

Florida Man Caught Smuggling Marijuana Wrapped in Christmas Paper at St. Thomas Airport

Customs officers uncover over 26 kilograms of marijuana and 4 kilograms of THC crumbles hidden in festive wrapping; suspect admits to prior smuggling attempts

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ST. THOMAS — A Florida man reportedly told law enforcement officials that he was smuggling marijuana into the territory as a way to dispose of a shop's old inventory.

According to court documents, Customs and Border Protection officers at the Cyril E. King Airport noticed something unusual about three suitcases coming off a Spirit Airlines Flight on Monday.

X-ray screening of the luggage revealed “anomalies” inside the suitcases, authorities say. The bags, tagged with the name Carl Delande, were placed on the baggage claim carousel, while CBP officers waited to see who would come to collect them.

They approached the man who retrieved the luggage, and he reportedly provided them with a Florida driver's license identifying himself as Delande. The CBP officers then escorted him – and the suitcases – to the secondary screening area for further inspection.

When the three pieces of luggage were opened, officers reportedly discovered that they all contained several vacuum-sealed packages along with several small glass bottles. The packages – 60 in total – were found to consist of a green leafy substance which had reportedly been placed inside transparent plastic bags, wrapped in paper plates, then gift-wrapped with Christmas paper before finally being vacuum-sealed in the outer bag. The glass bottles contained a brown substance. Both the vacuum-sealed plant material and the substance in the jars returned positive results for marijuana. All told, officials say that the suitcases, which Delande reportedly claimed as his and said he packed himself, contained over 26 kilograms of marijuana and over 4 kilograms of “THC crumbles”, as he called the brown substance.

Delande then reportedly agreed to provide a video statement to CBP officers, in which he admitted that the contraband was his, and said that he obtained the marijuana from a retail establishment in Hollywood, Florida, that was clearing out old inventory to make way for new stock. Delande also reportedly admitted that he was on his way to St. Croix with the marijuana, and had packed the material in such a way as to hopefully avoid detection.

According to the criminal complaint against Delande, he also admitted to bringing marijuana to St. Croix on two previous occasions in 2024 – about five pounds’ worth.

He was then arrested and charged with possession of marijuana with intent to distribute.

Delande appeared before U.S. Magistrate Alan Teague on Tuesday, who ordered a \$5000 unsecured bond. As part of his pretrial release conditions, Delande must surrender his passport to authorities and will be restricted from traveling outside the Southern District of Florida except to attend his scheduled court appearances on St. Thomas.