the expansion of specialized loan products for small enterprises."

Given the focus on supporting businesses in the technology sector, it is no surprise that banks across the country are going through their own digital transformation. The entire sector is not just upgrading its services but rethinking how customers interact with finances.

This has led to the introduction of mobile applications that allow customers to perform real-time transfers, manage payments, receive alerts and utilize ATM locators.

"Caribbean banks are investing heavily in their mobile banking platforms, allowing customers to make payments, open accounts and apply for loans directly from smartphones.

DEREK DOWNES
FOUNDER AND CEO, DEREK DOWNES BANKING CONSULTANCY
"Caribbean banks are investing heavily in their mobile banking platforms, allowing customers to make payments and apply for loans directly from smartphone."

Sagicor Bank, which is located in Barbados operates the region's first fully digital bank, illustrates a bright future for Caribbean banking," states Derek Downes, the founder and CEO of Derek Downes Banking Consultancy.

"Caribbean banks are also focusing on improving their cybersecurity posture and protecting personal data.

"Some have invested in AI-driven fraud detection systems to combat these threats. While mature customers will continue to enjoy in-branch service, many customers are calling for convenience and digital solutions that fit their needs. They are also keen to see the cost of banking reduced, especially when it comes to transferring funds abroad."

Commenting on PSB Bank's own digital agenda, Johnson adds: "We are currently undergoing a merger and digital transformation. We're joining forces with APC Bank — a union between PSB Bank and the former Sint Maarten Hypotheek Bank that will see us become one of the most digitally advanced banks in Sint Maarten.

"This digital transformation means clients will no longer need to make appointments or visit branches to access basic services. They'll be able to open accounts, transfer funds and manage finances entirely online.

"We're also expanding our loan offerings for small businesses, making it easier for entrepreneurs to access financing and grow alongside APC Bank."

Much in the same way that the global financial sector is embracing the digital revolution, there has also been a shift toward sustainability and green finance. This is another area where there are numerous opportunities for Caribbean economies.

"The banking community in Sint Maarten is actively engaged in green finance. One example is tackling the issue of sargassum seaweed — a recurring environmental problem. We're exploring ways to finance initiatives that repurpose this seaweed into usable materials for agriculture and other industries," states Johnson.

"We're also facilitating loans for solar energy projects and helping to extend energy access beyond the main grid. By supporting green initiatives, we can reduce environmental risks and strengthen the island's overall climate resilience."

Due to the strength and resilience of the financial sector in Sint Maarten, the country has attracted the interest of global investors and Johnson believes that there is no better time to invest in the island.

"Sint Maarten is a fantastic island to visit — and an even better place to invest," he says. "We are small, yes, but we're also stable, welcoming, and strategically located. Our international airport makes us a hub for travel in the region, and from here, visitors can island-hop to neighboring destinations.

"The ease of doing business, particularly in real estate, is a key advantage. Transactions are straightforward, the legal process is efficient, and the absence of land tax is a major incentive. These benefits, combined with our open investment climate, make Sint Maarten a unique and promising destination. We're here to support investors at every step of the journey."

Protecting keys assets

From hurricane recovery to climate resilience, NAGICO is reshaping insurance through innovation and a focus on the customer

Like many nations in the Caribbean, Sint Maarten's insurance sector remains highly exposed to extreme weather, as was witnessed in 2017 when Hurricanes Irma and Maria inflicted devastation amounting to approximately 250% of GDP.

This highlighted the importance of insurance, not just for individuals looking to rebuild their homes, but also in terms of national recovery. "As the country develops and infrastructure expands — airports, telecom, electricity — insurance plays a critical role in protecting assets and ensuring financial resilience," says Kyria Ali, the CEO of NAGICO the largest privately-owned general insurance company in the Caribbean. "Without coverage, one disaster can cripple progress. We also insure the banks that fund this growth, so our work is central to the country's ability to recover and thrive.

"We offer both general and life insurance, covering property, motor, marine, life and health. In a region where tourism is vital, we also insure vessels and other assets, giving peace of mind to both visitors and residents.

"Climate change may bring more frequent and intense storms, so the need for insurance — and for us to be ready — is constant."

In recent months, the company has also been reassessing its value proposition to better meet the needs of people across the region. This has led to the diversification of its offering.

"Diversification, by product and geography, is essential for our long-term strength and the region's resilience," outlines Ali. "We have started with education and improving access to core products like property and motor insurance. We are also expanding life and health offerings to diversify risk and strengthen our position as a regional insurer.

"On the health side, we aim to support a strong, healthy community and also care for the needs of tourists. Our education savings plans help families prepare early, so students can avoid large debts and focus on building their futures — benefiting not only individuals but the wider economy.


Kyria Ali
CEO, NAGICO

"In regard to climate change, we are working with contractors and governments to modernize building codes and promote more resilient construction. This not only protects lives and property but also builds investor confidence."

Headquartered in Sint Maarten and with an expert understanding of the local markets, NAGICO is also utilizing data to form strategic partnerships. "Through these various initiatives we are helping improve not just services but also the overall well-being of our communities," adds Ali. "Whether it's faster claims handling, better access to care or preventive health initiatives, our goal is to enhance quality of life. That is what attracts forward-looking investors — those who want to make an impact, not just profits."

Orco Bank is committed to making banking more efficient and accessible.

Helping to power key sectors

Orco Bank offers tailored financial solutions to meet rising investor demand in Sint Maarten

With Sint Maarten home to a strong, dynamic and healthy banking sector that has shown resilience even in the face of external shocks, local banks are not just flourishing but are positioning themselves to support long-term economic growth.

This is evident at Orco Bank, which has diversified its investments and is overhauling its digital infrastructure. "We are focusing on digital transformation, supporting key industries like tourism and renewable energy, and ensuring financial inclusion. This approach will help us continue driving sustainable, long-term growth in the region," outlines Judy King, country manager of Orco Bank Sint Maarten.

"We are committed to investing in digital infrastructure to make banking more efficient and accessible for our clients. Our goal is to enhance our online and mobile platforms, ensuring they are user-friendly and secure.

"We also prioritize cybersecurity by employing advanced encryption technologies and implementing rigorous monitoring systems to protect our clients' data. Additionally, we maintain strict compliance with both local and international regulations, ensuring that our digital offerings meet the highest standards of security and regulatory adherence."

Meeting the highest possible international standards is particularly important as Sint Maarten is seeing increased interest in real estate from US and European buyers. Property financing has become a key growth driver in the country and Orco Bank is playing a key role in supporting foreign investors.

"We offer tailor-made mortgage solutions, competitive financing options and expert advice. Whether it's a residential property or a large-scale commercial development, we provide the financing solutions that help drive growth in the real estate market," explains King.

"Our deep understanding of the local market allows us to offer personalized advice and help investors navigate the complexities of the Caribbean property market."

It is not just the real estate market that has attracted interest from overseas investors, with Sint Maarten's thriving economy presenting numerous opportunities in a variety of sectors. "Orco Bank is well-positioned to support investors with innovative financial solutions, expert advice and a deep understanding of the local market," says King. "Whether you're considering real estate or other investment opportunities, we're here to partner with you for success."


Judy King
Country Manager, Orco Bank

The Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance boasts more than 90 slips.

The marina can accommodate vessels ranging from 40-260 feet.

A premier homeport for superyachts

The Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance offers a world-class marina, tax-free advantages and unrivalled service, making it a popular choce for yacht owners

Strategically positioned at the crossroads of the Caribbean and renowned for its world-class marinas, Sint Maarten has carved out a reputation as the region's leading luxury yachting hub. Not only does the island boast deep-water facilities and state-of-the-art amenities, but what truly sets it apart is its unrivalled commitment to service.

This can be seen at the Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance, which caters to yacht owners and the crews who keep the vessels running. The facility offers a host of services, from shipping and transport arrangements to repairs, upkeep and even an airport VIP escort service.

Priding itself on its superb customer service, the yacht club also offers a marina office facility where customers receive free gym access, discounted rates at the nearby Princess Port de Plaisance Hotel, 24/7 marina security and special bridge openings and tender services.

The ability to provide bespoke provisioning and technical support has ensured that the Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance has become a trusted home port for some of the world's most prestigious superyachts and a vital stop on the global yachting calendar.

"Over the years, the Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance has continuously evolved and enhanced its facilities and services to meet the diverse needs of the vessels that grace our docks."

Such is the importance of the yachting industry to Sint Maarten that Grisha Heyliger-Marten, the Minister of Tourism, Economic Affairs, Transport, and Telecommunication, commissioned an economic impact study on the maritime sector, with the findings underscoring its position as a cornerstone of the economy.

"This study underscores the yachting and maritime sector's crucial role in Sint Maarten's economy, not just as a driver of GDP but as a vital pillar of our tourism ecosystem," stated Heyliger-Marten when revealing the findings of the substantial report.

The report found that the yachting and maritime industry accounts for 16.3% of Sint Maarten's GDP, with the more than 4,000 vessel arrivals across 2023 contributing $140 million in direct spending. It also stated that the industry supports more than 300 businesses and sole proprietors, creating approximately 4,769 jobs and contributing $242 million in annual expenditures.

The elegant mixed-use marina has a wealth of excellent facilities.

This highlights the Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance's role in local job creation and economic growth. Not only does it require a dedicated team to maintain and service the variety of vessels that dock at the marina, but it also employs a concierge department to cover port clearance services and ensure vessels, crew and passengers comply with all applicable immigration, customs and harbor regulations.

The evolution of the yachting industry

Since the 1960s, yachting has grown substantially in Sint Maarten, with the island now firmly establishing itself as a major regional hub for superyachts. In 2023, 418 superyachts visited the country, thanks in large part to its unmatched connectivity and world-class services.

"Over the years, the Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance has continuously evolved and enhanced its facilities and services to meet the diverse needs of the vessels that grace our docks. Our unwavering mission is to provide a safe, friendly and service-oriented environment, which has only improved each year," explains a Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance spokesperson.

"To achieve the vision of becoming the premier marina in the Caribbean, we have developed specially tailored packages to accommodate the unpredictable schedules of vessels, particularly larger yachts. Our facility has expanded its capabilities from accommodating yachts of 150 feet to now servicing yachts exceeding 260 feet. With our experienced team, we possess a deeper understanding of the yachting industry's needs and demands than our competitors."

To better accommodate the broad range of vessels that travel to Sint Maarten, the Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance has undergone significant upgrades since its establishment in 1991. Having seen the rise of the marina industry, a second phase took place in 2002, while further upgrades were made following the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma in 2017. These included rebuilding and repairing the marina itself, as well as surrounding amenities like the gym, swimming pool and country club.

Now the club not only offers a full range of leisure activities, but it also has more than 90 slips that can accommodate vessels of all sizes, from cruising class all the way up to ultra yachts. It also has a prime location inside the Simpson Bay Lagoon, which provides access from the Simpson Bay Bridge in Sint Maarten and the Sandy Ground Bridge in Saint Martin. That means visitors can easily explore a vibrant blend of both Dutch and French cultures.

Due to its excellent location and the huge range of services, the Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance has emerged as a popular home base for those seeking to travel between numerous Caribbean islands, especially St. Kitts & Nevis, Anguilla, Saba, and St. Barts.

It is also just minutes away from international air connections at Princess Juliana International Airport, making it a perfect launch point for multi-island itineraries. Furthermore, the airport can accommodate everything from wide-bodied passenger jets and private aircraft to cargo planes and helicopters.

The appeal of Sint Maarten

While Sint Maarten is well-positioned as a stopover destination, those who arrive on the island often choose to stay for an extended period. This has proved particularly valuable for the economy as yacht owners, charter guests, and crew bring some of the highest per-capita spending in tourism.

Jeff D. Boyd
President and Managing Director, MMC NV

A single superyacht can inject tens of thousands of dollars weekly into the local economy through provisioning, dining, entertainment, and luxury services. It also creates stable employment for locals in roles such as logistics, hospitality, and maintenance. There is also the added benefit that it contributes via customs fees, docking charges, permits, and fuel taxes.

Due to the yachting industry attracting the higher-value segment, Sint Maarten has actively sought to make the country as attractive as possible. While it already offers stunning beaches, a tropical climate, and a fascinating blend of cultures, it also has a completely duty-free and tax-free port.

This means that yachts can purchase provisions, parts, and fuel without import duties or value-added tax, making the country one of the most competitive hubs in the Caribbean. It also significantly reduces operating costs for superyachts, which spend heavily on maintenance and supplies.

There is also a benefit to guests and crew, who can enjoy duty-free shopping on a variety of goods. This has helped the country position itself as a homeport for the entire season rather than simply a stopover, making Sint Maarten a coveted destination for the mega-yacht community.

Boosting its global profile

Sint Maarten's status as a yachting capital has attracted attention around the world

Combining a strategic location, world-class facilities and unmatched services, Sint Maarten has rightfully earned its reputation as the yachting capital of the Caribbean. Equally appealing to yacht owners, charter companies and crew, the island features a host of deep-water marinas, including Simpson Bay Marina, Isle de Sol and Yacht Club Port de Plaisance.

The latter has the capacity to house vessels that exceed 260 feet, a rarity among many of the Caribbean islands. This has helped the club attract global attention and position the country as a luxury destination that sits alongside the likes of Monaco, Palma and St. Tropez.

Regularly recognized as one of the leading mega-yacht marinas in the entire Caribbean, it also hosts high-profile regattas, including the Sint Maarten Classic Yacht Regatta and the Sint Maarten Heineken Regatta, the Caribbean's largest sailing event. This annual event, held every March, attracts more than 100 yachts from more than 25 countries, making it a leading event on the global sailing calendar.

Hosting the regatta village, the club transforms into a vibrant venue that offers daily entertainment, including live music, food and prize-giving ceremonies.

The Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance is also the home of the annual SXM Lagoon Festival, which showcases the best of the island's yachting excellence, maritime traditions and its thriving culinary scene.

Growing in popularity over the three years it has been held, the festival pits talented chefs who work on luxury yachts against local culinary masters. The winner is then determined by a panel of judges that includes top chefs from across the Caribbean.

"The SXM Lagoon Festival was created to extend the stay of yachts on the island and attract new clientele. Sint Maarten is recognized as the yachting capital of the Caribbean, and this event highlights our destination's hospitality and dynamic culinary scene," explains Sharrita Mills, director of sales and marketing at The Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance. "We are also committed to providing a platform for local talent to compete alongside superyacht chefs."

Further leveraging its prime location and first-class facilities, the club regularly hosts networking events for the local and international maritime community. Welcome receptions and cocktail parties are also held for visiting yachts, while crew appreciation nights and hospitality gatherings are also commonplace.

Throughout the year, conferences and seminars related to the maritime, tourism and investment sectors are also held at the Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance. These types of corporate events are vital as they highlight the appeal of the yachting industry, while also showcasing Sint Maarten as an attractive destination for overseas investors.

These events have helped transform the Yacht Club at Port de Plaisance into a central hub for both business and leisure activities, making it a year-round destination for competitive sailing, luxury hospitality, business networking and community engagement.

THE YACHT CLUB AT PORT DE PLAISANCE

90+	40-260	3
Slips that accomodate a variety of vessels, including superyachts	The Marina can house vessels ranging from 40 feet to 260 feet	Princess Juliana International Airport is 3 miles from the club