image makeover

Princess Juliana International on the Caribbean island of St Maarten has embarked on a comprehensive upgrade of its retail and F&B concessions.

During the early 2000s, Netherlands Airport Consultants (NACO) designed the spacious and efficient passenger terminal building using materials and finishes of a very high standard. After nearly 15 years of successful operation, the terminal now requires an upgrade to keep pace with the constantly changing requirements of the market and to ensure a maximised non-aviation income contribution.

The airport’s operating company PJIAE, together with InterVISTAS Consulting Group (a sister company of NACO), has developed an exciting concession plan to increase passenger satisfaction, concessionaire sales and airport income. The new concession plan is a significant overhaul of the existing programme and features a walkthrough duty-free store and a central food court. Princess Juliana currently has 22 retail and seven food and beverage concessions pre- and post-security.

Princess Juliana International hosted 1.7 million passengers in 2012 and is the second-largest hub airport in the Caribbean. Since 2005, PJIAE has operated a state-of-the-art terminal on the southern, Dutch-speaking part of the island.

The new concession programme is publicly tendered on a two-phase process. An Expression of Interest (EOI) phase and a Request for Proposal (RFP) phase with short-listed candidates ran from January to March 2013. Selected operators are currently finalising their construction plans. The opening of the new concession arena is scheduled for early 2014.

The concession programme is state-of-the-art and will expose 100% of the passenger flow to exciting retail and restaurant facilities. After passing through passport control and security, passengers will enter a 1,000m² walkthrough duty-free zone offering the latest brands in fragrances and cosmetics, spirits and wines, and chocolate and confectionery. Specialist retail stores surrounding the main store will focus on watches and jewellery, fashion and accessories, news and books, sunglasses, and St Maarten souvenirs including the island’s well-known local rums.

Passengers will enjoy the choice of seven different restaurants and bars including traditional French and local ‘Lolo’ Caribbean food, American hamburgers, Italian cuisine and a spectacular St Maarten Icon Bar displaying all the island’s best qualities of sun, sea and sand.

Johan Schölvinck leader of InterVISTAS’ airport commercial team was the author of an initial study at the airport outlining the opportunities of a radical redesign of the retail and F&B programme, as well as tendering out the new units. Schölvinck now works with Olaf van Tol, manager of airport commercial development at InterVISTAS, and the two, helped by the airport’s commercial team, have spent more than a year developing and managing the concession plan, the tender procedure and the current implementation of the programme.

Challenges along the road of this project were the turnaround of the concession management of the airport from a landlord-type to a risk-sharing business partnership, convincing the airport management of the necessity to open up to international retail operators and bringing down the number of small units with often competing product categories into a smaller number of larger concession units with clear and attractive assortments for passengers. This has all been achieved and the Princess Juliana International Airport management team is highly satisfied with the results so far, eagerly anticipating the opening of the new concession arena early in 2014.

The revenues from the new concession programme will substantially boost the income of Princess Juliana International Airport and turn it into a world-class and exciting Caribbean hub.

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