

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix Boosted As Norwegian Air Makes Inaugural Flight To Island With Nearly 200 Passengers

Tourism / **Published On November 07, 2015 12:18 PM /**

Ernice Gilbert **November 07, 2015**



ST. CROIX -- It was exactly what this island needed: some good news to counter the wave of negativity -- via gun violence -- that has stolen the headlines over the last few weeks and with it the mood of residents here. Some had expressed frustration that the island, already under economic stress, would suffer further because of the seemingly unabating criminal activity, fearing that St. Croix's unique blend of culture -- rich history and award-winning culinary, among other unique offerings -- would turn likely tourists away.

But from Denmark's Copenhagen Airport comes Norwegian Air, a mammoth Boeing 787, onto the runway at the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport, with far more than the 150 passengers

that Department of Tourism Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty was expecting. The jet, towering over the airport, was greeted by firetrucks wetting its path in a show of welcome as it came to a halt after the direct flight that lasted between 9-10 hours, and as eager dignitaries -- senators, VI Port Authority officials, Tourism leaders, Kenneth Mapp administration officials, the territory's delegate to Congress and even Port Authority employees -- shook the hands of unnumbered tourists with wide smiles and flattering words.

The visitors, flushed with surprise at the overwhelming welcome they received, couldn't help but join in the excitement themselves. Some seized as officials made their fellow of the moment.



Local officials

pose for a group photo with incoming tourists.

Out of the terminal and into a small conference room located near the baggage claim area, DOT and VIPA kept the welcome party alive. There, tourists were greeted with hors d'oeuvres, steel pan music and two women dressed in carnival costumes. Outside the room, a moko jumbie amazed the visitors, some who took pictures with the tall, intimidating creature.

"Wow! What a fantastic welcome. I've never seen anything like it before," said Norwegian Air Public Relations Officer Daniel Pilpel Kirchhoff while giving brief remarks. "We are an expanding airliner and we've been opening many new routes every year, but I've never seen anything like this. Thank you so much."

The new route will see Norwegian Air visiting this island every Friday from now until April, 2016, and the flights are expected to recommence in November, 2016. Nicholson-Doty said Thursday's flight was a testament of a multi-year effort that first started as a charter operation and grew into the scheduled airline service available from yesterday.

"Having a major European airline that has the connectivity throughout Scandinavia particularly, but Europe on a whole, is incredible for the island of St. Croix," Mrs. Nicholson-Doty said. "We've long known that positioning St. Croix with the European market is important. We certainly focused on our linkage with Denmark and Scandinavia, and this just widens the possibilities for us in terms of overall marketing, and hence, economic impact. So we're really excited, not just because of this flight from Copenhagen, but our ability to have a regularly scheduled airline providing service that's



Local officials greet landing tourists.

Mrs. Nicholson-Doty mentioned Bravo Charters, a company that marketed the territory to Danish tourists, thanking the company for taking the risk with the islands, adding that it was well worth the effort because it has allowed "us to be here today, where we have a scheduled airline service in St. Croix."

The commissioner spoke of the ripple effect an additional 150 plus tourists every week on this island will have on the economy, and highlighted the increased revenue potential for car rental operations, restaurants and certainly hotels. It was a sentiment that would be later echoed by Senator Kurt Vialet, who told The Consortium that a few more flights like Norwegian Air's new, dedicated route would greatly boost the local economy.

"This is definitely what we need for St. Croix," Mr. Vialet said. "The Danish source to St. Croix over the last couple of years has been a big boon, especially to the restaurant industry because they walk and they eat. You see them in Christiansted going into restaurants on a regularly basis, [and] I think it's just wonderful that you have almost 200 individuals who came here today, which will also help hotel occupancy, and it's just good for St. Croix as a whole."

The Consortium also spoke with a Danish tourist, Sine Smith, seemingly in her mid-thirties, who revealed that her trip was part pleasure and part assignment, as she would be working on a PhD paper which, upon completion, will tell how the Danes described slavery, and how they wrote about it in the 19th century in Denmark.

At the podium situated to the east of the conference room, multiple officials gave remarks, including Mrs. Nicholson-Doty, VIPA's Assistant Executive Director David Mapp, Senator Myron Jackson, who represented Senate President Neville James, Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett and Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter, who operated in the capacity of governor last night, among other officials.



"One of the things you will love about the people of the Virgin Islands is their warmth," Mr. Potter said. He also urged the tourists to spend a lot of money.

"That is something we're hoping that you will do, and go back with one or two dollars just to catch a cab to go home. But leave most of what you came with here, in St. Croix."

Also at the welcoming event were senators Marvin Blyden, Jean Forde and Novelle Francis. The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency Director Mona Barnes acted in her capacity of pastor as she opened and closed with prayer, while St. Croix Administrator Stephanie Williams MC'd the affair.