



Australian High Commissioner
Vanuatu

Welcome ceremony of the return of Virgin Australia

Friday 31 March 2023

- Gud afternoon lo yumi everiwan.
- Mi wantem tekem opotuniti ia blo aknolejmen ol Chiefs mo traditional owna blong land – mo air – we yumi mit today.
- Mi wantem aknolejem tu:
 - Minister blong Tourism, Commerce, Trade and Ni Vanuatu Business Honourable Matai Seremaiah
 - Minister blong Finance Honourable John Salong
 - CEO of Vanuatu Tourism Office, Adela Aru
 - CEO of Airports Vanuatu, Jason Rakau
 - Chief Corporate Affairs for Virgin Australia, Christian Bennett and colleagues
 - Mo ol invited gest
- Hemi wan plesa blong stap wetem yufala lo welkam bak *Virgin Australia* lo Vanuatu.
- Air connectivity is an economic multiplier. It enables a country's people to explore opportunities and grow their skills in the region and allows businesses to attract investment from the region. It is one of the keys to unlocking a country's economic growth. This is truest in our region, the Pacific, one that is characterised by vast oceans and remote islands.



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- In 2019, Vanuatu was experiencing its fastest ever growth in international arrivals and the citizens and businesses of Vanuatu were thriving. All sectors of the economy, in particular Vanuatu's vibrant tourism industry, were reaping the rewards of this free movement and connectivity.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of borders was a tremendous blow to every country's aviation sector, people and economy.
 - However, no region in the world was more affected than the Pacific. International arrivals to the Pacific fell by a staggering 95% in 2021 compared to pre-COVID levels.
- Vanuatu too.
 - Your tourism industry was forced to adapt, people-to-people links were halted and businesses suffered.
- But Vanuatu is resilient.
- Since Vanuatu's borders were reopened in mid-2022, we have seen a gradual resumption of connectivity. Business travellers and tourists are returning.
- *Virgin Australia's* arrival back into Vanuatu marks the next phase in this recovery.
 - Your return represents a significant boost to Vanuatu's connectivity and is a substantial increase in the number of people that are able to fly into Vanuatu for work, relaxation or ecotourism/adventure.



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- Vanuatu's many tourism operators, resorts and bungalows will be especially thankful at this news. We commend these operators and the fantastic work of the Vanuatu Tourism Office to market Vanuatu as a safe, beautiful and vibrant destination.
- Our geography makes us neighbours. And *Virgin*, your return will enable our already strong people-to-people links to grow even more.
 - People from Australia and across the world will be able to experience Vanuatu's unique and beautiful culture. Likewise, the citizens of Vanuatu now have even more opportunities to visit Australia's shores.
- I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the hard working team at AVL, VTS, CAAV. Your collaborative spirit has ensured *Virgin* has been able to make a safe and timely return to Vanuatu. Thankyou also to the Vanuatu Government and the Ministers in attendance for facilitating *Virgin's* re-entry.
- Tankyu tumas mo gudfala afternoon long yufala everiwan.