

AIR PARTNER ARRANGES FIRST EVER PASSENGER CHARTER FLIGHT TO ST HELENA

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Air Partner, the aviation services group, was recently appointed to charter a return flight from Cape Town to St Helena, after the cancellation of two RMS voyages left a number of passengers stranded. The ship that travels between Cape Town and the islands of St Helena and Ascension, the RMS St Helena, is currently out of action while repair work is carried out on her starboard propeller.

St Helena Airport is a notoriously difficult place to land aircraft, primarily due to wind shear issues and the length of runway available, which means that only certain types can fly there. A suitable aircraft was located in South Africa which met all the necessary requirements, and Air Partner's Commercial Jets team arranged for it to be positioned to Cape Town International Airport on Tuesday for an 8am take-off the following day.

Speed was of the utmost importance throughout this project, as there had been no travel options to St Helena and Ascension since March when the ship went into dry dock. Air Partner worked around the clock to get everything in order for the flight, including obtaining the correct permits, liaising with St Helena Airport to ensure the correct ground equipment was supplied, and making sure there was sufficient fuel available. No detail was overlooked, down to how much ice was needed for the passengers' drinks on the return sector.

There were 50 passengers on board each leg of the journey, with priority given to those travelling to St Helena for work purposes and medical referrals. The outbound flight flew via Namibe in Angola for re-fuelling, while the inbound travelled through Windhoek in Namibia. Despite the notoriously tricky weather around the South Atlantic island, both flights operated within schedule.

Clive Chalmers, Director – Commercial Jets UK at Air Partner, said: “Passengers have now been waiting weeks for a transport solution from Cape Town to St Helena and vice versa, and so speed was of the essence for this project. Our team worked tirelessly to get passengers where they needed to be, as quickly as possible. I am delighted that, after a lot of hard work, we can now add the St Helena Government to our long list of government clients.”

St Helena Councillor Derek Thomas commented: “What a great day for St Helena to receive our first flight of passengers, and a really good turnout from the people. Over the past year there have been many disappointments for air access but despite this our people have been patient while waiting for a successful outcome. The arrival of the aircraft today is one step nearer to commercial use of our Airport and has enabled those people who were delayed in Cape Town to return home safely.”

Gwyneth Howell, Accountable Manager & Head of Operations at St Helena Airport, added: “The team at St Helena Airport did exceptionally well today and we should be really proud of them, everything went as well as we had hoped. There will be lessons learnt and we will always strive to improve but to everyone, from St Helena Government to SA Airlink to Air Partner and the Airport team, I think we all did exceptionally well.”

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