

AIRLINK

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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 the return of the 16th edition of the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIMA) 2023 from May 23-27 after a four-year hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic as this event will not only bring many delegates coming through Langkawi International Airport but will also attract more foreign investment from global players which will benefit the aviation industry. Pivoting towards the propensity for further growth this year, the airport operator continues to be driven by increased passenger and aircraft traffic as more new routes and flight frequencies are introduced and improvements are made at its airports, in particular our flagship KL International Airport (KLIA).

Dato' Iskandar Mizal Mahmood

*Managing Director
Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad*

Always mindful of providing convenience and a seamless travel experience to our passengers, we have recently introduced EZBagz (a new self-service bag drop facility) at KLIA Terminal 1, which is located at check-in counters B3 to B8 for those taking domestic flights from Malaysia Airlines. Meanwhile, the baggage arrivals at KLIA Terminal 1 and 2 are within 40 minutes with the flight movements registered at both these two terminals at 6,150 and 5,916 respectively, which is part of passenger experience overview for the first quarter 2023.

Commercial outlets at the two terminals have also witnessed the opening of new food and beverage (F&B), retail and services outlets such as Travel Club Lounge, PBH Duty Free, Alhabshi Dessert, Ahh-Yum and many more. At Terminal 1, 48 out of our 54 F&B outlets have opened while it is 90 out of the 133 F&B outlets at Terminal 2. In terms of retail and services, 124 out of the 130 outlets have opened at Terminal 1 while at Terminal 2, it is 149 out of 175 outlets.

I am happy to say that the improved contributions from the commercial revenue of our network of airports in Malaysia and Turkiye have been largely responsible for the higher non-aeronautical revenue of RM1,206.5 million Malaysia Airports received for the financial year ended December 31, 2022. We expect to see this trend continue as air travel and more major events pick up steam.

For instance, the upcoming five-day LIMA 2023, touted to be bigger, is expected to see not only aircraft manufacturers such

as Airbus, Boeing and Embraer showcasing their products but also see significant memoranda of understanding signed that will provide an economic impact to our country and in particular the aerospace sector.

We look forward to seeing more new airlines making their entry into our airports, which will help ease the seat capacity constraints and stabilise airfare prices, thus enabling more people to travel by air travel. This is particularly so for the air connectivity between Peninsular Malaysia and the two East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. We thus welcome Sarawak's proposal to set up a state-owned boutique airline to resolve the issue of expensive airfares, especially for Malaysians.

We are thus grateful to the various airlines such as Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia and Batik Air Malaysia for mounting extra flights, especially during the festive periods like the recent Hari Raya holidays. As your airport operator, we always stand prepared to make your air travel as seamless as possible by working closely with the respective stakeholders within our airport community.

On a final note, for the coming Gawai holidays and festivities, where we anticipate an upsurge of travelling between the peninsula and East Malaysia, we advise that you not only book your flights early to secure cheaper air tickets but also be at our airports four hours early before your scheduled flight's departure to allow for sufficient time for check-in and document verifications at the various touch points.



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Gradual Road to Recovery of China Market

Following China's relaxation of its travel restrictions on January 8 and the subsequent resumption of outbound tour groups to 20 countries, including Malaysia, from February 6, it did not take long for travel bookings to recover to pre-pandemic levels after its zero-Covid policy was lifted.

Airlines around the world were quick to scramble to restart their flights to China, the world's second biggest economy after almost a three-year hiatus. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Beijing was ranked the world's second most connected city in terms of number and quality of flight connections after London, according to Knight Frank Research.

Meanwhile, data from the Civil Aviation of China showed 169 domestic and foreign airlines offering 117,222 passenger and cargo flights a week for the summer schedule effective March 26.

Reportedly, 28 local airlines plan to operate 6,772 international flights weekly serving 101 cities in 55 countries while 88 foreign airlines currently fly to China from 79 cities in 47 countries.

China Southern Airlines' Kuala Lumpur (KL)-based Sales Manager Low Yu Yang told Airlink its twice daily Guangzhou-KL flights, which recommenced on February 12, would be increased to thrice daily flights from May 15. This sector uses the Airbus A320 and Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft.

Testing the resumption of its Guangzhou-Kota Kinabalu's (KK) thrice weekly flights from April 29 to May 6 on the A320, Low said the flights would be continued later in July. Meanwhile, its Guangzhou-Penang's thrice weekly flights, which restarted on March 1, had been increased to twice daily on April 24.

Yeoh Soon Hin, Penang State Exco for Tourism and Creative Economy (PETACE) said China Southern Airlines, which has been flying to Penang since 1991, enjoys a long-term working relationship with PETACE.

With China, recognised as having one of the world's highest outbound expenditures, he added that PETACE plans to launch a series of online and offline promotional strategies in

northern, central and southern China this year.

Although the China market remains in the early phase of recovery, Malaysia Airports' data revealed that passenger movements for this sector grew by 61% in February over January. March saw the airport operator welcoming more flight resumptions from China from carriers such as Shenzhen Airlines with its Shenzhen-KL and the AirAsia Aviation Group.

AirAsia recently had promotional offers of discounted fares for a limited period for its flights from Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou to KL and from Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Kunming, Nanning and Wuhan to KL, Johor Bahru and Kota Kinabalu to encourage travel between April 17 and October 28.

Currently, there are more than 81 flights weekly from China to Malaysia operated by AirAsia, Batik Air Malaysia, Malaysia Airlines, Cathay Pacific, China Southern Airlines, Shenzhen Airlines and Xiamen Airlines.

Sabah Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Datuk Christina Liew is confident of direct flights connecting China to Sabah with the soon establishment of KK as a hub by Firefly as it takes over the Sandakan, Tawau and Kuching routes from its sister company, Malaysia Airlines from mid-May.

She had been reportedly briefed by Ahmad Luqman Mohd Azmi, Chief Executive Officer of Airline Business of Malaysia Airlines Berhad that direct flights by Firefly from China to Sabah are expected to start from the second quarter.

So far, he said there have been chartered flights from China to KL using Malaysia Airlines services. It started with weekly chartered flights from Xiamen to KL in January, adding that chartered flights from Xiamen to KK using Firefly are under discussion.

KL, Sabah and Pahang were among the top three states visited by tourists from China pre-pandemic. Maybank Investment Bank Bhd highlighted in its research report earlier this year that out of the 3.1 million

Chinese who visited Malaysia in 2019, two million flew into the country. Expecting a gradual recovery of the China market, it projects that Malaysia Airports will welcome only 1.3 million Chinese visitors or two-thirds of its pre-Covid levels in 2024. This is partly because Malaysia Airlines, Batik Air Malaysia and AirAsia X cut their fleet size during the pandemic while AirAsia has yet to return all its aircraft to service.

Tourism Malaysia's efforts to boost arrivals from China

Facilitating the return of China tourists to Malaysia, Tourism Malaysia embarked on its first sales mission-cum-roadshow to the major cities in China from March 29 to April 15. Its sales mission trips were held in Beijing, Chongqing and Guangxi while the roadshows took place in Guangzhou, Beijing, Shanghai and Xiamen.

Led by the Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing, one of its main objectives was to promote deeper Malaysia-China bilateral cooperation in tourism and cultural exchanges. Recognising the potential of this market, the minister was eager to seek breakthroughs after identifying some of the restrictive barriers affecting it.

Among the issues raised was the easing of the visa application process as well as the requests for more flights and incentive allowances. Datuk Seri Tiong assured, "We will prioritise these matters towards achieving tangible results as soon as possible."

Tapping into the existence of the Chinese Cultural Centre established by China, he said, "We intend to continue building more bridges of mutual exchanges and appreciation on tourism promotion, investment, human resource training, cultural exchanges and tourism security.

"We will begin planning a series of large-scale cultural and tourism events such as the Malaysia-China Cultural Festival, Folklore Festival and other events aimed at welcoming the 10th anniversary of the Malaysia-China comprehensive strategic partnership."

During the trip, Tourism Malaysia, also signed two memoranda of understanding with two travel agencies to bring 350,000 and 100,000 Chinese tourists respectively to visit Malaysia this year.

The momentum to engage with more Chinese tour operators will continue as the two countries move towards their 50th anniversary of diplomatic relationship in 2024.

Datuk Seri Tiong quipped, "We are certainly looking forward to working with them on developing new tour opportunities related to tropical islands, diving activities, camping or glamping, campervans travel and other more diverse tourism collaborations."

He added his ministry would be upgrading the facilities and services of these attractions as it ramps up the awareness of its Visit Malaysia Year 2025 campaign to the Chinese tourists.



Myanmar Airways International Appoints GSA for Malaysia

Myanmar Airways International (MAI) has appointed H Travel Sdn Bhd as its general sales agent (GSA) for Malaysia effective March 16, overseeing its sales, including total customer and travel agent.

The GSA, which is part of the Singapore-based Holiday Tours & Travel Group, will also provide support for the airline's marketing and promotional activities as well as trade partners collaboration.

Malaysia continues to be a core market in MAI's expanded network post Covid-19 pandemic. The airline currently serves the Yangon-Kuala Lumpur route 11 times weekly using both the Airbus A319 and A320 aircraft.

Tanes Kumar, Chief Commercial Officer of MAI said: "We embarked on this partnership with H Travel as we believe it would be able to provide us with a broader presence in the Malaysian market beyond the Klang Valley with H Travel's expertise, experience and local know-how."

"Furthermore, they understand the overall travel landscape of both markets well. We hope to continue to build our position in the market with creative and engaging initiatives beyond the traditional means."

Duncan Choo, Director of H Travel remarked, "MAI is an established airline with a growing presence in the region. We look forward to working closely with our trade partners and the MAI team to continue to build the airline's position in the market."

From MAI's hub in Yangon and Mandalay, using a fleet of four A320s and A319s each, and three E190s, the airline covers other destinations such as Thailand, Singapore, China, Taiwan, South Korea and India, where it is starting a new route to Chennai on May 6.

Overall, about 42% of MAI's international seat capacity are taken up to and from Myanmar. Its business class passengers

departing from or arriving at Yangon International Airport enjoy complimentary access to the Mingalar Sky Premium Lounge.

The passengers can complete their check-in and baggage drop at its dedicated check-in counter within the lounge before enjoying the lounge's facilities and services. Ensuring the highest levels of comfort and luxury seamlessly, it also offers benefits for its niche segment of travellers. They include a one-time free date change for medical travellers, 5kg extra baggage allowance and special group fare for labourers while students get an additional baggage allowance of up to 9kg.

For more information, visit www.maiair.com or call 03-4812 9588/9



TAP Air Portugal Partners APG Network in 18 Markets

TAP Air Portugal has chosen APG Network to expand its reach across 18 markets in Asia, Australia, Europe and Africa. The latter will provide comprehensive sales and marketing activities as well as ticketing and reservation services, thus enabling the airline to strengthen its position in these keymarkets.

Headquartered at Lisbon Airport, Portugal's 78-year-old flag carrier aims to not only improve its brand presence in these markets but to also grow its revenue.

Justin Jovignot, Director of Commercial Strategy and Distribution of TAP Air Portugal said while the airline is flying directly to some of these markets where it has appointed APG Network as its GSA, its focus is also on the offline markets, where it is "still not flying to and where growth potential is a key element for future business development".

Tunku Iskandar, Asia Pacific (APAC) Regional Vice President and Board Member of APG Network quipped, "Significantly, the APAC market has been recognised by TAP Air Portugal to have strong potential business and leisure traffic to Europe and beyond coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic."

"Ten of our offices in Australia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines will be actively providing sales and marketing support to TAP Air Portugal's services."

"This is in addition to Morocco, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Egypt, Guinea, Malta, Slovenia and Tunisia," said Tunku Iskandar, who is also the Group President for APG Malaysia and Singapore.



Early this year, TAP Air Portugal earned the recognition from AirlineRatings.com as Europe's safest airline and the world's sixth safest airline.

A member of the Star Alliance network, it currently operates flights to 90 destinations in 36 countries with a fleet size comprising 77 Airbus, 16 Embraer and two ATR aircraft.

Despite operational challenges, its Chief Operating Officer Christine Ourmières-Widener said the airline delivered in for the first full year of its restructuring plan in 2022, a performance close to its forecast for 2025.

Closing last year with higher net profit of €65.6 million, it carried a total of 13.8 million passengers, reaching 81% of its 2019 level. "2023 is about optimising revenues in an uncertain environment, further reducing costs against a backdrop of inflation," she added at the airline's recent annual general meeting.

For more information, visit www.flytap.com or call 03-2181 5800



TransNusa Launches International Flight to Kuala Lumpur

Indonesian low-cost airline, PT TransNusa Aviation Mandiri (TransNusa) has introduced itself as a premium service carrier with the launch of its maiden international flight from Jakarta to KL International Airport (KLIA) Terminal 1 on April 14, carrying 90% load factor or 154 passengers.

Among those welcoming the first batch of arrivals from Malaysia Airports were Mohamed Sallauddin Mat Sah, its General Manager (GM) of Aviation Marketing and Development and Abd Hasman Abd Muhimim, its GM of Operations for KLIA.

Also present from TransNusa were its President-cum-Director Bayu Sutanto, Director Leo Budi, Chief Executive Officer Datuk Bernard Francis and GM Operational Capt Heru Triperwiranto.

Based on the intensive market research carried out by the airline company, Datuk Francis noticed that travellers' behavioural patterns have changed after the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, TransNusa has curated various packages to meet different passengers' needs.

For its international sector, premium services with competitive ticket prices and attractive new product bundles - SEAT, SEAT-PLUS and FLEXI-PRO – have been introduced.

He said, "We offer various facilities and services that can enhance your travel experiences such as more comfortable seats, high-quality food and beverage (F&B) as well as friendly and professional service from our crew.

"Our passengers enjoy check-in baggage of between 15kg and 30kg, depending on the product purchased," Datuk Francis added, pointing out that it is above the 7kg limit normally offered for passenger's hand-carry luggage by other airlines.



Its highest package FLEXI-PRO provides services such as 30kg baggage allowance, seat selection, complimentary F&B as well as priority check-in and boarding. Passengers can also change their flight schedule without restrictions as well as make cancellations and refunds subject to terms and conditions.

Using the Airbus A320neo and A320ceo aircraft, TransNusa offers a 168-174 seat configuration, which allows its passengers to enjoy 30-31 inches of legroom that is comparable to a full-service airline.

Operating two return flights from Jakarta to Kuala Lumpur (KL) daily at 07:00 and 16:50, its KL flights depart for Jakarta at 10:40 and 20:35 respectively to arrive at Terminal 3 of the Soekarno-Hatta International Airport.

Plans are afoot to launch flights from Jakarta to Johor Bahru and other international destinations later this year. Currently, TransNusa also operates 10 daily flights between Jakarta and Bali and thrice daily flights from Jakarta to Jogjakarta.

For more information, visit www.transnusa.co.id



Firefly's Intra-Borneo Services Take Off on May 16

Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG) will facilitate the transfer of some intra-Borneo services from Malaysia Airlines to sister airline Firefly effective May 16 as part of its strategic route rationalisation plan and review of its business operations as travel demand recovers.

Facilitating one-time daily return flights from Kota Kinabalu (KK) to Sandakan, Tawau and Kuching as well as a daily return service between Kuching and Miri, Firefly will be using its newly retrofitted Boeing 737-800 aircraft which offers 189 economy class seats.

"The implementation of this latest initiative is a testament to MAG's continued efforts to refine and improve its network and product offerings."

AHMAD LUQMAN MOHD AZMI
Chief Executive Officer Airline Business of
Malaysia Airlines Berhad

Reiterating MAG's unwavering commitment to remain responsive to changing customers' demands and the prevailing market conditions, he pointed out that Firefly's launch of its jet operations in 2022 has elicited considerable response, particularly within the leisure travel sector.

Based on its business model as a value carrier, Firefly passengers can elevate their journey by purchasing its bundle services, Plus, Extra and Flex, which offer savings of up to 70% on their 20kg baggage allowance, in-flight hot meals, two flight changes, priority baggage,



boarding and check-in, seat selection, travel insurance and more.

They can also expect a refreshed, vibrant ambience and new features such as its ergonomically designed seats with ample legroom, personal device holders and USB type A and C power outlets, thus enabling them to charge their devices conveniently from each seat.

Sabah Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment Datuk Christina Liew, who was earlier briefed by Ahmad Luqman on Firefly making KK its hub following the transfer of these intra-Borneo services from Malaysia Airlines, believes this would augur well for the state's tourism sector, including facilitating direct flights from China.

For more information, visit www.fireflyz.com.my



MYAirline Welcomes Sixth Aircraft Delivery

The recent induction of the sixth aircraft to MYAirline's fleet to meet the growing demand for air travel is timely, fitting into its policy of having a spare aircraft to meet its operational efficiency and high on-time performance (OTP) goals. Its Chief Executive Officer Rayner Teo said MYAirline also considered various other factors such as market demand and financial viability.

After taking to the skies in December 1 last year, the new airline's OTP had been affected for a few days around mid-March which resulted in flight delays and cancellations. Committed to provide a safe and reliable travel experience, it has been working diligently to avoid further flight disruptions.

Rayner added that MYAirline is confident to improving its operational efficiency by scheduling more frequencies to its existing routes as its seventh aircraft will be inducted very soon.

MYAirline, which had reached its 500,000-passenger milestone in April, currently flies from Kuala Lumpur to KK, Kuching, Langkawi, Kota Bharu, Penang, Sibul, Tawau and Miri using Airbus A320-200 aircraft.

The airline expects to have a total of 20 aircraft by end-2023 to further expand its domestic routes and customer base in ASEAN having launched its first Kota Kinabalu (KK)-Tawau intracity service in Sabah on April 18.

Securing further protection for its passengers by safeguarding their journey against inconveniences and mishaps, MYAirline appointed Zurich Malaysia as its exclusive travel insurance provider in March for all its routes by sealing the strategic collaboration with the latter's Country Head Junior Cho.

Initially introduced as MY Travel Shield in February, the customised MYAirline Travel Insurance covers delayed flights or cancelled trips; lost, damaged or delayed luggage; emergency medical treatment during travel; and Covid-19 benefits, which are particularly useful when Covid-19 infections persisted after travel borders have opened.

MYAirline passengers can opt to be protected starting from an additional RM25 for either one-way or return flights up to an insured sum of RM100,000 in case of accidental death or permanent disablement.

For more information, visit www.myairline.my



British Airways Rolls Out New Uniforms and Flights to Istanbul Sabiha Gokcen Airport

Early this year, British Airways unveiled its new uniform for the first time in nearly 20 years. Created by British-Ghanaian fashion designer and master tailor Oswald Boateng OBE, the airline's engineers and ground operations agents were the first to wear the new uniform from spring followed by its cabin crew, pilots and check-in agents in summer.

“Our uniform is an iconic representation of our brand, something that will carry us into our future, representing the very best of modern Britain and helping us deliver a great British original service for our customers.”

SEAN DOYLE

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of British Airways

Over 1,500 of its staff gave their input into the design and tested the new collection over the last four years with secret trials in the air and on the ground. Taking inspiration from the airline, its people and the flight experience, Boateng developed unique bespoke fabrics and designs.

“Although the airline has a strong heritage, it was imperative to support in creating a fresh narrative of change and transcendence, while remaining timeliness,” he said.

A tailored three-piece suit was designed for the men with regular and slim-fit style trousers and dress, skirt and trouser options for women, as well as a modern jumpsuit, which is an airline first.

Boateng also created a tunic and hijab option for the global carrier. The airwave pattern found across the

entire uniform collection, including jackets, t-shirts, buttons and ties, was inspired by the air movement over an aircraft wing while the jacquard fabric across all of the tailored garments features variation of the airline's iconic speed marquee.

Over 90% of the airline's staff garments were produced using sustainable fabric from blends of recycled polyester. As part of its BA Better World commitment to work with sustainable suppliers, British Airways worked with manufacturers who are members of 'Better Cotton', a world leading sustainability initiative to help cotton communities survive and thrive while protecting and restoring the environment.

The airline's sustainability drive also saw the staff's old Julien MacDonald garments donated to charity or recycled to create toys, tablet holders and other things. A number of items were also gifted to the airline's museum.

Another British original that British Airways has rolled out is its new onboard safety video starring many of its staff, ordinary people and some well-known faces Britons going about their daily activities. Encompassing British wit and obsessions, the safety video is shown on its long-haul aircraft with inflight entertainment screens starting May 1.

For the summer season, British Airways will be launching its maiden four times weekly flight to Istanbul Sabiha Gokcen Airport from London Heathrow Airport on June 1 using the Airbus A320. The flights are now on sale and for Avios redemption. Avios is a reward currency collected by members of British Airways Executive Club.

For more information, visit www.ba.com



Oman Air's Network Expansion and Frequency Increases for Summer

For the summer schedule, Oman Air has introduced four new destinations and flight frequency increases to some of its existing routes, which represent a 60% increase in the number of flights from its hub in Muscat compared to the previous year.

This will provide the market with about 60,000 more seats weekly across its network. The national airline of the Sultanate of Oman said among its four new routes from Muscat to the Indian subcontinent, its four weekly flights to Chittagong in Bangladesh have started at end-March.

Of the remaining three, its four weekly flights to Maldives will begin from end-June while its 12 weekly flights to Lucknow and five weekly flights to Thiruvananthapuram will commence from August.

Owing to popular demand for Turkey, Oman Air has relaunched its daily flights to Trabzon and will be increasing its frequency to double daily to Istanbul in June.

Its other additional flight frequencies for the summer included cities such as Kuala Lumpur (KL), Mumbai, Paris and Kuwait, where it will also be having double daily flights in June.

Salah Sakhi Al Balushi, Oman Air Country Manager (Malaysia and Indonesia) said its daily Muscat-KL flight will be increased to 10 weekly flights in June. As part of its promotional activities in Malaysia, he gave away three round-trip economy-class tickets from KL to Muscat at the recent MATTA Fair March 2023 Buyers' Contest prize giving ceremony.

For more information, visit www.omanair.com or call 03-2145 6123



Vietnam Airlines Expands Its International Network

Expanding its international network to meet the increasing travel demand of passengers, Vietnam Airlines will be launching new routes connecting Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to Mumbai on May 20, 2023.

Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra, is India's second-most populous city. Rated among the top 10 business centres, it is also known as India's commercial and entertainment capital.

Using the Airbus A321, Vietnam Airlines will operate four flights weekly on the

Hanoi-Mumbai route, departing on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays while the thrice weekly Ho Chi Minh City-Mumbai route will depart on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

The new routes are expected to further strengthen trade, cultural, social and tourism ties between Vietnam and India. Currently, Vietnam Airlines also operates four flights a week from Hanoi to New Delhi and three flights a week from Ho Chi Minh City to New Delhi.

On its largest market, Japan, the airline has resumed all its routes, including between Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Tokyo Narita, Nagoya, Osaka, Fukuoka.

Its Da Nang and Tokyo Narita sector, which resumed on March 26, was welcomed with a Yosakoi dance, flowers, souvenirs and free flight tickets to three lucky guests.

Plans are afoot to increase its four weekly Da Nang-Tokyo Narita flights to daily frequency from July 1.

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Vietnam this year, Vietnam Airlines has been playing a crucial role connecting the two countries via cultural and economic ties. It transported over 1.6 million passengers in 2019 from Japan while the Da Nang-Tokyo Narita sector registered nearly 200,000 passengers.

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



All Nippon Airways Restores Its China Network

Moving in tandem with the increasing demand in the Chinese market, All Nippon Airways (ANA) is boosting its routes to China during the summer by increasing frequencies, resuming one route and launching a new daily service between Tokyo Haneda and Shenzhen from May 20.

From May 1, the airline is increasing its frequency on its Tokyo Narita-Shanghai Pudong and Tokyo Narita-Guangzhou to daily flights weekly from thrice weekly and twice weekly respectively. Its Tokyo Narita-Dalian route is scheduled to be increased from twice weekly to four times a week from May 5 while its Tokyo Narita-Beijing flights will be raised to thrice weekly from twice weekly on May 6.

ANA will also resume its thrice weekly service to Osaka Kansai and Shanghai Pudong route on June 5, which has been suspended since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. Besides these cities in mainland China, ANA will also be increasing its frequencies to Hong Kong from July.

Meanwhile, the airline has revised its consolidated results forecast for financial year ended 31 March 2023 as its international passenger revenue performed strongly due to the recovery in the demand for business and inbound travel after Japan relaxed its border control measures.

Its operating income is now at 120 billion yen compared to 95 billion yen previously announced on February 2 while its net income attributable to owners of the parent company stands higher at 89 billion yen.

For more information, visit www.ana.co.jp/group/en/my/ or call 03-2032 1331

UPCLOSE WITH SONG HOI-SEE

Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Plaza Premium Group



A Malaysian who is proud of his roots, Song Hoi-See not only founded his first independent lounge concept in 1998 at KL International Airport (KLIA) but returned 25 years later to unveil how he has transformed his local brand PPG into more than a world-class lounge service provider. Moving beyond the recent grand opening of the Plaza Premium Lounge (PPL) and Plaza Premium First (PPF), spanning 1,500 sq m at the Contact Pier of KLIA Terminal 1, at 66, the humble Song who hails from Sungai Udang but now resides in Hong Kong remains very passionate in what he does.

Calling both Malaysia and Hong Kong his home, he co-founded the Malaysian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, creating a business platform for Malaysians in Hong Kong. Song continues to be an inspiration in the hospitality and travel industry with his visionary ideas and ambitious plans in the post-pandemic era with his membership-based global loyalty programme Smart Traveller, different airport dining concepts, airport hotels and airport passenger services under its ALWAYS brand.

Share with us the plans for PPG's 25th anniversary celebration this year.

We will be unlocking a series of new experiences and creating more value for global travellers besides continuing on our transformation course, redefining airport hospitality by investing in technology, sustainability and our people. One of our key initiatives is opening more mega lounges where Kuala Lumpur was the first to kick off this elevated experience with our new PPL and PPF. Growing our global footprint, we recently opened two lounges in Rome and Adelaide, and will be launching in Japan and Jordan later this year.

In the coming months, we will also be unveiling one-of-a-kind experiences as well as introducing new food and beverage (F&B) concepts. We will continue to work together with like minded industry friends and partners to make travel better. Complementing our lounge experience, PPG has been strengthening our 360° airport hospitality experience leveraging technology and diversifying our offerings under the ALWAYS brand.

What are some of the highlights of your lounges and what distinguishes PPG from your competitors?

At PPG's second branded lounge in the United States, PPL Orlando has become one of our flagship spaces in the Americas. It is a family-friendly destination with a children's playroom and an interactive game wall. Additionally, "Their Patio" in Dubai is the first co-working space at the airport. At PPG, we focus on creating a holistic experience to complement our core lounge business. That is why we upgrade different aspects of our services such as technology, F&B offerings and design.

While the combo or mega lounge is not new, tell us more about its concept.

The mega lounge concept was first launched in Hong Kong housing PPF, PPL and our ALWAYS concierge services. The focus is not so much on its size but its offerings in terms of airport experience for different travel purposes and profiles, and anticipating changes in the way travel will be approached in the long term.

It is more than just a pre-flight space but a destination in its own right from one country to another. At PPG, we emphasize a "sense of place", in which we reflect local cultures in our in-lounge experience, including its interior and F&B offerings.

Where else do you plan to open them?

Besides our new location in KLIA, we have two new mega lounges in Toronto and Jakarta, with another two in Bangalore and Abu Dhabi in the pipeline.

By turning PPL and PPF in KLIA into a gallery space, what do you hope to achieve in your first exhibition collaboration with The Art People Gallery?

Through art, we strive to enrich the lounge experience by creating a dialogue with travellers using local culture. Working with this homegrown art gallery, our aim is to showcase the work of different local artists and the Malaysian heritage. We hope to attract the interest of art collectors and enthusiasts through these artists' diverse range of modern and contemporary masterpieces.

PPG has bounced back from the Covid-19 pandemic with more airport lounges. How did you achieve that?

We adapted to the ever-changing business environment and consumer demands by diversifying our business and offering more than just lounges. We focused on airport hospitality by working closely with airports and have equipped ourselves to anticipate and shape the future of the airport experience. While we founded the independent lounge concept, we also helped other brands create their airport lounge experiences.

Amid the pandemic, PPG propelled digital transformation and transformed into a global 360° airport hospitality company focusing on technology solution development. It has been rapidly growing in the Americas and Africa, where we see massive potential.

What is the recipe for your success?

Hard work, teamwork, resilience, and the ability to pivot. They have been demonstrated through PPG's growth and evolution over the past 25 years, helping us make it through the challenging times and reinventing ourselves as we look ahead. Another thing is you must maintain the quality of your offerings and services besides constantly reinventing them.

You mentioned that the barriers are high in what you are doing. What drives you then to persevere in this business?

When I first started PPG 25 years ago, it was even tougher because it was a completely new idea to the world. I spent much efforts convincing the airport authorities at HKIA and KLIA that a lounge other than an airline lounge would bring great value to travellers. Throughout the years, we have been able to earn trust and maintain good relationships with different stakeholders in the ecosystem and expanded the PPG network. I would say passion has been the driving force within me to make travel better for everyone and to make an impact in the airport hospitality industry.

How many airport terminal hotels under your award-winning Aerotel brand do you have? How are they performing, in particular the Aerotel hotel at KLIA Terminal 2 which opened in 2018?

We currently have 11 Aerotels globally offering a solution for travellers who need a place to sleep at the airport whether they are in transit or have an upcoming flight, Aerotel Beijing and Aerotel Muscat have received significant industry recognition. Our Aerotel's business performance at KLIA Terminal 2 has been steadily picking up since the reopening of international borders. The hotel's occupancy rates, average daily rate and revenue per available room have shown positive revenue growth as a result of incremental on passengers' load. A one-minute walk to the departure hall in KLIA Terminal 2 and its flexible hourly booking module have made it a prime choice among passengers. As a winner of Agoda Golden Circle Award 2019/2020, Aerotel Kuala Lumpur has maintained its highest customer service level by being attentive, friendly, and responsive to guests' needs.

Tell us more about ALWAYS?

ALWAYS, our all-encompassing global airport concierge service incorporates technology as one of its key competitive

advantages. In 2022, we launched Airport Passenger Services (APS), a digital enabled one-stop-shop airport management and operations solution for both B2B and B2C customers under ALWAYS with real-time tracking and analysis plus strong customer support. Our global footprint allows us to uniquely offer a comprehensive and seamless experience from departure to destination, curbside to tarmac, from airport lounges, hotels, dining to 360° passenger services that include Meet & Greet, buggy, porter, baggage wrap, airport transfer and carpark.

What are the projects identified in your digital transformation plans?

Emphasizing precision and seamlessness in the customer's experience, technology will remain a key focus in PPG's strategy moving forward. Our current key projects are TECO (Travel Experience Ecosystem) and Smart Traveller. We recently relaunched the latter and will be taking it to the next level, offering exclusive privileges, benefits as well as member-only services and experiences. We are upgrading this platform to introduce Point Conversion, tying it in with other travel rewards programs next month so that the members can enjoy unique privileges with our partners worldwide.

Please enlighten us about TECO.

TECO is a digital platform that combines operations, commercialisation, technology and all back-end tasks in one place. Our APS under ALWAYS is hosted on this platform which simplifies the booking processes for both business operators and consumers. Honoured to be trusted by two international airports, Hong Kong and Bangalore, as we introduced 360° solutions powered by TECO to create a seamless experience for travellers, we plan to gradually extend to other cities besides our lounges and Aerotels.

What legacy do you want to leave behind for the younger generation, including your own children who work in PPG?

Purpose, passion and values that they could apply in business and life. Both of my children hold key positions at PPG, with Mei Mei leading the Global Brand and Product team while Jonathan heads the Global Business Development team. I have confidence in what they do and hope to inspire them to lead with humility and compassion besides making an impact on the industry.

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