



## PRESS RELEASE

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# Port St. Maarten Homeporting gets Ready for Inaugural Flight of XL Airways on Sunday

**December 15, 2016 – PORT ST. MAARTEN – Preparations are well underway at Port St. Maarten Homeporting and in conjunction with other stakeholders, readies for the arrival of the inaugural flight of XL Airways on Sunday, December 18 at SXM Airport.**

Sint Maarten is well underway to cement itself as a homeport destination in the Northeastern Caribbean. It is testament to the appeal of cruising from Sint Maarten as cruises out of the destination offer the perfect way to experience the warm hospitality of the Region.

Emphasis is being placed on luxury cruise brands that translate into more spending power of passengers based on their higher disposable income levels. This also shifts the destination from quantity to quality cruise tourism therefore increasing the destination value due to attracting other high-end brand lines.

XL Airways, the aviation company that will be used to bring cruise passengers to the country who will then board the Pullmantur vessel Zenith for their Caribbean cruise.

XL Airways weekly flights from Paris, France commence on December 18 with an Airbus 330-200. Allocated on the weekly flight are 250 seats for homeporting from a Pullmantur cruise vessel Zenith. There will be some additional seats for regular passengers who would like to spend their vacation on the island.

XL Airways has close to 20-years' experience. It's a French airline specializing in long-haul flights, and annually flies over one million passengers to the Antilles, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, the United States and the Mediterranean Basin. With XL Airways connectivity throughout Europe, this allows for more travel options for passengers seeking a Caribbean cruise, as accessibility to the destination will be seamless because getting to the island will just be much easier.

The airline is based and operates out of Charles de Gaulle Airport. It also operates flights from Marseilles and four other French airports, Lyon, Bordeaux, Nantes and Toulouse. In addition to the aforementioned regular service flights, the airline also operates chartered flights all year round on behalf of main French and European tour operators.

Pullmantur Cruises is headquartered in Madrid, Spain. It began operations in 1990, and is the largest Spain-based cruise line. The company mainly markets to Spanish passengers, but cruises are also sold by travel operators outside Spain. This group focuses on cruise customers from Latin America and Europe. The vessels used carries approximately 1500 cruise passengers and 450-crew.

Pullmantur Cruises home port will mean a significant economic boost and spin off for the destination as it will bring in additional tourists and business for the tourism and hospitality sectors. It also serves part of the diversification of visitors to our island with respect to Latin American and European visitors. This can translate into new airlift opportunities for the destination as other cruise lines and airlines review the successes of homeporting out of Sint Maarten.

With SXM Airport working to bring United States Customs Pre-clearance to the destination, this will be a plus and would stimulate connectivity and attract new businesses as there would be a seamless travel-cruise experience to and from the destination for the traveler.

The guests have some time prior to boarding the homeported vessel and also upon their return from their cruise to enjoy the benefits of the destination. The financial economic gain will trickle down to the following areas: transportation services sector such as taxi's and car rentals, vessel provisioning from food and beverage wholesalers; passengers arriving and departing through SXM Airport fees and economic activity for businesses there; aircraft fees for SXM Airport; dockage and passenger fees for Port St. Maarten; fueling services; hotels and villa rentals; restaurants and entertainment; duty-free shopping retailers; cruise ship personnel shopping for goods and services while homeported; visiting attractions and amenities available and taking tours/excursions; advertising and marketing of the cruise destination; opportunity created for conversion from cruise passenger becoming a stay-over guest, and other businesses that provide ancillary services to the tourism sector.

Home porting is nothing new for the destination as the country has had the opportunity to handle smaller vessels of under 500 passengers.

Port St. Maarten's homeporting approach addresses some of the trends in cruise travel such as cruise lines introducing private islands into the cruise travel mix. The private island becomes part of the cruise lines itinerary and the revenues derived from these calls go directly to the cruise line. In order for Sint Maarten as a cruise destination to remain competitive, looking outside the box and being proactive has resulted in strategic investment decisions being made such as the construction of a homeporting terminal.

Being a home port of call, this opportunity increases brand marketing and creates a better diversification balance between stayover and cruise which is what all stakeholders should be working towards.



**PHOTO OUTLINE:** Homeport terminal rendering.

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