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USVI Tourism Officials Put Pressure on American Airlines in Light of Carrier's Reduction in Flights to Territory; AA Blames Pilot and Crew Shortages, Fuel Issues Among Reasons For Cut Back

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**An American Airlines jet aircraft at the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on St. Croix this month.
By. V.I. CONSORTIUM**

In a meeting at the Routes World 2022 Conference in Las Vegas, held from Oct. 15-18, V.I. Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte and his team sat down with American Airlines officials this week to discuss their concerns of the severe impact on residents and tourists in St. Croix and St. Thomas in light of the air carrier's recent announcement of slashing flights to the territory beginning November 2022. The largest cuts affect major airports in Chicago, Dallas,

Boston and Philadelphia, but has left the territory with reduced airlift beginning Nov. 4 through late March 2023.

The Consortium on October 13 [reported on the flight reductions](#), which left St. Croix with one direct flight beginning Nov. 4 through late March 2023 from the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport to Miami, according an examination of available flights. Other offers include several connecting flights that take St. Croix travelers to St. Thomas before heading to the mainland.

For St. Thomas, the Nov. 4 through late March, 2023 schedule includes two direct flights and several connecting offerings, all of which are afternoon options.

The reductions come at a time when the territory will be seeing some of its busiest traffic, with families visiting home for the holiday season and St. Croix celebrating the Crucian Christmas Festival — the first full event since the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the meeting, American Airlines officials explained that while economic considerations are a factor in flight scheduling cutbacks throughout the United States, continued pilot and crew shortages along with fuel issues also led to the reductions in service at many U.S. airports including both USVI airports. They also mentioned that juggling the logistics of the appropriate types of aircraft suited to the geography and runways of USVI airports also complicate scheduling.

According to D.O.T., Mr. Boschulte stressed to the American Airlines executives that the service reduction in the territory has a huge ripple effect on connections for both domestic and international travelers. He pointed out that the USVI is currently leading the Caribbean in air arrivals and has had a 44% increase in overall air arrivals since pre-pandemic 2019.

The commissioner also gave American Airlines updates of the impending opening of the two rebuilt and rebranded properties at Frenchman's Reef, the Westin Beach Resort & Spa and the Seaborne at Frenchman's Reef Autograph Collection, that adds 500 additional rooms in St. Thomas. He also spoke of the new Divi Carina Bay Resort in St. Croix that offers the only all-inclusive property in the territory, as well as the spectacular success of AirBnb and other sharing economy rentals in St. Croix and throughout the USVI.

Mr. Boschulte said marketing St. Croix continues to be a priority as the territory prepares for the upcoming St. Croix Crucian Festival December 11- January 7, the 75th anniversary of the beloved Buccaneer Hotel and a new marketing push that will launch in upcoming weeks.

"USVI's Tourism Department and Governor Albert Bryan have had an on-going series of in-person meetings and negotiations with all the major airlines throughout the year to add more flights to the airports on both islands, Mr. Boschulte said. "We offer airlines a mix of aggressive incentives that can include reductions in airport fees and increasing our advertising spend in markets with direct flights to the territory."

He added, "We are doing everything possible to persuade all airlines to not only maintain their routes to St. Croix and St. Thomas, but to expand their flight frequencies given our exponential growth these past two years emerging out of the pandemic. But we keep in mind that airlines plan out their constantly changing routes according to their logistics planning and economic projections months in advance."

In addition to American Airlines, travelers flying to the islands of St. Croix and St. Thomas can book flights from Delta, United, JetBlue and Spirit through gateway airports of Atlanta, Boston,

Charlotte, Miami, Newark, New York and Orlando, D.O.T. said. Inter-island air travel in the Caribbean can be booked through Air Sunshine, Cape Air, Liat and Seaborne.

This the 27th Annual World Routes Forum in Las Vegas kicked off October 15th and continued through October 18th where thousands of airlines, airport and destination marketing executives participate in networking events and seminars.

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