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Southwest Airlines Announces Game-Changing Service to St. Thomas, Unlocking Unprecedented Tourism and Connectivity for USVI

Southwest Airlines will launch flights to Cyril E. King International Airport in early 2026, bringing a major airlift win to the USVI after years of strategic collaboration between the government, tourism department, and Virgin Islands Port Authority.

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In a transformative moment for U.S. Virgin Islands tourism and economic development, Southwest Airlines has officially announced plans to launch service to Cyril E. King International Airport in early 2026. This major win follows years of coordinated effort by the Government of the Virgin Islands, the Department of Tourism, and the Virgin Islands Port Authority, and is expected to significantly boost visitor arrivals, accessibility, and national visibility for the

territory.

The move brings one of America's most recognized and customer-friendly airlines to the Virgin Islands for the first time, opening the door to new markets and strengthening the territory's position as a top-tier Caribbean destination. Flights are scheduled to go on sale soon.

"Today marks an exciting milestone for the U.S. Virgin Islands and our growing tourism industry," said Governor Albert Bryan Jr. "We are proud to welcome this new partnership with Southwest Airlines and look forward to greeting new travelers to our beautiful island home."

St. Thomas will be the ninth island destination in the Atlantic Basin served by Southwest, joining the ranks of Aruba, The Bahamas, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and Turks and Caicos. It's also the first of three new destinations the carrier expects to unveil in 2026. The airline also operates international routes to Belize, Costa Rica, and Mexico, offering strong potential for regional and global connectivity.

"We are excited at the announcement of new airlift into St. Thomas with Southwest Airlines," said V.I. Department of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte. "As a destination, this expands our accessibility and connectivity to travelers, allowing for seamless and expanded travel opportunities to experience the natural beauty, vibrant culture, and warm hospitality that define the U.S. Virgin Islands."

Southwest's expansion into the USVI is expected to dramatically increase the territory's exposure among millions of loyal Southwest travelers and may lead to direct service from key U.S. cities. It also aligns with the Bryan administration's broader strategy to diversify airlift and reduce reliance on seasonal routes.

Bob Jordan, President, CEO, and Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors at Southwest Airlines, said the move was shaped by customer demand. "We are listening closely to what our Customers want—from new products and loyalty benefits to new destinations," said Jordan. "We want to make Southwest Airlines the easy and obvious choice every time, and this is another meaningful step in our ongoing transformation."

The announcement comes as Southwest prepares to roll out enhanced customer offerings. In the third quarter of 2025, the airline will begin selling assigned and premium seating, and by early 2026, travelers can expect a reconfigured fleet featuring extra legroom seating and new fare bundles—changes that could appeal to leisure travelers and business-class passengers alike.

For the U.S. Virgin Islands, Southwest's entry signals more than just added flights—it represents broader economic opportunity, job creation, and a boost to small businesses reliant on a healthy tourism sector. It also affirms the territory's reputation as a destination worthy of major airline investment.