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**St. Lucia: A Tale of Two Airports**

**By Joan Wingert**

Many travelers and even travel professionals are confused by the two airport system in St. Lucia.

Hewanorra International Airport (UVF)

Hewanorra (from the Amerindian word for "place of the iguana") is the international airport. Constructed in the late 1930's by the US military (the US Navy had signal corps personnel based in St. Lucia during WWII), it is located in the far southeastern corner of the island adjacent to the local town of Vieux Fort. This is the only area of this ruggedly mountainous island that has a large enough flat area to contain a long runway. Due to the prevailing easterly winds, the runway points to the east. Nearly all approaches to the runway are from the west over the sea. As the plane makes its final approach to landing, passengers on the left side of the aircraft are treated to spectacular views of the Pitons, and those on the right enjoy a hazy view of the mountains of St Vincent about 20 miles away.

This runway is long enough to accommodate the largest jets, so all international jet traffic must be routed into Hewanorra. If you are on an international flight from the UK or a North American gateway, this will be your destination airport. By Caribbean standards, this is a medium-sized airport. There are 8--10 duty-free shops and a couple of snack bars, plenty of available cabs, and tour operator and hotel reps to greet new arrivals.

Airport Transfers from Hewanorra--What to Expect

Since nearly all hotels and resorts on the island are located on the west side of the island (especially the northwest corner), all arrivals into Hewanorra face a lengthy cab ride to their hotel (Coconut Bay Resort is the one major hotel located near this airport, plus a few smaller hotels). Though the distance is only 20+ miles, the narrow, winding roads and traffic make it a slow commute. Travel to the Soufriere (Pitons) area will be around 45 minutes; travel to the many resorts north of Castries will be around 90 minutes. Still, this is an interesting journey--your first island tour! The route will take you along the Atlantic coast, up to Dennery, and across the interior where you will see your first excellent mountain vistas. Then you'll follow a valley heading toward the Caribbean coast, entering the very interesting Caribbean city and sea port of Castries, which is home to most of the local populace (banana boats may be loading and cruise ships may be docked here). Exiting the city, you will pass the other airport

## St. Lucia: A Tale of Two Airports

as you enter the main roadway to the north en route to the many hotels and resorts of this neighborhood.

### George F Charles Airport (SLU)

The second airport, the George F Charles Airport, is sometimes referred to as "Vigie" from the name of the locale. Named in honor of a prominent statesman of the 1950's, this is a smaller airport with a smaller runway, so commercial jets are not allowed. This regional airport is serviced primarily by the regional airlines Liat and Caribbean Star (featuring the Dash 8 airliner which seats around 30 passengers), and American Eagle flights from San Juan (some US travelers reach St. Lucia via this route). Connections go to Barbados, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, Trinidad, Martinique and Antigua. These are aboard a slightly larger turboprop aircraft seating around 60 passengers. Other international passengers may arrive here on a regional airline connecting to an international flight from

nearby Barbados.

Services here are limited to a small snack bar and one very small duty-free shop. There are car rental booths, an organized cab system, and many tour operators or hotel reps to greet new arrivals. Pictures on the walls depict the runway as it was in the 1950's—only a small shanty but no real terminal.

### Once You've Landed

Arrivals at either airport will be expected to complete an immigration form and to speak first to an immigration officer and then a customs officer once luggage is claimed. Upon departure from either airport, each passenger will be assessed a departure tax of approximately \$20 US.

In summary, the northern airport is much handier to most resorts and certainly much handier to the city of Castries. But, if arriving by jet from the UK or North America, this airport is simply not an option. American Airlines is the only carrier with scheduled flights to both airports. The airport of your arrival is not subject to your choice but is predetermined according to the airline you are flying.

### Hot Tips

Some additional tips for airport transfers and cabs in St. Lucia:

- Always check with your booking agency to find out if transfers are included in your package and if you will be greeted upon arrival.
- If you have not prepaid for transfers, the cab fare is set by law and not metered.
- It is always appropriate to ask the fare before departure to avoid subsequent misunderstandings.
- Tipping is appropriate.
- Cab fare will vary according to precise destination and number of passengers; in general, the cost of

a cab to a northern resort will run around \$75 US plus tip.

Joan Wingert is editor for Caribbean dot Travel (

<http://www.caribbean.travel>

), a recently–launched

website specializing in information for travelers to the Caribbean. Our site includes an interactive library (

<http://www.caribbean.travel/articles/index.php>

) which hosts articles on any and all things related to the

Caribbean as well as travel in and around the islands.

## **Virtual Airport**

### **By Hans Peter Oswald**

Aero Registrar Secura GmbH proposes to the IT departments of airports to sell aero–domains to companies at the airport. Airports can build a portal of the airport and forming by this a kind of virtual airport.

The advantages:

1. Search engines are today focusing link popularity. If airports would build a portal of the airport with interested companies and ask the companies at the airport as a condition for getting the aero–domain and the link to their websites that the companies link back to the airport's website, the airports will get many links back to their own website.

By this they increase the success of their website. Especially Google, the most important search engine of the world, is working with link popularity. If you assume, that the website is important for your marketing, you should try to improve your ranking at Google and other search engines.

2. ICANN accredited Registrar Secura will sell to airports the domains for other companies at reseller conditions. The IT departments can sell the domains at the price, which they think is fitting. The IT departments of airports will have an economic advantage at every sold aero–domain.

We also propose to airports they you should realize the shortcut initiative of SITA. One of many examples: If somebody is entering at the PDA parking.yourairport.aero, there are hints how to go and/or drive to the parking lot. Secura GmbH is also ready to make free subdomains in order to help to realize the shortcut initiative.

Hans–Peter Oswald

The author is the CEO of Aero Registrar Secura GmbH

Hans–Peter Oswald  
CEO  
ICANN accredited Registrar

<http://www.com-domain.com>

[secura@domainregistry.de](mailto:secura@domainregistry.de)

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