

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Liat Not Returning To St. Croix; Only St. Thomas, The Consortium Has Learned. Port Authority Waives Landing Fees.

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While Liat [will announce its return to the U.S. Virgin Islands during a press conference in St. Thomas on Monday](#), the airline, which once had operations at both USVI airports [before announcing the halting all flights in February 2017](#), will only be providing flights to and from St. Thomas, a person with intimate knowledge of a recent meeting held on St. Croix last week, has told The Consortium.

At the meeting, which included Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter, two Liat officials, two federal officials with either Immigration and Customs Enforcement or Transportation

Security Administration, or both, along with Virgin Islands Port Authority Executive Director David Mapp, Liat is said to have told local officials that it was hemorrhaging cash on St. Croix and therefore would not return to the island. The Liat officials also said that local officials did not immediately reach out to the airline when it first announced the halting of flights; Liat said the discussions commenced only after the announcement had become a reality, according to this person.

Federal officials voiced their concerns about Liat's consistent late arrivals to the territory, but the airline is said to have explained that the late arrivals were caused by U.S. immigration policy that Liat passengers coming into the U.S. Virgin Islands be cleared in St. Maarten -- even after they were already checked at other destinations. That process, which meant passengers from around the Caribbean traveling to the U.S. Virgin Islands had to remove all their luggage for yet another clearance, caused flights to delay, hence the late arrivals here, Liat contended. U.S. Immigration officials countered that Liat must improve its screening process, this person said.

Even with its decision not to return to St. Croix, Mr. Mapp waived the airline's landing fees for a year as part of an incentive to return to the territory, according to this person. The airline's flights to St. Croix will no longer include St. Maarten; the flights will come directly from Antigua to St. Thomas, beginning in June, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, this person said.

On Wednesday, Petra Mathew, special assistant to the lieutenant governor, said, "The date of the first flight will not be far from now. Liat executives will also be at the press conference and will issue a formal statement as well." Asked via text message on Wednesday night to expound on the report that Liat would only return to St. Thomas, Ms. Mathew did not respond.

The Consortium will be present at the Monday press conference, which will be held at Mr. Potter's St. Thomas office.

Liat's return to the USVI comes just as another airline is set to fill the void caused by Liat's halted operations. [InterCaribbean Airways](#), a Turks and Caicos airline operating for over 26 years, announced new flights that include nonstop scheduled services from Dominica to St. Lucia and Tortola, with one-stop easy connections via Tortola to St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. Maarten, San Juan, Puerto Rico, Providenciales in Turks and Caicos and Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. The new InterCaribbean Airways flights allow for travelers to make two-stop connections to Kingston, Jamaica and Nassau, Bahamas. "Even allowing for two stops this is still one of the fastest travel times in the Caribbean," InterCaribbean said in a [recently issued release](#). The flights will begin on March 22.

It was not clear whether InterCaribbean's landing fees were waived by the V.I. Port Authority as an incentive to operate in the territory, which would fall in line with the deal Liat was offered.