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Symphony of food and wine at British Virgin Islands Winemakers Dinner

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**Article Image Description:**

L to R: Ajit George & Sir Richard lift glasses for a toast. - Photo by Peter Wesley Brown

The British Virgin Islands Tourist Board and the BVI Charitable Fund welcomed international tastemakers, seasoned gourmards, travelers, and media from throughout the world including Brazil, Czech Republic, France, Germany, India, Italy, Korea, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Slovakia, Spain, United Kingdom, and the United States of America to the 2009 Virgin Islands Winemakers Dinners series from July 15 through 19, 2009; more than US\$100,000 was raised from the July series.

The gourmet lunches and dinners were held at a collection of exclusive BVI villas on four islands and featured flavorful cuisine and wine, helmed by the expertise of some of the world's

celebrated chefs and winemakers. Over 1,000 people in total attended the four dinners, seven luncheons, and the VIP Reception, which featured 78 separate courses of food and 87 different wines that were paired with these courses.

The Virgin Islands Winemakers Dinners kicked off with a private opening reception on July 15 at the Sugar Mill Ruins at Nail Bay Resort featuring 22 different dishes prepared by local chefs and four different wines. Dinners respectively followed at Necker Island, Sir Richard Branson's private island; Falcon's Nest on Peter Island; Jost House on Guana Island; and at Mooney Bay Estate on Virgin Gorda. The BVI Charitable Fund organized a culinary degustation of seven course dinners over four nights. The seven courses were paired with 14 renowned wines, personally poured by the vintners. Each dinner was preceded by a reception at sunset featuring a Riesling and a Pinot Noir Sekt Brut from Weingut Kirsten in Germany. Gourmet dishes were presented by seven international visiting chefs and four of the BVI's best chefs.

Visiting chefs and culinary personalities include Vikram Garg, Executive Chef at Halekulani Resort in Waikiki, Hawaii; Rachel Yang, of the Seattle restaurant Joule; Bill Fuller, corporate chef for Big Burrito Restaurant Group; Certified Executive Chef Thomas Hannum, Wilmington, Delaware; Carla Pernambuco, owner of Carlota in São Paulo, Brazil; Chef Alain Ivaldi, professor at Lycée Hôtelier in Marseille, France; and Executive Pastry Chef Michelle Mitchell, Wilmington, Delaware. All the chefs volunteered their time and talent.

Exceptional vintners include Pio Boffa of Pio Cesare, Italy; Jorge Borges of Quinta do Passadouro and wife Sandra Tavares da Silva of Wine, Portugal; Wilhem Haag of Weingut Fritz Haag and Schloss Lieser, Germany; Bernhard Kirsten of Weingut Kirsten, Germany; Manuel Muga Pena of Bodegas Muga, Spain; and Jon Priest of Etude, California. All the winemakers contributed the wines, time, and insight at no cost.

Mr. Ajit Mathew George, co-chair of the BVI Charitable Fund and managing director of Nail Bay Resort, reported that even though the economic climate was very challenging, the first part of the 2009 Winemakers Dinners attracted 29 percent more sponsorship revenue than all of the 2008 Winemakers Dinners. He added that the July series of the Winemakers Dinners was completely sold out in advance with a long waiting list for each dinner and lunch.

Martin Dindos, owner of OHMS, a company that imports premium white wines from Germany's Mosel Valley and fine champagnes and a founder sponsor, helped convince the German winemakers to donate rare and exclusive wines for the event and the silent wine auctions and fly to BVI for the dinners. Wine and food pairings were made by Richard Grosche, wine journalist from German wine magazine Weinwelt and Manager of the International wine academy MUNDUS vini. OHMS – which stands for On Her Majesty Services - also donated the fine Czech porcelain and glasses for the seven-course place settings each evening.

Every night guests mingled amidst panoramic sunset views of surrounding islands and shimmied under the stars to live music and entertainment by BVI's "Lady of Soul" Malcia Smith Hamilton. Guests also had the chance to bid on one of famed artist Romero Britto's original giclees entitled 'Wine Wine Yellow' which was donated by the artist and presented by April Bolet, Britto's charities and donations liaison. A simultaneous silent auction also included special bottles of wine donated by the winemakers, many of very limited production.

The second part of the 2009 Winemakers Dinners series will be held from December 3-6 with an opening reception at the Pirates Bight on Norman Island on December 2, followed by the dinners on Virgin Gorda and Tortola, including Baraka Point at Nail Bay, Virgin Gorda on December 3; Frenchmans Lookout, Tortola on December 4; Paradisi, Virgin Gorda on December 5; and the Golden Pavilion Villa, Tortola on December 6.

The BVI Tourist Board is the Presenting Sponsor of the 2009 and 2010 Winemakers Dinners.

For additional information and to become a sponsor of the December series of the Virgin Islands Winemakers Dinners, visit www.winemakersdinners.com [1].

ABOUT BVI CHARITABLE FUND

The co-chairs of the BVI Charitable Fund are the Premier of the British Virgin Islands, the Hon. Ralph T. O'Neal, OBE and Ajit Mathew George, managing director, Nail Bay Resort. The BVI Charitable Fund was established in March 2008 with a US\$25,000 challenge grant from Nail Bay Resort to create new and innovative fund-raising events to benefit various charities in the BVI by attracting support from both outside and within the BVI, while at the same time promoting this destination to potential new visitors. The BVI Charitable Fund is part of the Community Foundation (BVI) Limited which has no paid staff or overhead. In addition to Nail Bay Resort, the other Founding Sponsors are Allivictus and OHMS.

The beneficiaries of the net proceeds of the 2009 Winemakers Dinners are The BVI Red Cross, St. Mary's School, Virgin Gorda, St. George's School, Tortola, and YEP (Youth Empowerment Project) in the East End, Tortola.

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