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Special Feature



Fortress' \$425 Million Hotel Rebuild in St Thomas

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The iconic Frenchman's Reef resort complex in the U.S. Virgin Islands was built in 1973 and was a beloved Caribbean resort before it was shuttered in 2017 due to the massive devastation caused by hurricanes Irma and Maria.

After years of recovery, the Westin Beach Resort & Spa at Frenchman's Reef officially opened its doors, marking the second property to debut in the newly redeveloped Frenchman's Reef resort complex in St. Thomas.

The US Virgin Islands property is joined by sister resort the Morningstar Buoy Haus Beach Resort at Frenchman's Reef, Autograph Collection, which debuted in May. The two Frenchman's Reef properties were previously known as the Frenchman's Reef & Morning Star Marriott Beach Resort.



The beach (and Tide Pool) at the new Buoy Haus.

Fortress Investment Group acquired Frenchman's Reef in April 2021 and immediately restarted the reconstruction efforts paused by the prior ownership group upon the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, said Thomas Pulley, CEO of Fortress' global real estate business.

"The renovation of the resort, which totaled \$425 million, left no component untouched," said Pulley. "The resort was striped down to a concrete shell and rebuilt with all new interiors, systems, elevators, and roofs."

Furthermore, the renovation included newly built water sports activity center, rebranded and enlarged wellness spa, improved pool offerings, and newly conceptualized restaurants and bars, said Pulley.

Pulley said immediately following the acquisition, Fortress mobilized key contractors and recommenced construction with a carefully curated design led by Kollin, Altomare Architects, paying tribute to the historic landmark.

Post-renovation, the resort has been up-branded from a Marriott to a dual-branded Westin and Autograph Collection, transformed into a world-class resort destination with high-end food and beverage and amenity offerings, including full service spa with 13 treatment rooms and more than 66,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space.

In addition, the property was significantly fortified against future weather impacts rebuilding to Miami-made standards and constructing a saltwater reverse osmosis plant providing 100 percent of the resort's drinking water plus a LPG-powered cogeneration plant providing 100 percent of the resort's electricity, said Pulley.

The project is the latest in the Caribbean by [E-Finity Distributed Generation](#), which has become arguably the premier clean energy company for Caribbean hotels in recent years.



One of E-finity's Microturbine systems.

"The property has undergone a long journey to return to the preeminent destination in the USVI and Caribbean market," said Pulley. "We are extremely excited to steward this important property through the completion of its ambitious rebuilding and reopening as a global destination with unrivaled facilities and amenities."

And what does this mean to see this iconic hotel reopened for the people?

"Frenchman's Reef is a remarkable property—an irreplaceable asset that we are thrilled to add to our portfolio," Pulley said. "We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the long-term vibrancy of the St. Thomas economy, and look forward to working closely with USVI officials and engaging with the people of St. Thomas as a significant employer, providing essential jobs as we welcome back prior employees as well as new."

As for any other immediate plans, Pulley said the focus was on the relaunch.

"The immediate focus remains on a successful re-opening of both hotels, preparing for a very busy season in front of us," said Pulley. "We will continue to refine Frenchman's offerings, listen to guest feedback and monitor the trends of the region. We are also excited to launch our newly christened 60-foot catamaran, the Flying Frenchman later this month."

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