

AIRLINK

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MORE THAN AN ISLAND, A GATEWAY TO LEGENDARY TREASURES.

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Dato' Iskandar Mizal Mahmood
Managing Director
Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad

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, as Malaysia's air travel industry picks up momentum in the first quarter of 2023 with the reconnection of more routes plying between Kuala Lumpur (KL) and other destinations such as Hanoi, and several cities from mainland China, he is also happy that Malaysia's latest low-cost carrier MYAirline is marching on with another new route to Miri. The airport operator's other hub in Kota Kinabalu is also witnessing more flight activities with departures heading for Shenzhen and Guangzhou following the recent reopening of the China market.

Having achieved a total 52.7 million passengers in 2022 with the introduction of new routes by 27 airlines to 38 cities, we are not resting on our laurels to have more new routes being resumed or making their debut at our flagship KL International Airport (KLIA).

Making a strong rebound, AirAsia Aviation Group not only relaunched seven international destinations to China but also followed them up with increased flight frequencies in March.

Other airlines such as Vietnam Airlines is resuming its Hanoi-KL sector on March 26 for the summer while MYAirline is debuting its eighth destination to Miri from its KL hub.

I am proud to announce that our Aviation Marketing and Development team, which was at the recent Routes Asia 2023 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, to drive future growth at our airports with more route developments, was also there for the handover ceremony as Langkawi will be the host venue for the 20th Routes Asia event in 2024. Through our strategic partnership with Tourism Malaysia, we will not only market Langkawi but also Malaysia as an attractive destination to the region's route development community.

Meanwhile, having recently obtained in principle approval to operate and manage the 39 airports and STOLports in Malaysia until 2069, the new Operating Agreements

2023 reflect the government's confidence in our capabilities and experience while affirming our airport network framework and cross-subsidisation model.

We will continue to ensure the commercial sustainability and facilitate the growth of our country's airports managed by us. This includes the upgrading of the Subang Airport, which currently serves eight domestic and two international passenger routes. We are also grateful that the government has agreed to our proposal to rebrand KLIA and klia2 to Terminal 1 and Terminal 2 respectively as this will enable us to market the airport's services more effectively, which will in turn strengthen KLIA's position as a regional hub.



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Langkawi, Host Destination for Routes Asia 2024

Malaysia, which previously hosted Routes Asia in 2014 in Kuching, will be welcoming the region's route development community to the breathtaking and legendary Langkawi for the 20th Routes Asia event to be held from February 25-27, 2024 at the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre. The island's largest convention and exhibition centre has been playing host to the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition, which has been organised biennially since 1991, with this event returning soon in May after its last show held in 2019.

Tracing the origins of Routes Asia, the event was originally known as New Route Asia. The brainchild of Malaysia Airports, it was first held in 2003 in Kuala Lumpur for three years running before the airport operator co-hosted Routes Asia 2014 in Kuching with Sarawak Tourism Board. Malaysia Airports will be working closely with its strategic partner Tourism Malaysia to host Routes Asia 2024, where over 3,000 meetings, pivotal in shaping future air connectivity in the region, are expected to bring together airlines, airports and tourism authorities.

At the recent Routes Asia 2023 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, over 30 meetings were scheduled by Malaysia Airports with existing and new airlines to discuss route development opportunities into Malaysia's airports, especially its international airports in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Langkawi, Kuching and Kota Kinabalu.

Malaysia Airports Managing Director Datuk Iskandar Mizal Mahmood said one of the primary objectives of the airport operator was to accelerate the return of foreign airlines into Malaysia although on the average almost 80% of them have resumed their flights.

Besides targeting to get more onboard, he said, "We want those who have returned the past year to get into the 2019 level as soon as possible by expanding their flight frequencies. We have identified certain regions and airlines to follow up on and this will be an ongoing effort by us and Tourism Malaysia to raise our country's connectivity and accessibility."

Indeed, Malaysia Airports' total passenger movements of nine million for January this

year represents an 81.3% recovery against 2019, which can be attributed largely to the continuous resumption of airline operations and flight routes as well as the introduction of new destinations.

Last year, the airport operator had 17 airlines resuming services to 32 city-pairs with the highest traffic operated to Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea, Vietnam, India and the Philippines. Its passenger traffic growth was supported by new route launches by 27 airlines to 38 city-pairs.

Among its city-pairs with the highest growth in 2022 over 2021 are Denpasar-Bali, Lahore, Ujung Padang, Male, Brisbane, Bangkok, Perth, Phuket, Batam and Bangalore. Malaysia Airports had 59 airlines operating at all its airports plying 84 international and 35 domestic destinations last year compared to 48 airlines flying to 51 internationals and 32 domestic destinations in 2021.

At the handover ceremony on February 16 at the end of the three-day Routes Asia 2023, Malaysia Airports General Manager of Aviation Marketing and Development Mohamed Sallauddin Mat Sah remarked, "Routes Asia 2023 has been a huge success with very strong attendance from both airlines and airports."

"Since the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a tremendous change in personnel. Routes events are incredibly important as it allows our organisation to meet the decision makers from airlines in the region. Hosting Routes Asia 2024 will allow us to showcase not only Langkawi but also the country of Malaysia to carriers from across the region."

Routes Director Steven Small quipped, "We have a long-standing relationship with Malaysia Airports and are delighted to be working with the very experienced team again. This year's event brought together over 1,000 decision makers from the route development community. The recovery for this region has really gathered pace in the last year and we are confident that we will see this continue in Langkawi."

One of Malaysia's gems, Langkawi offers facilities that include luxury hotels, natural attractions, duty-free shopping, and an international airport managed by Malaysia Airports, one of the world's largest airport operator groups in terms of passenger numbers.

Besides Malaysia Airports and Tourism Malaysia, other key stakeholders from Malaysia present at Routes Asia 2023 to promote their respective destinations were Penang Global Tourism, Langkawi Development Authority, Sarawak Tourism Board and Sabah Tourism Board.

For Sabah's tourism industry where over 90% of its visitors arrive by air, the networking at Routes Asia 2023 with senior decision-makers from the region's airlines to restore more international air connectivity into the Land Below The Wind proved to be invaluable.

Sabah Tourism Board Chief Executive Officer Noredah Othman remarked, "Routes Asia has allowed us to gain exclusive insight into the aviation sector in the new post-pandemic era."

She and her team also took advantage of the event to gather information on industry trends, competitor analysis, and customer preferences to help define future tourism development strategies in Sabah.

Noredah added that Routes Asia presented Sabah with the opportunity to promote its attractions, tourism offerings and infrastructure to a diverse audience of aviation and travel industry experts. "While Sabah Tourism is working towards encouraging flight growth, we are also tripling our efforts to make Sabah a more visible destination. This year alone, we have carried out promotional efforts in Europe and the Scandinavian regions."

Sabah received 1,511,163 visitors and RM2.73 billion in tourism receipts between January and November 2022, of which 1,300,729 were domestic arrivals and 210,434 from overseas.

Routes Asia 2023 Award Winners

At the recent Routes Asia Marketing Awards 2023, Singapore Changi Airport was crowned the Overall Winner, and also bagged another accolade in the Over 10 Million Passenger category, where Fukuoka Airport, KL International Airport (KLIA) and Melbourne Airport were shortlisted.

It is not unusual for an airport to win two awards. KLIA had the honour of being the Overall Winner and also in the Over 20 million Passenger category at Routes Asia 2018's award ceremony in 2018.

Meanwhile, the Under Five Million Passenger category was won by Mactan-Cebu International Airport while the Five to 10 Million Passenger category was clinched by Perth Airport.

In the Airlines category, AirAsia Aviation Group beat Cathay Pacific, Cebu Pacific and Malaysia Airlines to win Routes Asia's prestigious award while the Destination category was bagged by the Philippine Department of Tourism.

Bo Lingam, Group CEO of AirAsia Aviation Group Ltd said: "We are thrilled to win this award, which focuses on the importance of partnerships in achieving successful and profitable routes.

"As the largest low-cost carrier in Asia, our partners play a significant role in our mission to democratise air travel, flying close to 800 million guests in two decades. A great partnership also allows us to support economic growth in all the markets that we fly to.

"This is especially important as the world recovers from the impact of the pandemic and tourism is the key element for economic viability. We look forward to strengthening the relationship with our airport partners as we return to service stronger in all our key markets and continue to expand our service as our full fleet returns this year."

MYAirline's Sustainable State-of-the-Art Aircraft Interior

Partnering with leading aircraft interior provider Geven, MYAirline has equipped its A320-200 fleet with Italian-made superEco aircraft seats that are sustainable and comfortable.

Describing these seats as “sleek, ergonomically designed” and “lightweight”, its Chief Executive Officer Rayner Teo said these seats fitted its aspiration to be an eco-friendly airline as they result in less fuel burn and carbon dioxide emissions, thus helping to reduce the carbon footprint.

The superEco seats meets MYAirline's value proposition in providing leading-class services and comfort with its customised fittings. They feature a padded dress cover, self-structural bottom cushion, lower literature pocket and flush armrests.

Its ergonomically-designed pre-reclined seats angled at 109.4 degrees offer ample space for its passengers and do not need to be put upright during take-off or landing.

“Although we are a low-cost airline, we take pride in ensuring that we provide highly comfortable seats. We want our passengers to enjoy their journey. Our carefully selected interior fittings is a testament to our efforts in ensuring operational safety, efficiency and sustainability while providing comfort.”

RAYNER TEO

Chief Executive Officer of MYAirline

Overall, its superEco fittings provide roomier legroom of 17.3 inches for the emergency exit row and 12.3 inches for other rows. MYAirline's seat configuration for the middle seat is also configured to be more spacious with 18.5-inches width compared to its aisle and window seats with 18-inches width.

The seats also leave a larger shin and knee clearance pitched at 28-29 inches. Most of MYAirline's seat pitch is 29

inches whilst that of the emergency exit row is 34 inches. Besides being easy to maintain, they also help keep MYAirline's cost structure low, Rayner added.

Enhancing the entertainment experience onboard, its passengers can watch their entertainment from their personal devices with MYAirline's personal electronic device holder built into their meal trays. This will save them from muscle fatigue holding their device.

For more information, visit www.myairline.my



Multi Awarding-Winning Ethiopian Airlines Returns to Kuala Lumpur



Ethiopian Airlines, which garnered four accolades at the Skytrax 2022 World Airlines Awards including for Best Airline in Africa, will be resuming its four-weekly service to Kuala Lumpur (KL) via Singapore on its ultramodern B787 Dreamliner on March 25, 2023.

Flight ET638 will depart from the carrier's hub at Addis Ababa at 11.20pm on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday and land in Singapore at 2.50pm the next day before departing at 3.30pm on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday to arrive at the KL International Airport at 5.10pm.

The return flight ET639 will leave KL at 11.15pm on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday, landing in Singapore at 12.45am the next day. It will depart Singapore at 2.00am on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday and land in Addis Ababa at 5.50am.

The service resumption will support the continued expansion of trade and collaboration between Africa and Southeast Asia.



“ In line with our plan for growing our network around the world, we will keep on opening new routes to enhance connectivity between Africa and the rest of the world via Addis Ababa. ”

MESFIN TASEW

Group Chief Executive Officer of Ethiopian Airlines

Africa's fastest growing airline is currently connected to over 130 passenger and cargo destinations across five continents. The Star Alliance airline registered an average 25% growth in the last seven years before the Covid-19 pandemic.

The leading aviation group in Africa recently inaugurated a new training centre in Hawassa, Ethiopia to serve as the second campus for its Ethiopian Aviation Academy (EAA) and will provide trainee programmes to pilots from different parts of the world.

EAA, the largest and most modern aviation academy in Africa recognised as International Civil Aviation Organisation's regional training centre of excellence, offers pilot, simulator, cabin crew and catering, aircraft maintenance, commercial and ground service as well as leadership trainings at its headquarters in Addis Ababa.

For more information, call 03-2022 0168 or visit www.ethiopianairlines.com

Japan Airlines Receives Five-Star Rating Again



Japan Airlines (JAL), a member of the oneworld® alliance, has been certified as a five-star airline for the sixth consecutive year by Skytrax. Currently, only 10 airlines worldwide are certified five-star by the London-based international air transport rating organisation.

Critical to JAL's five-star rating is the level of excellence it provides across all of their cabin types. Skytrax CEO Edward Plaisted explained that the rating evaluates the total customer experience, be it standard or premium cabin travellers.

"JAL provides excellent standards of comfort and product facilities, which combine with high standards of staff service across the airport and onboard experience to achieve this."

Acknowledging this, JAL President Yuji Akasaka, remarked, "Our industry experienced many challenges as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, but all of us at JAL remained focused on providing a safe and comfortable journey for our customers and we are grateful for their continued support."

Celebrating its 55th anniversary of flight operations into Malaysia in 2022, it held an event at the KL International Airport (KLIA) on December 23 with Malaysia Airports' support to thank its customers for their support after Japan reopened its border to foreign travellers and reintroduced visa free entry from October 11, 2022.

Aiming to be the world's most preferred and valued airline, Japan's first international airline currently serves 349 airports in 52 countries and regions together with its codeshare partners with a modern fleet of 230 aircraft.

Its roundtrip services daily between Tokyo (Narita) and KLIA, using the Boeing 787-8 aircraft, are fitted with JAL Sky Suite fully-flat business class seats, JAL Sky Wider, the world's best economy class seats with increased seat pitch of 84cm and width of 48cm.

The airline's loyalty programme JAL Mileage Bank is one of the largest mileage programmes in Asia. JAL is also recognised as one of the most punctual major international airlines.

For more information, call 03-22876888.

Vietnam Airlines' Direct Hanoi-Kuala Lumpur Flight to Resume

Vietnam Airlines will resume its four-weekly Hanoi-Kuala Lumpur (KL) direct service for its summer schedule on March 26 after a short hiatus since October 2022. It will be using Airbus A321 with 184 seats.

To celebrate the route resumption, the national flag carrier is offering attractive round-trip flight ticket prices to passengers for a limited period until March 26 for travel until the end of the year. Passengers can book tickets on their website, mobile application and official ticket offices and agents of Vietnam Airlines nationwide.

The airline currently operates the Ho Chi Minh City-KL route with 11 weekly flights after resuming service in February 2022.

According to the Tourism Information Technology Center under Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, Vietnam Airlines transported over 220,000 passengers between Vietnam and Malaysia in 2019.

To date, the airline has restored most of its international destinations, bringing the total number of flights operating across its international network to more than 600 flights weekly. This is equivalent to 70% of its operating frequency before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, the Civil Aviation Authority of Vietnam expects its country's aviation sector to fully recover from the impact of the pandemic by end-2023 with an estimated 80 million passengers and 1.44 million tonnes of air cargo this year despite huge hurdles facing the sector.

For more information, visit www.vietnamairlines.com or call 03-2031 1666



Singapore Airlines is Airline of the Year in 49th ATW Awards

Singapore Airlines (SIA) has been named 2023 Airline of the Year in Air Transport World's (ATW) 49th annual airline industry awards, which recognises excellence across a broad range of airline operations.

The panel of editors and analysts at ATW, Routes, Aviation Week and CAPA, who made the decision, said the airline company responded rapidly and decisively to global travel restrictions related to Covid-19 by raising S\$22.4 billion in fresh liquidity, the most by any airline during the pandemic.

"In addition, multiple cost-cutting and innovative initiatives kept the company on a strong footing so it was ready to re-enter the market strongly when borders reopened.

"Since then, SIA has posted record passenger load factors while restoring passenger capacity more quickly than its regional peers to capture the pent-up demand, with deeper strategic airline partnerships, a multi-hub strategy that leverages its Indian joint venture with Tata Sons, and a 2023 summer schedule that will take it above pre-pandemic levels in the Americas, Europe, and South-Asia markets."



SIA Chief Executive Officer Goh Choon Phong, who viewed the award as a recognition of the airline's firm commitment to its three pillars of brand promise: product leadership, service excellence and network connectivity, said, "We will continue to strive to exceed our customers' expectations in their end-to-end travel journey and set new standards in the airline industry."

Meanwhile, SIA also recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Vietnam Airlines to explore opportunities for codeshare arrangements to facilitate better connectivity between them. This could be expanded to include other destinations that SIA serves.

With both airlines having well-established networks that can support each other to strengthen the connectivity between them and to the key markets around the world, Goh believed, "These win-win arrangements will offer more options and greater value for our customers, support economic growth and bolster initiatives that facilitate tourism activities."

Held in Singapore during the Vietnam-Singapore Business Forum, the MoU signing ceremony was witnessed by Vietnam Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and Singapore's Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Trade and Industry, Dr Tan See Leng.

For more information, visit awards.atwonline.com and www.singaporeair.com

All Nippon Airways, Top Scorer in Cirium's 2022 Awards



All Nippon Airways (ANA) has been ranked first in both Global and Asia Pacific for its exceptional service and reliability in providing on-time performance in 2022 by travel data and analytics firm Cirium, which has been presenting these On-time Performance Awards since 2009.

This represents the second consecutive year Japan's largest and five-star airline for 10 consecutive years has emerged top in the Global category. It is ANA's fourth consecutive year since 2018 that the airline has been positioned first in Asia Pacific as the Cirium awards were not presented in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Among the top global airlines, ANA Group's on-time arrival rate was 89.79% in its network category, which includes flights operated by ANA Wings and Air Japan. On-time arrival refers to arrivals within 15 minutes of the scheduled arrival time.

Its network statistics as at January 2023 shows ANA Group serving 50 international routes in 36 cities with 830 flights weekly while domestically, it is 102 routes in 47 cities with 728 flights daily.

“Prioritising safety and on-time performance are ways we strive to serve our customers, and it is rewarding to be independently recognised for our commitments and results.”

KATSUO YOKOYAMA
Executive Vice President of
All Nippon Airways

To improve its on-time performance, ANA had revised boarding and deplaning its customers in stages, where in July 2022, it eliminated the detailed grouping previously implemented to allow for social distancing between customers from both domestic and international flights. Last September also saw ANA enhancing the functionality of its mobile application for domestic flights to provide easy-to-understand steps on making a reservation to boarding.

For more information, visit
www.ana.co.jp/en/my

Lanmei Airlines Changes Schedule Dates



Cambodian hybrid carrier Lanmei Airlines, which operates four direct flights weekly between Phnom Penh and Kuala Lumpur (KL) on Monday, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday will be changing them to Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday effective March 26.

Its KL branch Deputy General Manager Liu ZiQiao Vincy said this was partly in response to the trending weekend trips made by travellers.

According to Cambodia's Tourism Minister Thong Korn, the country received about 400,000 international tourists in January, up 794% compared to the same period last year but it was still down 38% compared to 2019 before the Covid-19 pandemic.

With Cambodia's tourism industry gradually recovering, Liu added that the airline will be participating for the first time as an exhibitor at the MATTA Fair held from March 17-19 at Malaysia International Trade and Exhibition Centre, KL.



"MATTA Fair will be a good opportunity to showcase the products we are offering to the market besides benefitting both the travel agents whom we work with and the visitors to Malaysia's largest consumer fair."

Lanmei Airlines, which had commenced its maiden once a week service to Phnom Penh KL on May 28 last year, plans to subsequently increase them to seven times weekly later this year.

According to its Cambodian air transport company based in Phnom Penh and Siem

Reap, Lanmei is an abbreviation for the Lancang-Mekong River.

Apart from its domestic destinations, the international destinations it currently serves include Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Guangzhou, Nanning and Wenzhou.

Besides the seven kilogram (kg) hand carry, passengers are also provided 15kg free check-in baggage allowance.

For more information, call 03-2144 1571

SalamAir to Debut Its 36th Destination in Malaysia

Oman's value-for-money airline SalamAir will be introducing a direct twice weekly flight between Muscat and Kuala Lumpur (KL) from July 3 on Mondays and Fridays to serve the high demand for leisure and business tourism from both sides.

Using the Airbus A321neo aircraft, Malaysia will be its 36th destination with the Muscat-KL route taking about seven hours. The airline has started selling air tickets for this route via its official website, mobile app, 24/7 call centre and accredited agencies.

SalamAir CEO Captain Mohamed Ahmed said, "The new service marks another milestone in our network expansion strategy." He expects it to boost tourism, economic relations, business opportunities and student movements between the two countries.

Owned by the Muscat National Development and Investment Co, the airline started commercial operations in 2017 and has won accolades for having the youngest fleet in Asia in recent years.



The airline operates six A320neo, four A321neo and an Airbus A321 freighter. It has become the first Embraer E195-E2 operator in the Middle East and ordered six passenger aircraft to cater to the neighbouring countries.

For more information, visit www.salamair.com

AirAsia Aviation Group Remains Bullish about China

China represents an integral market for AirAsia Aviation Group, the largest international low-cost carrier by capacity before the Covid-19 pandemic with over 1.8 million guests carried in 2019.

Under the group, AirAsia Malaysia has restarted its service to Macao, Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Kunming from Kuala Lumpur (KL) and Kota Kinabalu with a total of 10 flights weekly. It plans to increase their frequency by up to 27 flights weekly in March.

Complementing the resumption of these short-haul destinations, its long-haul sister company AirAsia X Malaysia will reconnect KL to Shanghai, Hangzhou and Chengdu with 10 flights weekly starting from March 1.

In response to a Bloomberg report on February 22 quoting AirAsia X Malaysia Chief Executive Officer Benyamin Ismail in an interview as saying that "sales have not been off the roof" due to uncertainties about the travel requirements as the second largest aviation market reopened recently to the world, he told Airlink, "We are (still) bullish on China," albeit "just cautious".

For more information, visit www.airasia.com



UPCLOSE WITH CAPTAIN MUSHAFIZ MUSTAFA BAKRI

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Batik Air Malaysia



Proud of his Malaysian roots, 48-year-old Captain Mushafiz Mustafa Bakri, who hails from Melaka has an illustrious aviation career that includes being a pilot, instructor and examiner. Prior to his appointment as CEO of Batik Air Malaysia on September 23, 2019, he was the Director of Safety, Security and Quality of Thai Lion Air, another airline under the Indonesian-based PT Lion Group. Sharing his incredible journey with the Lion Group, he sums it up as one where he will cherish the memories for years to come.

Having been with the Lion Group for a decade, what are some of the most unforgettable moments in your career?

One poignant moment that stands out the most for me is the opportunity to set up two airlines within a year in 2013. Being part of the team that established Malindo Air, now known as Batik Air Malaysia, and Thai Lion Air was an incredible experience. It was a challenging but rewarding task to start an airline from scratch. Seeing it grow and succeed in a highly competitive industry was truly fulfilling. The journey was full of hard work, long hours, and intense pressure, but it was worth it in the end.

As a team, we navigated through various challenges, which included obtaining the necessary licenses, selecting the right routes, building the airline's brand and marketing strategies as well as developing the necessary operational processes and procedures. Witnessing the first flight take off and knowing that we had played a significant role in making it happen was unforgettable besides it being a testament to our team's dedication, hard work, and determination.

What are the benefits of being part of Indonesia's Lion Group?

Besides Batik Air Malaysia, there are six other airlines within the Group, namely Lion Air, Wings Air, Batik Air (Indonesia), Super Air Jet, Biz Jet, and Thai Lion Air. Being under one parent company has helped us achieve greater financial stability, which in turn has allowed Lion Group to make investments in improving our overall operations.

Other benefits include easier ticket bookings and simplified flight operations such as check-in and baggage handling. Our future plans include implementing the ability for our passengers to earn and redeem miles, enjoy reciprocal frequent flyer benefits between airlines in our group and access to each other airline lounges.

What was the most significant challenge you have encountered thus far?

The Covid-19 crisis in 2020 brought with it an avalanche of hardships, not just affecting human lives but also negatively impacting the aviation industry globally. Commercial air travel came to a standstill disrupting management of air traffic. We have to give employees unpaid leave as well as implement a voluntary separation scheme, retrenchment and reduced pay. Employees whose contracts were expiring were not renewed plus early termination of our aircraft lease agreements. In short, we had to operate with minimum staff strength. The pandemic had totally redefined the aviation sector landscape.

How did Batik Air Malaysia's rebranding exercise and launch of its B737 MAX 8 in July 2022 impact its growth and revenue?

In a crowded and confusing marketplace, a strong brand gives buyers a reason to notice you and to care. Done in phases, our rebranding was aimed at refreshing and integrating our routes within the Lion Group's airlines for seamless connectivity. It came with a new logo, livery and visual identity to reflect a modern and streamlined brand identity. Thus, enabling us to attract more customers and increase our market share.

The B737 MAX 8 is a great economical aircraft that offers more capacity, range and fuel efficiency compared to our previous aircraft. The new aircraft helped us to improve our operational efficiency, reduce costs and offer a better customer experience. Contributing positively to an increase in our airline's growth and revenue, the rebranding exercise and B737 MAX 8 have helped position us for continued growth and success.

Amadeus data for Malaysia's air travel in 2023 identifies Indonesia as the highest growth origin country followed by Singapore, Thailand, Australia and Vietnam. How do you see this reflected in your airline in terms of passenger flow and route development?

Our flights are always busy on those routes. As a result, they have automatically lifted our growth and capacity from those countries. We are very glad to contribute and play a role in the expansion of the Malaysian aviation market. We had a strong finish in our recovery last year and hope to build the air traffic growth momentum this year with surging travel demands and an almost full reopening of international borders.

What is the airline's existing reach in terms of routes or destinations from its two hubs in KL International Airport (KLIA) and Subang Airport after the Covid-19 pandemic?

Currently, we fly from KLIA to Lahore, Amritsar, New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kochi, Trichy, Kolkata, Kathmandu, Dhaka, Bangkok, Phuket, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Taipei, Tokyo, Hokkaido, Osaka, Jakarta, Bali, Medan, Perth, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Penang, Langkawi, Kuching and Kota Kinabalu.

From Subang, our ATR 72-600 aircraft fly to Pekanbaru and Batam in Indonesia and other local destinations, namely Johor Bahru, Melaka, Penang, Langkawi, Kota Bharu and Kuala Terengganu.

Has the airline managed to return to its number of weekly flights and capacity pre-pandemic and what is its current fleet size?

We are now around 70% of our pre-pandemic levels. Our fleet comprises nine ATR 72-600, three B737-800 and 16 B737 MAX 8 aircraft.

What are your future plans for the airline?

We are pursuing our international route expansion. So far, we are on track and have successfully launched new destinations - Tokyo, Osaka and Hokkaido - in Japan besides restarting our flight to Taipei. There will be more routes to Northeast Asia.

Currently, what is the airline's staff strength? How many staff, including pilots, has it managed to recall and be given training?

We employed 5,000 staff before the pandemic but now have 2,023 employees. Our pilots and cabin crew have been recalled and sent for retraining in phases. We are reaching almost 75% of the pre-pandemic capacity.

You started as a pilot but your diverse experience has led you to be an instructor and examiner as well. What career tips would you give those entering the aviation sector?

Firstly, discipline and dedication to continuous learning and improvement are crucial to success in this field. Aviation is an industry that demands precision, attention to details and a strong work ethic. Secondly, be prepared to face challenges along the way as this industry is highly regulated and constantly evolving. You will need to adapt to changes and be willing to tackle challenges head-on.

Thirdly, be proactive in grabbing opportunities to gain new experiences, build your skills, and expand your network. There are many different career paths in aviation. You never know where a particular opportunity might lead. Fourthly, have a solid plan outlining your goals and steps you need to achieve them whether you are just starting out or looking to advance in your career as it will help you stay focused and motivated. Lastly, have a backup plan or alternative career path. As aviation is a highly competitive industry, it is important to be prepared for the unexpected.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life balance to support your professional and personal growth?

Understanding my priorities helps me to ensure that my work is aligned with my values and that my personal life with my family, friends and loved ones is not sacrificed. I practice time management and prioritise my health by eating well, exercising regularly and getting enough rest.

Malaysia's traditional dish nasi lemak is close to my heart as it always reminds me of home. Apart from playing tennis and badminton, I also enjoy cycling to stay in shape and explore the outdoors.



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