

Sangster International Airport launches terminal expansion and celebrates Jamaican icon



A look at SIA's the newly expanded departure area

Sangster International Airport (SIA), operated by MBJ Airports Ltd (MBJ), launched its new terminal expansion "heralding a new era of passenger-centric experience," according to the team. The expansion marks a major step toward serving the 6.9M passengers expected to travel through the gateway in 2035, based on pre-COVID forecast levels.

Optimizing flow

MBJ's holistic focus reached across almost every aspect of the airport's operations, from retail design to environmental targets. Originally appointed in 2017 to support the airport's commercial planning strategy, The Design Solution's (TDS) role expanded to encompass four major design elements of the airport development: commercial spaces, operational areas, the new Dufry-operated walkthrough duty free store, and the design and branding of a new food & beverage (F&B) concept exclusive to Sangster International.

For TDS, the core commercial planning challenge was that passengers split north and south in the duty free shop, passing through two separate commercial zones on their way to the two departure piers. Analysis by Pragma Consulting, working with TDS on the initial planning, suggested that around 40-45% of footfall was being lost. The planning approach overcame the retail visibility barriers by expanding and reconfiguring the space (6,600 square meters), including resetting the guest path to

ensure 100% exposure to the commercial space on their journey to the gates.

With the optimised flow established, TDS then created a new design ethos and design guidelines for use across the whole commercial space to drive a cohesive passenger experience.

A cohesive airport experience & One Love Restaurant

The expanded retail and F&B experience is complemented by additional seating, improved natural lighting and a terminal-wide focus on giving travelers a genuine expression of Jamaica on their departure. Across the commercial space a unique local spirit is expressed through design, including a powerful emphasis of Jamaica's natural beauty, heritage, iconic local products (such as Blue Mountain coffee) and the airport's leading role as "the tourist gateway" to the island. The TDS team also integrated a number of these core design themes into the operational areas of the terminal.

At the start of the retail space is the terminal's new walkthrough duty free store, operated by Dufry. The airport's F&B offer has been transformed within an expanded zone overlooking the apron, including a strong focus on local brands. The F&B spaces also integrate a series of core design elements to link the holistic passenger experience across the retail, F&B and operational spaces. The initial design inspiration in this area was the shapes and form of palm tree thorns and trunks; however, as the design progressed, the dominant theme became the inspiration from a Jamaican icon, Bob Marley.

The centrepiece of the new F&B experience is the TDS-designed Bob Marley One Love Restaurant, exclusive to Sangster International and scheduled to open in February 2023. TDS provided design support to regional specialist F&B operator Margaritaville and the Marley Group family estate to help develop the world's first restaurant themed around the life and work of Jamaica's most revered musician and campaigner.

"Huge congratulations to Shane Munroe, CEO of MBJ Airports Limited, and his team for their incredible commitment to developing Sangster International, achieved in the face of the pressures inflicted by the global crisis. TDS has been proud to support their focus on improving the passenger experience while simultaneously driving optimal commercial performance.

"The depth of our working relationship with Sangster International in developing commercial planning and design across the whole airport has enabled our multi-disciplinary design team to develop an exceptional understanding of the airport, its needs, ambitions and personality and then embed those factors into our design work right across the airport space, from commercial planning to retail design.

"Such is our passion for this project that one of the key members of The Design Solution team, John Clarke, has been working from Jamaica for over a year. This local immersion and love for the island has been fundamental to creating an authentic and unique airport experience.

"Airports worldwide face increasing pressure to enhance the whole passenger experience but they need to achieve this while also driving operational and commercial performance; that is exactly the strategy adopted at Sangster International. A key aspect is that many airports operating with older terminals worldwide need to take new approaches to the traveller flow. Too often, airports focus predominantly on creating new retail and F&B experiences – but this must be supported by a planning strategy that optimises flow into the commercial spaces to make them fully effective.

"At Sangster International we have managed to create a startling increase in passenger exposure to the commercial offer ensuring that when they experience these exciting new spaces they are highly engaged and convinced to spend more," explains Robbie Gill, Managing Director, The Design Solution.

“The Design Solution has been a sustained and highly effective specialist design support to our long-term development strategy at Sangster International. They have shared our commitment to creating a unique and authentic expression of Jamaica for our passengers as part of a memorable airport experience, while ensuring that we optimise the revenue potential across our commercial spaces.

“We are delighted to officially launch these exciting new spaces and our new standard of passenger-experience, but the work continues as we have further plans to consolidate Sangster International’s position as the benchmark airport experience for the Caribbean,” says Shane Munroe, CEO, MJB Airports Limited.

MBJ’s broad development focus across the whole airport continues in 2023, with plans for the expansion of its Immigration Hall, outbound security area, check-in area and landside roads. By the end of 2022 traffic at Sangster International is forecast to achieve around 92% of 2019 levels, which was the busiest year in the airport’s history, and a number of new routes are being planned, including additional connections to the USA and Europe.