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Seaflight Ready to Offer Seaplane Services Once Seaborne's Exclusivity Deal Expires in 2026, Owner Says

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Ernice Gilbert **August 22, 2022**

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Seaflight Virgin Islands By. SEAFLIGHT VI

Seaflight VI owner and president has said his company is ready to offer services at the V.I. Port Authority's seaplane port — which currently is under an exclusive agreement with Seaborne Airlines — once the exclusive agreement ends in 2026.

Speaking to the Consortium last week, Donald Lewis said his company would not only be ready to operate at the seaplane terminal, it would also be providing cheaper flights than what is currently being offered by Seaborne Airlines, suggesting instant benefit to consumers as soon as competition is allowed.

The Seaflight executive's comments come on the heels of a recent Senate hearing where lawmakers [expressed disappointment](#) that the V.I. Port Authority, when it was under the leadership of David Mapp, allowed an exclusive agreement that would have expired five years ago to be extended by 10 years.

"The port dropped the ball because the port had an opportunity to fight and to open up that port to additional airlines. They did not fight, they acquiesced and they signed," Senate Finance Committee Chairman Sen. Kurt Vialet said during an August 12 VIPA budget hearing. "That's why it's going for five more years. We had the opportunity to open up the port to any airline that's a seaplane operation that wanted to use downtown, and we're feeling the effects now."

Mr. Lewis said his company has long been attempting to provide seaplane services. "We've been trying to operate at the [seaplane terminal] for the past 12 years. We've been blocked during that time," he told the Consortium, adding that his company would "absolutely" offer seaplane flights if allowed. Mr. Lewis added that Seaflight's airport operation has been successful, "but we have not been able to expand into that location," he went on, referring to the seaplane terminal because of Seaborne's exclusive agreement.

Mr. Lewis also said local carriers such as Seaborne Airlines and Cape Air have been facing stiff competition from his company, which he says offers roughly four flights between St. Thomas and St. Croix daily. "Whatever services they are providing or not providing has nothing to do with pilots, it has to do with demand. They're trying to get \$190 for a one-way flight between St. Croix and St. Thomas, and I'm charging \$100 so the people are coming to me. It has nothing to do with pilots. They have pilots; they don't have the ability to match my price," Mr. Lewis said, challenging Cape Air's claims that [it is facing pilot shortages](#).

It currently costs \$338 or more for a roundtrip ticket on Cape Air between St. Croix and St. Thomas. In comparison, it is possible to get a cheaper roundtrip ticket to the U.S. mainland and back to the USVI through Spirit Airlines.

Cape Air's baggage allowance (excluding the Caribbean region) includes 1 checked bag (L+W+H), plus 1 gate checked bag, small enough to pass through TSA as a briefcase or small laptop bag. **Complete baggage policy information**

Customers may receive a full refund for any ticket, including "non-refundable" tickets. Cancellation and refund policies can be found [here](#).

Unaccompanied minors: if booking an unaccompanied minor, please refer to the UNAM policy can be viewed [here](#).

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A screenshot showing the cost of a roundtrip ticket between St. Croix and St. Thomas from Cape Air. This test was performed on Monday, Aug. 22, 2022 (Credit: V.I. Consortium)

Current Port Authority Executive Director Carlton Dowe has said executives of Silver Airways, which owns Seaborne Airlines, have started holding conversations about a renewal of the contract which is nearing its end, however Mr. Dowe said the VIPA governing board has agreed that exclusivity is off the table.

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A test performed on Monday, Aug. 22, 2022 showing the cost for a roundtrip ticket on Spirit Airlines between St. Croix and Fort Lauderdale, FL. The cost of tickets varies during seasons and demand. (Credit: V.I. Consortium)

"They have now approached us," Mr. Dowe made known during the Aug 12 budget hearing, referring to Silver Airways regarding renewal of the Seaplane contract and exclusive rights to operate it. "The governing body, we have drawn a line. Right now as we speak, they have indicated that they want to renew this lease, we've told them unequivocally no, unless that issue

can be solved."

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