American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

A Sweet 16 to remember

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Ayonnah Tinsley, an aspiring aeronautical engineer and straight-A student, already had a great Sweet 16 celebration planned alongside her mother and her favorite Disney characters Mulan and Princess Tiana aboard a Disney Cruise setting sail from Orlando, Florida. Then the American Airlines staff at Reagan National Airport (DCA) jumped in to make it even better.

It all started when Ayonnah's mom, Tationna Tucker, wrote to some of the senior leadership at American, including Kerry Philipovitch, Senior Vice President of Customer Experience.

"My daughter and I will be traveling on American Airlines from Washington National to Orlando to celebrate her 16th birthday. We love flying on American Airlines, and my daughter Ayonnah wants to be an aeronautical engineer when she grows up," Tationna wrote. "She is very kind and hardworking, and I wanted to see if there is anything you or your staff could do to make sure her birthday trip is extra special?"

From there, airport leadership at DCA made plans for what was to be a grand arrival and experience for her July 15 flight.

"From the moment we received an email about Ayonnah's surprise and delight, I knew our team would make it special," said Radney Robertson, Managing Director of DCA for American. "Multiple workgroups were involved such as Customer Care, Premium Guest Services and our inflight crew departments. Our DCA team lives for moments like this."

The team made sure Ayonnah's trip would be special from the moment she arrived at DCA.

"As soon as we entered the ticket counter area at the airport, I noticed a sign that said, 'Happy Sweet 16, Ayonnah'

above the check-in position, and, from there, it was one surprise after another," Ayonnah said.

The birthday girl and her family visited the Admirals Club with a welcome fit for a queen — tiara included — for some relaxation and amenities before boarding. DCA Club Representatives put together a gift bag with all of Ayonnah's favorite snacks for her to enjoy later.

"Approaching the gate I heard music. I didn't think much of it, but then realized it was a party at our gate — and it was for me," Ayonnah said. Customer Service agents welcomed Ayonnah and her mom to the gate, surrounded with balloons, birthday signs, cupcakes and a cake.

As with anyone interested in aviation, getting to sit in the cockpit is a dream. For Ayonnah, it became reality.

After a quick photo op behind the controls, Ayonnah a flight filled with excitement and celebration from American crew members who got all customers involved. Team members put together another gift bag with gift cards and other items, and Flight Attendants Deborah Beavan, Deborah Baker, Willie Ranson and Tannah Miinch made Ayonnah feel welcomed once seated and even gave a birthday shout-out over the PA to everyone's delight.

But it didn't end there as the red carpet had been rolled out for arrival at Orlando International Airport (MCO).

"I know DCA did a great job sending her off (the flight attendants were raving about it!), and we did our part in welcoming her to MCO," said Bimal Vadhani, Station Director at MCO.

She also received a nice surprise from the Chief of Staff for NASA, Janet Karika, who happened to be on the same flight. Janet introduced herself and gave Ayonnah a business card and asked her to reach out for a possible future job opportunity.

"We have been planning and saving for this trip for a long time and were so appreciative of the efforts set forth by the American Airlines team — we will never forget it," said Tationna. "It's so hard to keep anything from my Ayonnah, but this is one secret I was glad I could keep."

Customer Service Manager Krystle Louis and special welcome message greeted Ayonnah at Reagan National Airport.

Ayonnah temporarily traded her birthday tiara for a captain's hat.