

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Hummingbird Air Crash-Lands In St. Lucia; Its Second Accident In Three Months

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ST. CROIX -- Hummingbird Air, a fledgling carrier owned by businessman Sam Raphael, crash-landed in St. Lucia on November 8, its second accident in three months; the first occurring on Monday, August 17 at the Codrington Airport in Barbuda, where one of its planes -- traveling from Antigua to Barbuda -- veered off the runway and crashed-landed into a nearby field between 10:00 a.m. and twelve noon.

The latest accident led Mr. Raphael to cancel all Hummingbird flights until further notice, according to a statement the airline issued to VI News Online, a Tortola-based newspaper.

"The company has launched an internal investigation to determine the cause of this incident. Hummingbird Air has taken the decision to cancel all passenger flights until further notice. Additional information will be provided as it becomes available," Mr. Raphael said on Sunday, November 8.

St. Lucia News Online reported that the accident occurred at about 8:45 a.m. and involved an aircraft with a registration number N7994H, which veered off the runway.

According to the St. Lucia publication, citing Fire Service officials, preliminary investigations revealed that the aircraft's right landing gear malfunctioned. The article further stated that an official said the airport's control tower did not receive any calls for help prior to the aircraft's arrival, but once the plane crash-landed, fire personnel and ambulances in the Castries area responded to the scene.

The aircraft only carried the pilot, however, and he was not injured during the accident.

The Consortium contacted Hummingbird Air, but a representative told the publication that Mr. Raphael was not available to speak. The Consortium has also contacted the FAA, and the federal agency said it hasn't taken any action against the airline.

In an [October 2014 interview](#), Mr. Raphael told The Consortium that starting an airline business was more about seeing economic growth on the island than it was about making money.

"There's a joke that people pass around, they say to become a millionaire in the aviation business is to start with a billion dollars," Raphael said, highlighting the significant costs involved in launching an airline company. "It's very, very difficult — and especially here in the Caribbean where you have these different restrictions. Every island is its own kingdom with its own rules and permits, which makes it more challenging, and operation over water is very expensive because of the salt and other factors, [plus] a whole lot of immigration issues," he explained.

Even so, Raphael is no stranger to uphill battles. He likened the situation to a real estate market where homes are being foreclosed upon and people start moving away. Raphael said that is the best time to move in and "purchase cheap" because once the economy picks back up, the ones who purchased real estate when it seems as if the market would never recover, are the ones who will reap the most fruit.

It's the exact situation Raphael faced when he started what is now rated as No. 2 on Trip Advisor's Top 25 Caribbean Destinations, [Jungle Bay Resort](#), because the location he chose to construct the hotel was what many would call "behind God's back." Today, however, it is a premier destination and employs over 60 people in Dominica. Jungle Bay has been given rave reviews by top publications around the world, including *New York Times*, *US News & World Report*, *Travel + Leisure Magazine*, *Forbes Traveler* and more.

Mr. Raphael is hoping to have the same level of success on St. Croix with Hummingbird Air. But the two recent accidents, though seemingly minor, his path ahead has become more complicated.

Feature Image: A Hummingbird Air aircraft at the George F. L. Charles Airport in Castries St Lucia.

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