

## Winair makes first flight to T&T

**PIARCO**

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NO-NONSENSE, stable and reliable.

That is how chief executive officer of the Windward Islands Airways International (Winair), Hans Van de Velde, describes the airline's services.

Winair made its maiden landing at Piarco International Airport yesterday, launching regular services on Sundays and Wednesdays.

As part of its services, direct, non-stop flights between St Maarten and Trinidad and Tobago are now available.

In attendance were Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation Eli Zakour, Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism Satyakama 'Kama' Maharaj, Winair CEO Hans Van de Velde, and Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago general manager Hayden Newton.

The first flight, carrying local ministers, delegates and passengers, was greeted with a cultural reception at Gate 5, featuring a steelpan performance, Shiv Shakti Dancers and a soca presentation. The aircraft arrived just after noon and received a water salute from the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service.

Describing Winair as the oldest airline in the region, with 65 years of operation, Van de Velde said the airline is performing well. 'We decided just two days ago to expand our fleet from nine to ten aircraft,' he said.

'We connect the world to the Caribbean and the Caribbean to the world, similar to your homebased carrier, Caribbean Airlines,' he added. He attributed this to their hub at St Maarten Airport, which he described as having the most connections in the region to the rest of the world.

Van de Velde stated that Winair maintains commercial relations with several international airlines. 'They like operating with us because we are no-nonsense, stable and reliable,' he said.

He stressed the airline's commitment to its mission: delivering on promises. 'We promise a flight at a certain time, and that's what we do. It is not always easy, and of course, there are sometimes delays, but unlike the common practice in the region, we do not cancel flights.'

The new connection brings St Maarten closer not only to Trinidad and Tobago but also to surrounding islands, he pointed out. He highlighted that, beyond tourism, there is significant business activity between the two countries. 'It also allows people from St Maarten to come to Trinidad and Tobago for business. We start with only two flights a week. Caribbean Airlines is a close partner and flies four times a week, so together, that is six times weekly.' Flight fares start at US\$165.

Van de Velde reiterated that Winair is a serious airline, committed for the long term, with plans to invest in the country and expand to other islands.

In his address, Zakour said finalising the agreement with Winair took several months. He emphasised that aviation depends on preparation, professionalism and responsibility.

'Every successful operation relies on sound judgment, trained personnel, and systems working together. Those same principles apply to how we approach air transport policy and regional connectivity,' he said.

Having travelled on the inaugural flight, the Minister said it allowed him to 'experience firsthand the significance of this new chapter in regional connectivity.'

He added that the introduction of Winair reflects 'a true understanding of the role aviation plays in Caribbean development. It improves access, supports trade and tourism, and expands travel options for our citizens.'

Zakour also highlighted the commercial benefits, noting that connectivity creates new opportunities for businesses, offers greater choice and convenience for travellers.

He acknowledged the contribution of two Trinidadian pilots who flew passengers on the inaugural flight.

The event marks the official commencement of direct service between Princess Juliana International Airport and Piarco International Airport, a milestone in strengthening connectivity and cultural exchange between the northern and southern Caribbean.



**WATER SALUTE:** A Fire Service tender gives a water salute to welcome Winair Airlines after it landed at Piarco International Airport yesterday to mark the start of its twice-weekly service between Trinidad and Tobago and the Princess Juliana Airport in St Maarten. -Photo: TT