

# American Airlines makes test flight from Miami to BVI airport

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TORTOLA — Days before two American Airlines aircraft are expected to land in the British Virgin Islands, a test flight touched down Thursday at the Terrence B. Lettsome Airport. The ERJ 175 aircraft Flight MQ9858 operated by Envoy, departed Miami at 7 a.m. and landed at 11:30 a.m. in the BVI with a crew that included two captains, a first officer and flight attendant. Some of the passengers on board were aware that it was a test flight, but others did not, according to officials. "Today, they performed a test operation which is basically the aircraft made an approach, which was basically a touch and go. They saw the

runway, circled and came back to land into EIS," Edward Singh, whose Platinum Services company, will handle cleaning and ramp services for the AA flights, told The Daily News. "It was to give the pilot an idea of where the threshold was — an idea of the runway length because the BVI basically has a small runway." Singh said the pilots landing the plane "didn't use much runway which was great and it was a great landing." "The test operation was also to have the pilot be aware of the surrounding areas, the runway and where they're going to be parked on the first day of operations," he added. In what will be a historic first, American is poised to land two planes on June 1, directly from Miami. In years

past BVI visitors would land in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and take a taxi to a ferry that would take them to the British island. BVI Communications and Works Minister Kye Rymer said Thursday that the test flight was an "exciting moment for the territory on a whole." "I can't neglect all the efforts from past boards, past governments and past ministers," he said. "This has always been a topic where we want to get direct flights, so seeing this test flight happen today, it signifies that we are achieving what we set out to achieve and we're grateful to God first and foremost, for blessing us to be able to get to this point today. We're excited about next week when we'll see the first flight with passengers."

According to officials, Thursday's test flight was important for such things as lining up the mobile staircase that passengers will disembark from, doing training on the aircraft "and getting a basic idea of what's to be done on June 1 when they have two operations in one day." "Everything ran pretty smoothly, no hiccups or problems. The aircraft parked safely, the crew got off, met with key persons in the community and other organizations. Everything went pretty well," Singh said. In preparation for the inaugural flight, Singh said employees had been training for the last month. The test flight gave the trained clean and search team an idea of how quickly they could clean the aircraft, including every sin-

gle cabin and seat within a 15-minute timeframe. Ramp personnel were also being trained on lining up the staircase properly to ensure a safe operation, and transferring luggage. "It's a great initiative by American Airlines to do the test flight today, because it gives the agents who were being trained from scratch an idea of what to do from day No. 1," Singh said. Rymer was on the tarmac with other officials when the flight landed, and saw the fly-by where the pilots took measures — including videos of the runway — to understand airport infrastructure. The pilot used Runway 26, made an immediate left as a mountain is on the right, circled and returned for a safe landing.

## EPSTEIN

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tain student visas. "Ultimately UVI structured a bespoke class to enroll victims and provide cover for their presence in the territory—the same year Epstein donated \$20,000 to the university through one of his companies," Ellsworth wrote. But UVI representatives previously told The Daily News that the university only received a total of \$17,900 from Epstein and his companies over several years. The year that donation was made is not listed in Ellsworth's filing, which cites exhibits produced by the Epstein estate that are sealed from public view. In 2019, The Daily News requested information from UVI about any donations received from Epstein or any

of his charities and companies. UVI spokeswoman Tamika Thomas Williams provided a list of seven contributions accepted between 2003 and 2007 from "Enhanced Education, one of Mr. Epstein's organizations," totaling \$17,900, including \$5,000 in "annual giving," \$3,900 for the "Upward Bound Program" and \$9,000 to the annual Celebrity Golf Classic. "Mr. Epstein continued to show interest in supporting major initiatives subsequent to his 2008 conviction; however, the UVI Board of Trustees decided it was in the best interest of the University to decline future gifts," Williams wrote at the time. UVI President Hall provided a statement to The Daily News Thursday night, confirming that there is no evidence it received a \$20,000

check from Epstein. "From our preliminary review, having received the information in the JP Morgan court filing late this afternoon, the University of the Virgin Islands has searched its records for gifts from Mr. Epstein or in the name of his known companies in the amount of \$20,000 relating to the ESL Program and we could find no record that the University received such gifts," Hall noted in the statement. Hall said he also reviewed the statements about the "bespoke" class created for Epstein's victims, "and can state unequivocally that I was not aware of the activities described, and as President never approved or authorized a course being developed for individuals connected with Jeffrey Epstein." Hall added that, "The University

is engaged in the furtherance of our mission to advance the educational goals of our students and this institution clearly has never aided or supported the activities of Jeffrey Epstein." There are other inconsistencies in JPMorgan's latest filing. Ellsworth wrote that several Virgin Islands officials, including deJongh, former Gov. Kenneth Mapp, and Dawn Henry visited Epstein's islands "with regularity." Henry, former Commissioner for the V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources, told The Daily News in a February 2020 interview that she never personally set foot on either Little or Great St. James island, but DPNR officers did visit the islands to enforce zoning and environmental laws. When reached by phone Thurs-

day, Henry declined to comment, citing her upcoming deposition in the case. Thursday's filing by JPMorgan also includes a quote from Henry that was taken out of context from a Feb. 18, 2020, article in The Virgin Islands Daily News. The article, titled "Former DPNR Commissioner says territory must learn from Epstein's legacy," focused on an interview Henry gave about her personal dealings with Epstein. In that interview, Henry described how she and other officials struggled to cite Epstein for destructive illegal construction and environmental violations on his private islands, and his expectation that he would receive special treatment. Henry emphasized that DPNR was not responsible for enforcing the territory's sex offender laws, and noted that the V.I. Justice Department declined to investigate Epstein while he was alive, but did file a civil action against his

