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"New dolphins here. Dolphin Discovery : Water is clean.

by James Osbourne

The dolphin swim programme at Prospect Reef Resort reopened Friday with the arrival of four new dolphins.

Atlas, Icaro, Poseidon and Calypso touched down at T B Lettsome Airport a little after midnight Thursday after an all-day flight from Cancun, Mexico. They were transported via truck to the resort where they were given medical evaluation. "They were all fine. We got them in the water around 3am and they were really excited to be in the new environment," said Renato(sic) Lenzi, vice president of animal management at Dolphin Discovery, who is in the BVI for two weeks setting up the programme.

Dolphin Discovery has being (sic) operating in Mexico since 1994 and has three facilities there. They came to the BVI after Florida-based company Dolphins Plus left in November, citing poor water quality as making their animals ill. One of the dolphins died shortly after arriving in the company's Dominica facility. But Dolphin Discovery has no concerns about the water quality.

According to Mr Lenzi, who holds a doctorate in biology, the water has been checked regularly and meets with the standards set by the US Dept of Agriculture.

"If you look in the water there's about 30 lobsters living in the lagoon – that's a good indicator" said Mr Lenze "Lobsters are very sensitive to their environments".

A new pumping system will be installed in two weeks, but according to Mr Lenzi that has more to do with spectators than the animals. "The pumps will provide extra visibility, so people can see the dolphins better," he said, specifying that dolphins will often hunt in murky rivers and deltas and use echo-location to hunt for fish rather than sight.

But the question remains whether the dolphin programme will prove profitable. Observers of Dolphin Plus' operation reported the company had trouble attracting customers, specifically the cruise ship tourists to whom the programme was primarily geared. Dolphin Discovery was confident their experience in Mexico will make their business here successful. "We have a lot of experience working with the cruise ship companies in Cozumel (Mexico). They will send their passengers if they believe the programme is safe and productive," said Mr Lenzi. " We're not going to be down at the dock with brochures".