

SXM Weekly News Special Edition:
The Future of SXM Princess Juliana Airport

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- 1-- **The Future of SXM Princess Juliana Airport**

Editor's Note:

Last week, we interviewed Ravi Daryanani, CFO and Acting CEO of SXM Airport. The interview focused on questions of the greatest interest to North Americans visiting SXM. Here are our questions and Mr. Daryanani's revealing answers, along with comments from Michel Hyman, Airport CCO.

Q. When exactly will the terminal building of SXM Princess Juliana Airport be fully reopened?

A. Although we foresee that the full resumption of all services at SXM Airport will occur by Q1 2020, what's critically important is that ***this will be a phased-in process of rebuilding and moving-in that will actually begin in November of this year, much sooner than many people may expect.***

For example, arrivals and departures could both be handled from the terminal's first floor starting some time in November, 2018, somewhat as they were when air service here was first resumed after Irma. Concessionaires could return ahead of time. So, some activities could be well underway on the first floor while second floor construction is underway. Our first priority in the

terminal is to resume arrivals and departures inside that building, from the first floor, as quickly as we can, of course with full security in place there as well.

The CCO, Michel Hyman, stated that PJIAE [SXM Airport -Ed.] will move its operation back into the terminal building, in a phased approach. The first phase will be in Q4 of 2018.

Q. So this means the tents outside the terminal could be dismantled before the end of this year?

A. The tents we have are rented and were never intended to be anything resembling a long-term solution. We first had to remove all the damaged materials from inside the terminal building, fully mitigate mold, and completely repair the roof, making it fully capable of withstanding storms as strong as Irma, which was the most powerful Atlantic hurricane in recorded history. So, once we are able to move arrivals and departures back into the first floor of the terminal building, we can dismantle the tents. Should any storms threaten us this season, we have time to dismantle the temporary tents beforehand.

The PJIAE Hurricane Preparation Manual was adjusted taking into account the temporary arrival and departure pavilions. When winds are expected to exceed 30kts but less than 40kts, operators will be evacuated from the arrival and departure pavilions and therefore operations in the pavilions will be suspended. The pavilions will be anchored by heavy boulders to protect the covering canvas, but the pavilions will remain erected.

Winds above 45 KTS: The pavilions will be dismantled and all items removed and stored (storage areas were identified in the terminal building and other areas). In both cases the operation plans are to revert to

our emergency operation under the make-up area inside the terminal, as was the case when we resumed operations after Irma. This will be done on a much smaller scale, until tents are made available for departure services and the FBO (Fixed Base Operations -- the facility normally for business and private jets) used for arrival services. Data network and power supply are also in place to facilitate the transfer.

Q. Will the new roof be capable of withstanding the kind of sustained winds that Irma produced, 185 mph?

A. Yes it will. It was important for us to fully understand what happened at the airport so we can prevent it from ever happening again.

Irma's winds came in through the doors and that caused pressure to build up inside the building and damage the roof. There was serious damage here also when solar panels along with much other flying debris were blown into the building from nearby non-airport structures.

All this had to be looked at very thoroughly and we have gone deeply into how we deal with and manage the surrounding area and of course future hurricanes.

We're very aware of what we might expect in possible future storms. We have rewritten our Hurricane Preparedness Plan. We need to be in front of this with disaster management planning and communications that work no matter what. We will have a coordinated recovery plan fully in place right down to satellite telephones.

Q. Any word on the long-discussed parallel taxiway, which would enable a significant increase in flight frequency?

A. For now the main thing is getting the terminal back up and running, getting the fire station itself completely back up, and getting our core business back up and running before we can go back into doing

anything like parallel runways. We need to fix what's broken first.

Q. We've heard that "Preclearance" of US-bound passengers is of interest to the Airport. Is it definitely coming, and if so, when?

A. Preclearance is in the minds of everyone; it is going to happen. We see no reason for it not to. The talks with the US are going very well. It was long coming and I think in a sense the hurricane gave us a reset button, obviously not the way we wanted it to be reset, but to make us go back and think about how we should move forward. Preclearance will not be a part of the terminal reconstruction project; we looked at that and in *that* context it's not workable. The terminal will be rebuilt interior design-wise essentially as it was earlier.

If you look at the terminal from the air, it is the shape of a half moon with its east end missing. *What's going to happen is that the east end of the terminal will be completed over property where the employee parking lot is currently located. Preclearance will be housed in that part of the building. You're looking at actual preclearance being in place by 2020, 2021, or 2022, depending on the completion of the rest of our reconstruction. A lot of this is contingent upon the bilateral agreements that need to be signed, and financing.*

The CCO, Michel Hyman noted that this is dependent on the hotel rooms inventory and developments regarding the reconstruction of the PJIAE terminal building.

Q. Will more gates be added? On Saturdays in high season, some planes can't park at the terminal because there are no available gates.

A. In addition to providing Preclearance space, the expansion of the half-moon of the terminal will provide approximately two additional gates. However the design is also going to provide what are called swing gates so perhaps three airliners or more could preclear simultaneously. Much of this depends on how this airport will be used in the future by the region.

Q. If the reconstruction moves more slowly than expected, do you continue using the tents?

A. The tents have outlived their usefulness. By November we fully expect to move back into the main terminal's first floor. We don't see anything on the horizon that would deter that. When they finish the work on the second floor, we can then say arrivals and departures can now move back up to the second floor. Of course there will be another hurricane season coming next year during which we will still be in construction, so this action helps us safeguard the terminal for all the activities that must be undertaken there and helps safeguard its revenues and productivity as the 2019 hurricane season progresses.

Q. We've heard that Southwest Airlines wants to come to St. Maarten and that jetBlue wants to expand the number of cities from which it flies in the US to SXM. When might these things happen? And when do you expect all the airlines to resume flying their full schedule to SXM?

A. There are many factors at play regarding airline scheduling for this coming winter. How many hotel rooms are back online? Timeshare rooms? Villas? Airbnb? Based upon that information, the airlines will not be back to their full, regular schedule by this winter. As of now, for example, with American Airlines we see only one flight daily from Philadelphia, Charlotte, and Miami. A lot of airline planning is based on the load factors the airlines are achieving, and of course on bookings for the winter. Where are the reservations? Airlines need to be aware of how many people are coming to the island in aggregate. That total demand is what will drive the airlift to get back to normal. The hub function -- involving smaller airlines flying within the Windward and Leeward islands -- doesn't seem to be an issue -- passengers overnighing here who are on their way to Anguilla, St. Barths, St. Kitts, and elsewhere. That airlift is based on their respective economies and their hotel space.

As for Southwest and jetBlue, first, we know that jetBlue now has returned weekend nonstops from Boston to SXM to its winter schedule. JetBlue wants

to launch nonstop flights from Ft. Lauderdale to SXM and it's watching passenger demand to SXM to decide when it will launch that service. Southwest definitely wants to fly here as well and it, too, is watching the load factors of other carriers to determine when it will make the move. *I believe that with the resiliency we have demonstrated here airlines have already put great faith into the island by increasing their winter schedules to St. Maarten. I predict, and this is just a personal prediction, that after September and October should we go unscathed I expect we will see a bigger increase -- but then we need to be ready -- the hotels need to be ready, our economy needs to be ready, restaurants need to be ready.* Nobody's coming to St. Maarten for disaster tourism. I think everything is very dependent on this upcoming hurricane season.

If you want to help us increase airlift, come to St. Maarten this Summer and plan more trips. They will all help.

The CCO, Michel Hyman stated that there are ongoing talks with the Southwest Airlines on the start-up of direct service to and from St. Maarten, and that there are ongoing talks with JetBlue on the startup of this direct service. Meanwhile, the JetBlue managers said they are looking to reinstate the Boston route and the Mint Service for the Winter season.

Q. Last year, a WestJet 737 approaching in inclement weather was 40 feet above the water several hundred yards from the airport runway when it pulled up and went around in what was called a "reportable" incident by Canadian authorities. There were two other incidents where large passenger aircraft were approaching to land on the runway and other aircraft pulled onto the same runway and took off. In both cases the approaching aircraft did a "go-round" and landed later. There was no accident in any of these cases and no one was hurt, but what is being done to prevent incidents like this from occurring at all?

A. The Air Traffic Control (ATC) Management provided the following comments: It is important when incidents are referenced, that it is done in a clear manner. A video can be interpreted by many in different ways. The exact dates, times and circumstances are important to accurately assess an incident.

The WestJet report was received and the findings are being addressed. An Air Traffic Services (ATS) directive will be issued for inclusion in the controllers standard operating procedures, to ensure that controllers do not clear aircraft for an instrument approach when the ceiling and visibility is below the minimum for that particular approach procedure.

Runway lighting intensity control guidance will also be included for controllers. This however requires the input from the Technical Division prior to publishing a procedure. The intensity steps and the corresponding light intensity must be determined prior to doing so.

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SXM Weekly News remains a free publication thanks to readers who join our JMB Website Supporters Island Discount program, which delivers over 300 island discounts and many other benefits. ***Our Summer Membership Promotion delivers all this at low Summer rates.*** Please join and help us continue to bring news of tourist interest about SXM to you every week:

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The SkyMed Medical Evacuation Memberships we talk about in ***SXM Weekly News*** Take You Home to doctors and hospitals you know and trust when you

become critically ill or injured when traveling -- home to where your health insurance actually works, too.

SkyMed annual and multi-year Ultimate memberships include a 90-day exclusion for coverage of pre-existing conditions, after which they're covered in full.

So... if you are traveling this Fall or next Winter, get SkyMed now -- that way the 90 day exclusion will be over before you travel. See getskymed.com or call Jeff with questions at 508-747-8281 any weekday during normal business hours, Eastern time.

More on SkyMed, which is our Principal Sponsor:

A number of readers have asked me over the years why, exactly, do I talk about SkyMed medical evacuation protection. An emergency trip home on a medevac jet today could easily cost upwards of \$50,000 payable in cash in advance unless you have SkyMed. From overseas, it can be twice that. Now you know why I've been a bit evangelical about it: it really is a remarkably big deal.

Allow me a few very quick facts:

First, there is **no age limit** to buy SkyMed; you can apply at any age. Pre-existing conditions are covered at once on short-term memberships, and after a short 90-day waiting period on annual and longer memberships.

Second, annual and multi-year SkyMed memberships are **guaranteed renewable** as long as you like, regardless of advancing age or declining health.

Third, SkyMed memberships **don't get more expensive as you get older or have illness issues**; everyone pays the same reasonable rates. SkyMed won't cancel your membership or increase its cost just because you've reached a certain age, either. Keep it until you're 109 if you like.

Fourth, basic coverage "Takes You Home" when you travel in the USA, Canada, Mexico, Bermuda, the Bahamas, and all the nations of the Caribbean including Cuba. Available global coverage includes the rest of the world except places on the State Department "watch list" (North Korea, for example.)

Fifth, SkyMed delivers far more than just medical evacuations. Its entire list of all key Features & Benefits is here:
<http://www.everythingsxm.com/sxmweeklynews/SkyMedServices.pdf>

Sixth, JMB Website Supporters members get substantial discounts on all multiyear SkyMed memberships. If you're not a JMB member when you call, we'll sign you up on the spot, if you like, giving you instant access to discounts available only to our JMB Website Supporters members. (More on JMB membership is on our site, [everythingxm.com](http://www.everythingsxm.com); JMB has over 300 SXM discounts and many other benefits.)

For still more info, please see our SkyMed site, getskymed.com.

We can answer all your questions; call us any day or evening up to 8 pm EDT at 508-747-8281 (SkyMed calls only). If you're ready to protect yourself and your family, we can take your application by phone -- usually in under 10 minutes.

Please do it now. Things can change in a heartbeat.

Jeff.

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