

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Renewed Calls for Expanded Service to St. Croix as Southwest Makes Inaugural Visit to St. Thomas

While celebrating Southwest Airlines' inaugural St. Thomas flight, leaders repeatedly highlighted St. Croix's role in the VI's tourism and cultural economy, urging future service and stressing the need for air access that benefits all three islands.

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A Southwest Airlines aircraft taxis under a ceremonial water salute after touching down at Cyril E. King Airport on St. Thomas on Thursday, February 5, 2026, marking the airline's inaugural arrival in the USVI. By. GOV'T HOUSE.

ST. THOMAS — While Southwest Airlines marked the launch of its inaugural St. Thomas flight on Thursday, territorial leaders used the occasion to repeatedly spotlight St. Croix, signaling continued interest in expanded air service to the island and framing the new route as a foundation for broader territory-wide growth.

During remarks at Cyril E. King Airport, Tourism Commissioner Jennifer Matarangas-King offered what she described as a “shameless plug” for St. Croix, stating that the Department of Tourism views airline partnerships as long-term relationships that must benefit the entire territory, not only St. Thomas. She expressed hope that Southwest would eventually recognize the value of St. Croix as part of its Virgin Islands footprint.

That sentiment was echoed by Willard John, chairman of the V.I. Port Authority Board of Governors, who welcomed Southwest to St. Thomas while encouraging the airline to consider future service to St. Croix. John described consistent and affordable air travel as essential to the territory’s vitality and said expanded routes could lead to longer visitor stays, increased spending, and job growth across tourism, hospitality, and small businesses.

Port Authority Executive Director Carlton Dowe also underscored St. Croix’s importance during his remarks, stating that VIPA stands ready to support airlines that open new markets across the territory. Dowe said the authority can offer incentives, including reduced landing and operational fees, to carriers launching service, provided such measures align with board approval and long-term growth goals.

Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach framed St. Croix as central to the Virgin Islands’ identity, describing the island as the keeper of the territory’s culture and history. He noted that while St. Thomas serves as a metropolitan and gateway island, St. Croix remains a vital pillar of the Virgin Islands experience and must be included in any comprehensive tourism and transportation strategy.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. placed St. Croix within a broader vision of regional connectivity, noting ongoing efforts to improve inter-island transportation, including ferry expansion linking St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. He said strengthening connections between the islands supports a more integrated tourism product and positions the territory to function as a hub for Caribbean travel.

Bryan also noted that affordable air service is critical for residents across the territory, particularly those who travel off-island for healthcare, family obligations, and essential services. He described airlift expansion as both an economic and social priority for the Virgin Islands.

Throughout the ceremony, speakers repeatedly described Southwest’s arrival as a starting point rather than a conclusion, signaling continued advocacy for expanded service beyond St. Thomas. While no formal announcements were made regarding St. Croix routes, the island’s repeated mention by senior officials underscored its ongoing relevance in airlift planning discussions.