

# AIRLINK

## CONTENTS - APRIL 2022

### Airport Talk

Airport MD Speaks	45
Malaysia Gears for its International Borders Reopening	46

### Aviation News

Malaysia Airports Poised for Recovery in 2022	48
VTL by Air Programme Implements New	

'Test and Release' Arrival Process	49
Malaysia Airlines and Qatar Airways Strengthens Collaboration	50
Scot Launches Inaugural Flight to Miri	51
Etihad Airways Records Strong Recovery for 2021	52
Kargo Xpress Expands to Hong Kong	53
China Airlines Awarded Silver Class	53

Bamboo Airways Launches Hanoi – Melbourne Route	54
American Airlines Creates Reimagined AAdvantage Loyalty Program	55

### Aviation Interview

Aviation Interview with Dato' Dr Mohmed Razip Hasan Director-General of Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC)	56
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## Airport MD Speaks

**Dato' Iskandar Mizal Mahmood returns to Malaysia Airports after almost 20 years with his wealth of experience gleaned from many multinationals and government-linked companies to elevate and transform Malaysia Airports in the fast-changing aviation landscape with new travel norms and innovative technological advances.**

**This month, he welcomes Malaysia's reopening of its international borders and how the recent commencement of the Singapore-Penang air vaccinated travel lane (VTL) has served as a stepping stone in revitalising the tourism sector by generating more flights and frequencies. Malaysia Airports' recent participation in the government-linked companies (GLC) Open Day 2022 has also created greater awareness of how the airport operator has not only remained a strategic provider of airport services to airlines and other stakeholders despite the Covid-19 pandemic but has also strived to continuously improve our services in order to remain competitive in the fast-changing global landscape.**

**Dato' Iskandar Mizal Mahmood**  
Managing Director  
Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad

**D**espite the reopening of our international borders on April 1, air VTL arrangements will remain beneficial for travel between Malaysia and countries that have not fully opened their borders. There is no denying their significance in stimulating international travel and generating economic activities which have greatly assisted in the recovery of both our tourism and aviation sectors.

The recent Singapore-Penang VTL saw Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia, Singapore Airlines and Scoot serving our northern hub, Penang International Airport (PIA), which has always been the second busiest airport after our flagship KL International Airport (KLIA) in terms of international passenger traffic. Similar to KLIA, PIA has a private health screening service operator at the airport to provide Covid-19 screening tests for the arriving passengers.

There are 10 screening test booths and a full-fledged lab to produce the results

quickly for the passengers, who have been advised to pre-book their screening test. We also had approval from the relevant authorities to implement a Test and Release arrival process, which allowed passengers to immediately leave the airport to their declared accommodation upon clearing immigration without having to wait for their Covid-19 RT-PCR screening test results at the airport.

As the country transitions to the endemic phase, Malaysia Airports will continue to work closely with the authorities to facilitate a safe and seamless airport experience for all passengers while ensuring the required safety protocols and health processes are implemented accordingly. As a responsible GLC, which represents an important component to Malaysia's economic structure, we work with the government to help the 'Keluarga Malaysia' recover in terms of their income and jobs, among other things, in order to deliver optimum impact to our country's socio-economic growth.

We also welcome the resumption of Firefly jet services on April 11 from its Penang hub to Johor Bahru, Kuching and Kota Kinabalu as this will not only boost domestic tourism but also facilitate more international traffic within Malaysia with the reopening of our borders. The return of air travel soon to its normalcy gives much optimism not only to us but also our airport retail partners, who can expect to see more sales being generated.

Apart from our travel retail ecommerce platform, shopMYairports to enable the public to purchase travel exclusive and duty absorbed products and have them delivered directly to their doorstep, we will be introducing soon on-ground services such as Click and Collect to enable travellers to shop prior to their trip and collect their purchase at designated counters in the respective airports upon their departure or arrival. All these initiatives are part of our on-going efforts to make our airports a premier lifestyle and shopping destination. Here's to safe and seamless, happy travels and shopping!





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## Malaysia Gears for its International Borders Reopening



The recent announcement on Malaysia's reopening of its international borders on April 1 after a two-year hiatus by Prime Minister Ismail Sabri as the country transitions from pandemic to endemic where Covid-19 is concerned has been welcomed by many industry players.

Taking advantage of the less stringent health requirements for foreigners to enter Malaysia, event organisers such as Perak Tourism Association (PTA) decided to reschedule its Pangkor International Marine Tourism Conference 2022 (PIMTC) from March 26-29 to May 9-12 at Marina Island.

This will also probably allow PTA more time to get its targeted 200 participants for PIMTC, of which half of them are expected to be foreigners from Australia, Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Perak committee chairman for housing, local government and tourism Dato' Nolee Ashilin Dato' Mohammed Radzi says PIMTC will be the silver state's first international event for 2022 besides promoting Pangkor's nautical tourism assets through a boat rally, Sail Malaysia.

To help reset and revitalise the local tourism industry and the economic activities in the state, she stresses that Perak relies on the

supporting industries. For instance, Pantai Hospital Ipoh will be sponsoring 250 Covid self-test kits for the PIMTC.

SKS Airways, which recently commenced direct flights from Subang Airport to Pangkor, is also currently having an all-in one-way fare, inclusive of taxes, from RM99 until April. When this new airline first started its flights to the island, the fare was from RM160.

With the daily cases from the Omicron variant remaining high, Penang state executive councillor for tourism and creative economy Yeoh Soon Hin cautions that the reopening of our borders might not observe an instant V-curve recovery for tourism.

He reminds that promoting "responsible tourism", enhancing personal health and safety measures and scoring the faith of tourists to visit Malaysia are the fundamental pillars and top priorities we should consider in strengthening our tourism market in the long run.

To prepare for the opening of our borders to international tourists, both the health and transport ministries visited KL International Airport (KLIA) on March 19 to ensure that the country's flagship airport is prepared to receive the influx of fully vaccinated tourist arrivals without quarantine.

### New requirements for reopening

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong says working through the Civil Aviation Authority, the airlines have been informed of the new protocols, which include requiring passengers to download the MySejahtera app before arriving in Malaysia.

Under the pre-departure conditions, passengers must download MySejahtera, upload their RT-PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test results taken two days before and fill in a form. A traveller's card will then be issued via the app.

Passengers will be checked at the counter whether they have MySejahtera before they are allowed to board the plane at their port of origin. Wee believes the new protocols will help reduce the time spent in the airport upon their arrival besides minimising congestion in the airport.

Working closely with the transport ministry to ensure a safe and seamless travel once the country reopens, Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin says his ministry will be closing the RT-PCR test counter and will no longer provide these free tests for Malaysians returning to the country as what has been done over the past two years.

For travellers opting for the trial Covid-19 breathalyser test instead of taking the professionally-administered antigen rapid test (ART) upon their arrival, Khairy says the former can only be administered at KLIA while the ART can be done immediately at the airport or within 24-hours, with the results uploaded on MySejahtera.

"We have tested the accuracy of the breathalysers and are satisfied with its accuracy," reminding that the cost for such tests will be borne by the travellers.



### Should Malaysia follow Cambodia and Thailand's footsteps

While Malaysia is implementing pre-travel and on-arrival testings as it reopens its international borders, Cambodia and Thailand which has air vaccinated travel lane (VTL) arrangements for fully vaccinated travellers on designated routes without having to quarantine upon arrival effective March 15, have lately announced their decision to do away with such tests.

Cambodia is the first country in the region to remove pre-travel PCR test and on-arrival ART results for its fully vaccinated tourists from all countries in a bid to boost its tourism and economic recovery. Announcing this on 17 March, its health ministry reinstated the visa on arrival scheme for all travellers entering Cambodia by land, water and air.

However, the travellers have been advised to do a rapid test on their own before entering Cambodia while those who have not been fully vaccinated will be quarantined for 14 days in the centres designated by the government.

Thailand's Centre for Covid-19 Situation Administration has approved the lifting of the pre-departure RT-PCR requirement for international arrivals effective April 1 as the country prepares a four-phase plan to downgrade the pandemic to an endemic disease.

But, travellers entering under its Test & Go and Sandbox are still required to take the RT-PCR test upon day one and an antigen self-test on day 5. This has led to some sectors feeling that the newly announced measures are not strong enough to woo tourists as other destinations have opened with fewer restrictions.

In Malaysia, they have also been called by some circles for the removal of the pre-travel and on-arrival tests. That decision will have to come from the health ministry after considering all factors and with various parties concerned.

Meanwhile, Malaysia's reopening of its borders has spurred the airlines to mount new routes and increase their frequencies. Among them is AirAsia, which has announced that it will be adding more international flights between Malaysia and Thailand with three new routes, starting with Penang-Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur-Hat Yai from April 13 and Johor Bahru-Bangkok from 3 May. The airline is also increasing its flight frequencies to Bangkok from April 13 on top of its existing KL-Bangkok and KL-Phuket flights.

With the VTL arrangements bringing more visitors into Malaysia since it was implemented, the reopening of its international borders is expected to bring in more arrivals into the country and spur economic activities.





## Malaysia Airports Poised for Recovery in 2022

Malaysia Airports Group has reported EBITDA of RM220.3 million for its financial year ended 31 December 2021 (FY21), a significant improvement compared to the negative RM1.2 million recorded over the same period last year (FY20). The significant improvement in Group EBITDA was largely due to financial discipline with core operating costs reducing by a further 11.2% or RM172.3 million in FY21 on top of the 26% or RM575.5 million reduction achieved in FY20.

Commendable air traffic recovery at its Turkish asset, Istanbul Sabiha Gokcen International Airport (ISG) in Turkey contributed towards reducing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Group's earnings. EBITDA for the Turkey operations reported an increase of 110.3% to RM662.9 million, while the Malaysia and Qatar operations recorded an EBITDA of negative RM450.6 million and positive RM8.0 million, respectively. The Group also reported an operating cash flow surplus of RM262.9 million compared to a deficit of RM67.2 million in FY20.

The Group's network of airports including Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen International Airport in Turkey recorded 36.1 million passengers in FY21. Although a contraction of 16.0% over the prior year, the Group is optimistic on seeing significantly improved air traffic performance in 2022. ISG's traffic performance last year was already at 71.5% of its pre-Covid-19 level in FY19. The airport was also ranked as the sixth busiest in Europe last year for passenger movements by Airports Council Europe.

More substantially, the Group's passenger traffic movements of 14.2 million for the final quarter of 2021 grew by 43.4% over the immediate preceding quarter including for its Malaysia operations where passenger traffic movements at its network of local airports grew 5.8 times in the same period. This recovery was the result of further relaxation in travel restrictions in both Malaysia and Turkey in tandem with the countries' high vaccination rates among their population.

Specifically for Malaysia, demand arising from the Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL) programme with Singapore, and Umrah travel is expected to result in an increase in international passenger movements. The Group also views the impending re-opening of Malaysia's borders and those of its key air travel markets within the region as a positive development. The ongoing commercial reset initiative at various airports in Malaysia will provide a fresh retail experience as well as new offerings for passengers and is expected to improve rental yields for the Group moving forward. Similarly, the Group expects to see additional revenue from new land developments at KLIA Aeropolis and Subang Airport which will complement the recovery of aeronautical revenue and sustainability of the cost containment initiatives.

## VTL by Air Programme Implements New 'Test and Release' Arrival Process

As part of efforts to standardise the health and safety protocols for passengers travelling under the Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL) By Air with other participating countries such as Singapore, Cambodia and Thailand, Malaysia Airports together with Ministry of Transport have obtained the approval and support from Ministry of Health to implement the 'Test and Release' arrival process starting from March 16, 2022.

“This enhanced process will mean that travellers no longer have to wait for their Covid-19 RT-PCR screening test results at the airport. Instead, they can immediately take private transportation, taxi or private hire car from the airport to their declared accommodation in their MySejahtera Home Surveillance Order (HSO) upon clearing immigration.

“This will provide greater flexibility and comfort to VTL travellers while they wait for their test results which will be provided within 24 hours. Once the test result is confirmed to be negative, their HSO status in MySejahtera will be lifted by the authorities and the traveller can proceed with their activities freely in Malaysia.

**DATO' ISKANDAR MIZAL MAHMOOD**  
Managing Director of Malaysia Airports

He added that Malaysia Airports is working closely with the authorities to improve services and facilities at the airport in order to deliver the best customer experience. Apart from enabling passengers to clear airport processes faster, this latest enhancement will also minimise congestion at the airport in view of the multiple VTL by Air programme that are being implemented. VTL by Air for Cambodia and Thailand has commenced from March 15, while VTL by Air with Singapore is expanded to include a new Malaysian destination i.e Penang starting from March 16, 2022.

With the upcoming border reopening on April 1, 2022, the airport operator has ramped up efforts even further. Most recently, two of its international airports, KL and Langkawi were named among the world's best airports within their respective categories in the global Airport Service Quality survey by Airports Council International (ACI).





## Malaysia Airlines and Qatar Airways Strengthens Collaboration

Malaysia Airlines Berhad and Qatar Airways announced on February 23, 2022, a new chapter in their long-standing relationship by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). With the enhanced partnership, both airlines will leverage each other's network strengths and provide more access for passengers to travel to new destinations beyond their individual networks while offering new and exclusive products to their customers soon.

Malaysia Airlines' passengers will enjoy seamless connectivity to popular destinations in Europe, Africa, Middle East and the Americas with Qatar Airways' extensive network via Doha, while Qatar Airways' passengers will gain better access to the wider domestic Malaysia market and key destinations in Asia such as Penang, Langkawi, Medan (Indonesia) operated by Malaysia Airlines via its hub, KL International Airport.

“We are delighted to have taken the next important step with our close oneworld partner. This partnership will provide better efficiencies and a more comprehensive network for our passengers whilst we further boost the growth of traffic flow via KLIA, which will serve as a primary gateway to Malaysia domestic and selected Southeast Asian region destinations.

This MoU for strategic partnerships between Malaysia Airlines and Qatar Airways is an important part of our long-term business plan, as we explore more strategic opportunities and establish deeper partnerships. At the same time, it underscores the commitment of both airlines to provide passengers with safer, and increased choice of flights, wider destinations and greater flexibility on top of the excellent service hospitality throughout their travels with us.

We believe the strategic partnership will put both full-service carriers on a stronger footing to compete in the highly competitive market as we continue to navigate recovery of the pandemic with the reopening of international borders and an increase in the demand for air travel.

**CAPTAIN IZHAM ISMAIL**  
Group Chief Executive Officer of  
Malaysia Airlines Berhad

“This is a significant moment for us as we have just celebrated 20 years of serving Malaysia, and this new strategic cooperation with our oneworld partner, Malaysia Airlines, further cements our commitment to the country. This partnership will serve to link both our networks and allow us to work together across different aspects of the business therefore creating exciting opportunities for our joint passengers, as well as for our airlines.

As we move forward in a post-pandemic world, successful business is driven by strong partnerships, and this close cooperation with Malaysia Airlines is a firm example of how symbiotic international partnerships can pave the way to industry recovery. Providing customers access to the most extensive route network with unrivalled service and seamless connections.

**AKBAR AL BAKER**  
Group Chief Executive Officer of  
Qatar Airways



## Scoot Launches Inaugural Flight to Miri

Scoot, the low-cost subsidiary of Singapore Airlines (SIA), launched its maiden passenger service between Miri and Singapore on February 23, 2022, making it the airline's second flight service to Sarawak, on top of its existing flight service to Kuching.

The inaugural flight, TR400, departed from Singapore and was welcomed with a commemorative water cannon salute as the A320 aircraft taxied down the runway at Miri International Airport (MYY) upon arrival. Onboard, passengers were treated to signature Scootitude inflight activities such as trivia games about Miri, led by Scoot's cabin crew, who are affectionately known as Scootees. Upon arrival, passengers were also greeted with special performances by Sarawak cultural troupes, which provided them with a glimpse of Miri's rich cultural diversity and heritage.

Sarawak Minister for Transport Dato Sri Lee Kim Shin said this inaugural flight by Scoot marked a good beginning of direct international flights into Miri City, a renowned destination for nature and adventure-based tourism products and for its oil and gas industry. “Scoot is the first airline from Singapore that lands at Miri Airport today. I wish to express my thanks to Scoot's top management for its decision and support to fly the Singapore-Miri route. This inaugural flight marks the beginning of a foreign airline that flies direct to Miri City from Singapore. It will be a boost to Miri's tourism industry and business travels. Miri has a lot to offer in terms of tourism and business activities, especially oil and gas.

“Scoot is delighted to launch this new route to Miri, the northern gateway to the state of Sarawak. The launch of the twice-weekly flights to Miri is testament to Scoot's continued commitment to serving the varied travel needs between Singapore and Malaysia, and providing connectivity via Singapore to and from our wider network of 71 destinations worldwide, at great value fares.

**CALVIN CHAN**  
Chief Commercial Officer of Scoot

Puan Sharzede Datu Haji Salleh Askor, Chief Executive Officer of Sarawak Tourism Board said, “We are heartened to welcome passengers from Singapore to Miri, Sarawak on this momentous inaugural flight. A unique plethora of culture, adventure, nature, food, and festivals, we are certain travellers from Singapore will enjoy the many offerings of Sarawak. With the addition of this new direct route to Miri, we look forward to welcoming more visitors from Singapore during the upcoming holiday season.”

According to Dato' Iskandar Mizal Mahmood, Managing Director of Malaysia Airports, “We are delighted that more foreign airlines are starting to add new routes and destinations once again as this is a sign of growth and positive outlook for the aviation industry in this region. Scoot's operation at Miri further enhances Miri Airport's connectivity with a total of 4 airlines operating 17 routes.”

Home to a wide range of picturesque flora and fauna, travellers can enjoy numerous wildlife attractions and pristine national parks, such as the Gunung Mulu National Park, that Miri has to offer. They can also look forward to swimming alongside the thriving marine life or exploring a sunken World War II Japanese ship.

For more information, please visit [www.flyscoot.com](http://www.flyscoot.com)





## Etihad Airways Records Strong Recovery for 2021

Etihad Airways announced on March 1, 2022 its business results for 2021, recording a strong recovery in passenger operations along with a significant improvement in financial performance, posting a much-reduced loss of USD476 million for 2021 (2020: USD1.70 billion). The airline carried 3.5 million passengers in 2021, with an average seat load factor of 39.6%. Passenger loads doubled in the second half of the year, reaching 70.1% in December as travel demand peaked during the winter holiday period. The airline recorded a particularly strong surge in passenger volumes in Q4 following the September relaxation of mandatory quarantine periods in Abu Dhabi.

Network capacity came in at 37.21 billion available seat per kilometers (ASKs) for the year, with the airline connecting Abu Dhabi to 71 passenger and cargo destinations across 47 countries. The airline launched or restarted operations to 13 destinations in 2021, most notably introducing scheduled services to Tel Aviv following the normalisation of relations between the UAE and Israel.

Etihad Airways posted passenger revenues of USD1.07 billion in 2021, down by 14% year-on-year. While ongoing travel restrictions and new variants of the virus dampened demand, the airline saw passenger revenues bounce back in the last quarter of the year, recovering to 50% of 2019 levels in December.

Cargo operations meanwhile continued to outperform expectations, with a 27% year-on-year increase in freight carried in 2021 (729,200 tonnes) coupled with a rise in cargo revenues of 49% to USD1.73 billion, the highest figure in the history of the airline.



“

In another year of global uncertainty, Etihad Airways has continued to move forward, strengthen its business, and build on its world-class travel proposition. As always, this has been thanks to our remarkable people who have gone above and beyond to make the most of every opportunity. Despite the slowdown caused by Omicron, we are confident that the spring and summer season will continue to see a resurgence in travel as more people return to the skies.

”

**TONY DOUGLAS**  
Group Chief Executive Officer of  
Etihad Airways

Adam Boukadida, Chief Financial Officer of Etihad Airways, said “Despite Covid-19 suppressing global travel demand for a second year running, we have continued to transform Etihad Airways into a more efficient business, delivering additional line-by-line savings and further optimising our cost base. Our record cargo operations have provided much-needed uplift, helping to more than double monthly operating revenue between January and December.

“Pushing the frontiers of sustainable financing, we issued the first-ever sustainability-linked Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) loan in aviation, while at the same time reducing our outstanding debt by more than 20%. All these factors combined resulted in a strong year-end liquidity position, aligned to our pre-pandemic levels, and in a steadfast ‘A with a stable outlook’ credit rating reaffirmed by Fitch.”

For more information, please visit [www.etihad.com](http://www.etihad.com) or call 03 – 2687 2222

## Kargo Xpress Expands to Hong Kong

Kargo Xpress celebrate as it expanded its network and commenced flight operations between Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong on February 21, 2022.

Operating a Boeing 737-800BCF freighter with cargo capacity of 20,000kg, the inaugural flight WW888 departed at 9:00pm from KL International Airport (KUL) for Hong Kong International Airport (HKG). The return flight WW889 from HKG arrived at KUL at 6:30am, 22 February 2022. This marked a new milestone in Kargo Xpress’ network.

With the inaugural flight, Kargo Xpress will be operating daily flights from KUL to HKG. Kargo Xpress also plans to add a second daily flight from KUL to HKG via Kota Kinabalu International Airport (BKI).

In addition to HKG, KCH and BKI, Kargo Xpress operates 9 flights weekly to Macau International Airport (MFM). Furthermore, the cargo airline commenced daily scheduled flights to Kuching International Airport (KCH) and BKI starting from February 15, 2022 from KUL.



Currently, Kargo Xpress has a fleet of 3 full freighter aircraft consisting of a Boeing 737-400F and 2 B737-800BCFs. All aircraft operate from its hub in KL International Airport. The Boeing 737-400F has 10 standard pallet positions whilst the B737-800BCF has 12 pallet positions on its main cargo deck.

For more information, please visit [www.kargoxpress.com](http://www.kargoxpress.com)

## China Airlines Awarded Silver Class



S&P Global, the international sustainability ratings agency, announced on February 15, 2022, the results of the Sustainability Yearbook 2022 which awarded China Airlines the “Silver Class” rating in the airline industry.

This marks the second year that China Airlines has received this rating, making it Taiwan’s top transport operator in terms of its total Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) score. China Airlines also announced that it has joined the “TALENT in Taiwan” alliance and is committed to boosting the competitiveness of Taiwanese talent through the joint promotion of sustainable talent development and cultivation.



The 2022 Sustainability Yearbook, compiled from the results of the 2021 Dow Jones Sustainability Indices (DJSI), assessed the sustainability performance of more than 7,500 large enterprises in 61 industries across the world. Only the top 15% of enterprises in each industry are eligible to receive the award with the final score based on strict criteria.

China Airlines had previously been awarded the “Bronze Class” in the airline industry on three occasions beginning in 2016 and improved its performance to “Silver Class” last year. This year, China Airlines emerged from a group of 51 airlines, taking second place for the second consecutive year.

For more information, please visit [www.china-airlines.com](http://www.china-airlines.com)





## Bamboo Airways Launches Hanoi – Melbourne Route

**B**amboo Airways has announced non-stop Hanoi – Melbourne flights scheduled to begin on April 27, using modern wide-body Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner. The service marks the first-ever direct connection between Melbourne and Hanoi in Vietnam’s aviation history.

The airline intends to initially operate one return flight per week between Melbourne and the Vietnamese capital, with an increased frequency depending on market demands. Flights depart from Hanoi at 6:30pm (local time) on Wednesdays and arrive in Melbourne at 10:00am (local time) on Thursdays. The nonstop route will help shorten travel time between two cities to only over 9 hours, less than 21 hours compared to current transit flights.

The announcement follows the launch of the airline’s service between Melbourne and Ho Chi Minh (HCM) City, which took flights in February this year after Australia lifted their international restrictions. Bamboo Airways chose Melbourne as its Australian headquarters and became the first new foreign carrier to serve Victoria since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Truong Phuong Thanh, Deputy General Director of Bamboo Airways, said: “The regular non-stop Hanoi-Melbourne route is a testament to Bamboo Airways’ resilience and strategic vision in connecting Vietnam and the world despite the unexpected pandemic.”

“With the expansive network of Melbourne Airport and precious support from authorities of two countries, we believe our new non-stop service will create favourable conditions for the travelers of both countries, thus contributing to fruitful ties between Vietnam and Australia in various aspects such as trade, commerce, investment, culture, and tourism.”

“Bamboo Airways was the first new international airline we welcomed to Melbourne since the start of the pandemic, so to be expanding into an additional service so quickly after the initial announcement is great news for Melbourne Airport. It’s also exciting to have the first-ever direct service between Melbourne and Hanoi.

“It’s also great news for Australians, who we know love visiting Vietnam. Importantly, this service will also help connect the Vietnamese community in Australia to friends and family back home, as well as enable us to welcome Vietnamese visitors and international students to Melbourne.

**LORIE ARGUS**  
Chief of Aviation of Melbourne Airport

For more information, please visit [www.bambooway.com](http://www.bambooway.com)

## American Airlines Creates Reimagined AAdvantage Loyalty Program



**A**merican Airlines leads the way in customer loyalty with the official launch of the reimagined AAdvantage® program, designed to reward members with enhanced benefits, more ways to earn status and the easiest way to unlock a world-class customer experience..

At the center of this innovative approach is Loyalty Points, the only metric that, starting March 1, AAdvantage members need to track to earn status. This single-point system, in which one qualifying AAdvantage mile earned equals one Loyalty Point, positions the AAdvantage program as the largest airline loyalty program that will not require members to track miles, dollars and/or flight segments to earn status.

“The past few years have taught us that loyalty is not one-size-fits all — it comes in different forms,” said Alison Taylor, American’s Chief Customer Officer. “We recognise the path to earning status is different for each individual, which is why we’re giving members more ways to earn Loyalty Points — whether by flying, shopping or using an AAdvantage credit card. We want to make it easier for our customers to achieve status wherever they may be in their travel journey.”

In March, AAdvantage members will have access to an updated online AAdvantage Status Estimator to help project their status qualification

from flying and shopping. Also in March, members will see their progress toward status with Loyalty Points within their AAdvantage account on [aa.com](http://aa.com) and the American Airlines app.

Once a member achieves a status level, their enhanced travel experience and status will be valid through March 31 of the following year.

To elevate the travel experience for all status members, American is expanding complimentary upgrade access for AAdvantage Gold and AAdvantage Platinum members to include all flights on American within North America regardless of the flight distance. For travel starting March 2, an upgrade will automatically be requested if everyone in the reservation is eligible for a complimentary upgrade. Members will only need to use 500-mile upgrades if they want to upgrade travel companions who do not hold AAdvantage status.

Later this year, American will extend complimentary upgrades to one companion traveling on the same flight as the status member. At that time, all existing 500-mile upgrades in members’ accounts will each convert to 250 Loyalty Points toward the 2022 status qualification period.

For more information, please visit [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com)



## “ Aviation Interview with Dato’ Dr Mohmed Razip Hasan Director-General of Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC)

Dato’ Dr Mohmed Razip Hasan, 61, took up his current post in February 2020 at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia. Viewing it both as a challenge and opportunity to serve the country’s tourism industry from the Islamic tourism and hospitality perspectives, he believes in providing a different and influential leadership that is agile and decisive to ensure ITC’s sustainability. The former Tourism Malaysia deputy DG (Promotion) also subscribes to developing new talents, new skills and competencies, especially among the next generation of leaders in ITC and the industry.

### What is your definition of Islamic tourism?

Its definition is rather broad yet focused. To simplify it, Islamic tourism is when you or a group engage in travel and hospitality activities to explore, learn and appreciate a destination’s Islamic history, arts, culture, civilisation, heritage, architecture, economy, education, business as well as its health and wellness. You get inspired by the signs of the Almighty’s creations and experience the Islamic way of life in conformity with the Islamic faith. It shows you Islamic tourism’s diversity and magnitude.

### How has the disruptive and unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic impacted it?

The global border closures during the pandemic prevented people from travelling freely. We naturally saw fewer tourists visiting Malaysia the past two years with Muslim tourist arrivals down from 5.3 million in 2019 to 882,631 in 2020 as airlines globally became grounded and airport operations almost came to a halt. However, ITC saw this period as an opportunity to reflect, review and redesign its programmes to suit the complexities of the time.

### How significant is Islamic tourism’s contribution to Malaysia’s tourism industry, which is now on the path of recovery?

Before the pandemic, Muslim tourist arrivals and their expenditures contributed 20%

respectively to Malaysia’s total arrivals and receipts. The source markets came from the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) region, West Asia, South Asia and long-haul markets with huge presence of Muslim communities.

We expect Malaysia’s tourism recovery taking place in phases since not all countries have relaxed their travel restrictions. Looking at the latest developments in Europe, we anticipate travel patterns and behaviours to change in tandem with the increase in travel cost due to the recent hike in oil prices.

Nevertheless, ITC is optimistic of a steady recovery of Muslim tourist arrivals from the regional and medium-haul markets. Both the destination management organisations (DMOs) at federal and state levels must work together with industry players to facilitate global travel as Islamic tourism is an important component of this industry. Malaysia must maintain and improve its leading position in this growing potential sector or we will simply lose out to our competitors.

### Under your leadership, what are some efforts made by ITC to strengthen Islamic tourism further?

Among my first moves was the rebranding of ITC as a global player. We strengthened our relationship with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and its organ, the Statistical, Economic and Social Research

and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC); OIC’s Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC), and the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC). It was an honour when ITC was nominated by the Department of Standards Malaysia and accepted by SMIIC as the lead coordinator representing our country to develop standards on the halal spa services at the OIC level.

The invitation from the Dubai Chamber of Commerce & Industry in 2021 for us to speak on Islamic tourism and the Muslim consumer at the Global Business Forum held in conjunction with Expo 2020 Dubai served as a good platform to reach out to a wide corporate audience. It also validated the importance of Islamic tourism for investment and business.

Working with the ASEAN, Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, we leaned towards collaborations and online activities to make the most of our limited resources to help solidify the Islamic tourism ecosystem besides ensuring resilience and sustainability.

We also expanded the Muslim-friendly tourism (MFT) concept to include hospitality. The Muslim-friendly tourism and hospitality (MFTH) term was coined and became aligned with our agenda for inclusivity and

sustainability. This was further strengthened with the development of MFT Products, Hospitality and Packages (MFT ProHPack) recognition with plans to expand them overseas. This covers medical facilities and airports as well.

### Please elaborate on ITC’s new business philosophy, “New thinking, New actions, New results” for 2021-25.

In order to chart our way amid the pandemic, we established a Strategic Development Plan 2021-2025 detailing our expanded roles as the way forward for Malaysia to remain competitive, inclusive, and sustainable within the Islamic tourism space. Key to that growth strategy was our new business philosophy where we challenged ourselves to look at new ways of doing things, focusing on cooperation with stakeholders, strengthening ties with the industry and fortifying the ITC branding both at home and abroad. It is not business as usual as the pandemic had changed the business landscape.

### What are some of the achievements of the new business philosophy thus far?

It has led us to create strong linkages with government agencies, tourism industry players, academic and training institutions, tourism consultants, destination marketing organisations (DMOs) and foreign embassies in Malaysia to organise unique and beneficial programmes for different target audience. They include the youth, tour guides and foreign government officials through various events such as the World Islamic Tourism Conference (WITC) and Islamic Tourism Entrepreneurship and Leadership Seminar (ITELS).

We also put our new business philosophy into practice when we organised the ITC Corporate Forum: Women In Islamic Tourism Economy on July 8, 2021. It opened our eyes to the potential of women travellers as strong drivers of Islamic tourism growth. The same philosophy also allowed us to uncover how Islamic tourism could bring the spa industry to the next level and resolve certain long-standing challenges.

Our unique business philosophy also enabled ITC to address its own workforce’s human capital needs when we enrolled our managers and senior-level executives in the Business and

Leadership Coaching training to equip them with high-level thinking skills and capabilities to lead the organisation forward.

Another important initiative was the Memorandum of Understanding signed with Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) via its agency, Institut Pengajian Islam & Dakwah Sabah, to establish a market-driven Islamic tourism curriculum in academia that aligns with our vision to develop human capital needed for a sustainable and robust Islamic tourism industry. We have also established similar partnerships with agencies such as International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance to conduct micro and macro research on Islamic tourism that would help shape the understanding and potential of this industry.

### How many support staff does ITC have?

ITC is a fairly lean organisation with 20 staff working in Research and Training, Industry Development, Corporate Communications, Digital as well as Corporate Development and Finance. With such a small outfit, we rely on partnerships and close engagements across all sectors to drive our efforts.

### How do you hope to encourage more youth participation in Islamic tourism?

After successfully initiating a one-day ITELS last October, we aim to reach out to more young people this year through a few more ITELS series in Penang, Kuala Terengganu and Kuching by engaging different parties to share their experiences, motivations, ideas and success stories. We see the youth’s potential in Islamic tourism business product and service delivery, including Islamic-based app development, faith-based media and entertainment content, modest fashion and personal care products.

### Tell us more about ITC’s Muslim-Friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR) initiative. Who are its participants and what are the current numbers?

This initiative provides the framework for both local and internationally branded hotel operators in Malaysia who fulfill the Muslim tourists’ needs to be recognised as a Muslim-friendly hotel. The MFAR branding has three categories - Silver, Gold and Platinum - to reflect the varying levels of Muslim-friendly

services and facilities offered by these hotels.

Currently, 53 hotels in Malaysia have been recognised. The international brands include Hilton, Hyatt, Pullman, Westin, Sofitel, Intercontinental and Mövenpick. Among the home-grown brands are Sunway Hotels and Resorts, Tamu Hotel and Suites, The Light, Perdana KLCC and Kota Bharu, Adya Hotel Langkawi, RARA Hotels in Kota Kinabalu and Terengganu, Dorsett Putrajaya, Zenith Putrajaya, Amari Johor Bahru, and Mardhiyyah Hotel and Suites.

### Likewise, what is the ITC’s Muslim-Friendly Tour Guides (MFTGs) course all about?

This course was initiated to add value to the tour guides’ service delivery given the unique needs of this market. Currently, we have 62 MFTGs certified by ITC with each given a special MFTG card upon completing the course. This card complements their existing tour guide licence issued by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture. We also organise for the MFTGs a refresher course, which include training on life-saving skills such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

### Regarding your plans for 2022 to work with key local academic institutions to advance Islamic tourism through research initiatives, who else do you have in mind?

Besides working with many of our leading local tertiary institutions, we may expand our partnerships to regional and international higher learning institutions. Our collaborations extend beyond research activities to developing frameworks and guidelines that support industry participation in Islamic tourism. There is also the area of curriculum and module development as well as training where we work together towards youth talent development and knowledge enhancement among tourism professionals.

### Work apart, what are your interests or hobbies?

I enjoy reading, writing, classical music, theatre and travel, especially to the countryside and nature-based destinations. I am also a fan of history and culture, always keen to understand how world events impact a country’s future, its people and civilisation.





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