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Jetblue Makes Inaugural Flight From JFK to St. Thomas as Holiday Season Nears

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Jetblue Crewmembers welcomed by Dept. of Tourism greeters on Saturday, Nov. 7 at the Cyril E. King Airport. By. MAXIENE K. CABO FOR VI CONSORTIUM

The Department of Tourism on Saturday gave the inaugural flight of JetBlue Airways from the John F. Kennedy Airport to Cyril E. King Airport an exceptional welcome that included Moko Jumbie performances and some cultural dancing. First Lady Yolanda Bryan welcomed passengers with gift bags as they deboarded the aircraft.

Jetblue announced the nonstop flights [back in June](#).

“It’s a great day for us to receive this, especially in a pandemic people really want to travel with the least amount of connections as possible,” said Department of Tourism Commissioner Joseph

Boschulte about the every-Saturday route. He said the TriState area has historically been where the territory has seen the majority of its visitors coming in from. “We are definitely happy we have another medium to bring more people in, and we are excited of the possibilities of this season,” he said.

According to JetBlue, with business travel facing a less certain recovery timeline, newly announced routes offer the carrier an opportunity to generate revenue, bring back into service aircrafts that would otherwise sit idle, and add more flying opportunities for JetBlue crew members.

Asked about the new direct route, Governor Albert Bryan, who was also present for the inaugural flight, said, “The beautiful thing about this, it’s like the holy grail of Caribbean tourism, that you have an inaugural flight flying from JetBlue all the way into St. Thomas flying direct to New York. It’s something that St. Croix has been praying for for years and we were able to accomplish it here in St. Thomas. Being able to expand our grip in terms of the seats available coming into the island, our overnight passengers it will be tantamount to our survival this year in the tourism industry.”

While the Center for Disease Control and Prevention has allowed its no-sail order for the cruise industry to expire, major cruise lines have cancelled sailing through November, though some level of cruise ship travel is expected by January. Mr. Bryan said while the cruise ships are expected to start operations, the level of calls and visitors won’t be the same — all this due to the pandemic.

"Cruise ships are looking like they are coming back, but they are not going to come back in the way that they did before," he said. "Having this flight and many others that are coming in, we are almost to our pre-hurricane levels now in St. Thomas and slowly creeping past that in St. Croix. We are looking for more passengers with that test slip coming in here, fully masked and ready to have some fun over the holiday season.”

Mr. Boschulte hailed the direct flight from New York as monumental, which adds upon a variety of options already in place to fly into the territory. "Taxi drivers will have work, all our hotels will be full, Airbnbs will be full, restaurants and bar scenes will have people going. Ultimately we need the injection into our economy, but we need to do it safely," he said.

JetBlue currently serves St. Thomas from San Juan, Boston, and now JFK. The tourism commissioner stated that he has been in conversations with JetBlue regularly about increasing the frequency of flights and getting a flight back on St. Croix, where the airline previously served [before pulling out in 2019](#).