

5-star Taj Hotel coming to VG

• *Nail Bay partners with Indian company*

BY MASON MARCUS

India-based Taj Hotels and Palaces made inroads into the Caribbean market earlier this month, when the group agreed to develop a luxury resort at Nail Bay in Virgin Gorda.

Plans for the five-star resort include as many as 100 hotel rooms, in addition to spa suites, hotel villas, townhouses and other residential units, a private jetty, and ten moorings.

"This will be a true brand, a true flag that will bring in really high service standards," Nail Bay Managing Director Ajit George said in an interview on Tuesday morning.

On July 15, Mr. George signed a memorandum of understanding with Raymond Bickson, managing director and CEO of the Indian Hotels Company Limited, during a reception for the Winemakers Dinners on Virgin Gorda.

For the 106-year-old, high-end brand, the deal marks the first resort in the Caribbean and Latin



Shaded areas represent land to be developed as part of the proposed hotel plan. (Graphic: Mason Marcus)

American market. The project will be the first Taj Exotica Resort and Spa in this hemisphere.

Taj Hotels and Palaces — already one of Asia's largest hospitality companies — comprises 77 hotels, seven palaces, six private islands, and 12 resorts and

spas in over 52 destinations.

According to Mr. George, at least 10 different high-end brands had been courting developers, but Nail Bay selected the Taj Hotel group because of its "focus on high-end quality of service."

"In my mind, it was the attention to detail for service that distinguished them, and the combination of being the right size," Mr. George explained.

Taj Hotels was looking for a "boutique hotel" with between 60 and 75 rooms, which Mr. George said would be set in the heart of Nail Bay.

Developers are also considering putting a portion of the hotel in Mooney Bay, using a model that Taj Hotels has used in other locations.

Despite the economy, Mr. George said developers are eager to begin planning and paperwork for approvals. "Long-term thinkers like the Taj want to be in places before the economy matures again," he said.

Current investment

To date, \$42 million has been invested in Nail Bay villas, according to developers. Over the past three years, most of the secondary roads within Nail Bay have been paved in concrete; utilities have been placed underground; a state-of-the art internal water distribution system has been laid; and generators have been installed to automatically provide standby electricity.

All told, it may be about two years before groundbreaking at the Taj Hotel at Nail Bay and another two years before construction is finished.

Likely financed by private equity, Mr. George said the project may be the single largest investment in land development in VI history.

"It will be, without questions, one of the most preeminent hotels [in the territory]," he said.