

# AIRLINK

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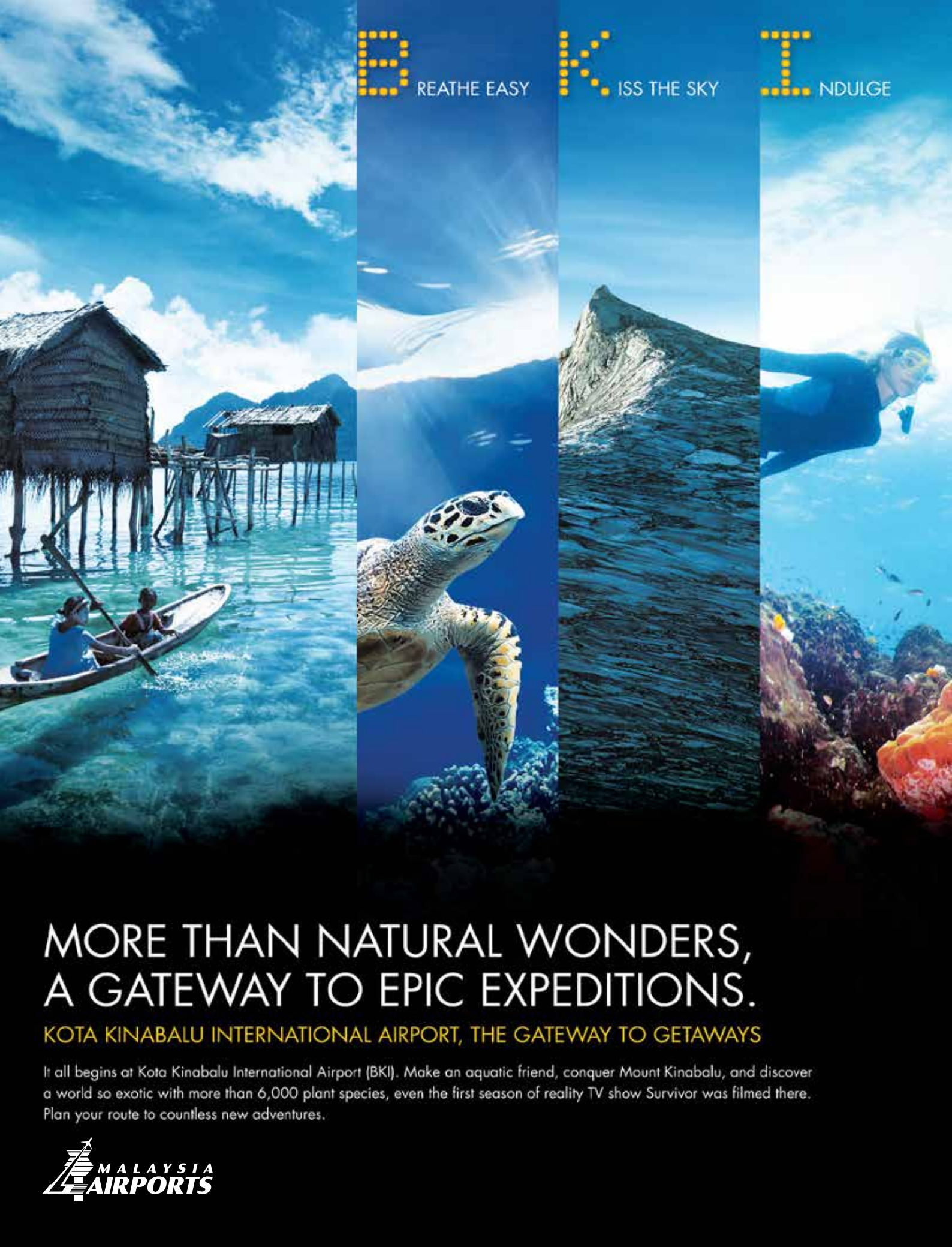
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## MORE THAN NATURAL WONDERS, A GATEWAY TO EPIC EXPEDITIONS.

**KOTA KINABALU INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, THE GATEWAY TO GETAWAYS**

It all begins at Kota Kinabalu International Airport (BKI). Make an aquatic friend, conquer Mount Kinabalu, and discover a world so exotic with more than 6,000 plant species, even the first season of reality TV show Survivor was filmed there. Plan your route to countless new adventures.



## Airport MD Speaks



**Dato' Sri Iskandar Mizal Mahmood**

*Managing Director*

*Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad*

**Dato' Sri 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 the nation celebrates the 60th Malaysia Day on September 16, he shares how the airport operator takes pride in playing a lead role in building the country's aviation sector. Its responsibilities extend beyond managing its network of 39 airports nationwide. They include expanding the facilities at its key airports such as Penang International Airport (PEN) and Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport (SZB), and providing a continuous learning platform for its airport community through its training provider, Malaysia Airports Academy (MAA). The momentum of more new airlines and routes as well as flights resumption continues unabated.**

I would like to encourage airport operators and those involved in air cargo operations to join the full-day refresher course on September 19 co-hosted by MAA and NACO Aviation Academy. Held at Sama-Sama Hotel, KL International Airport (KLIA), this hybrid event will feature two air cargo experts from Netherlands Airport Consultants (NACO) and one from Districon.

I am pleased to announce that Malaysia Airports Group reported a net profit of RM160.7 million on higher revenue of RM2.3 billion for the first half of 2023. We have also been witnessing steady traffic growth, with over 11 million passenger movements registered for July. Of this, 7.4 million came from our airports in Malaysia.

The Group also recorded international and domestic passenger movements of 5.4 million and 5.7 million, its highest volume year to-date. Representing 89% and 87% respectively of the passenger numbers for July 2019, they signal our consistent progress made towards full recovery of pre-pandemic volumes.

As announced earlier by the Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, we will be upgrading and expanding PEN and SZB. Work on PEN, expected to take four years, will be able to accommodate up to 12 million passengers annually upon its completion. PEN has already exceeded its capacity of 6.5 million passengers per annum.

Following the green light from the Cabinet for SZB to be upgraded to become a premium city airport that can handle up to eight million passengers annually under

the Subang Airport Regeneration Plan (SARP), we would like to reiterate that its role is complement KLIA Terminal 1 and 2 (KUL) operations besides catapulting Malaysia into a hub for maintenance, repair and overhaul facilities and private jet operations.

We are now finalising its implementation plan and investment recovery model with the relevant parties. We had commissioned feasibility studies from independent entities such as NACO and Deloitte Malaysia to provide validation and recommendations for the SARP and submitted them to both the transport and finance ministries.

Abiding by strict governance, we will ensure that the SARP goes through all the necessary approved procurement processes, including calling for an open tender for the construction and development of the airport terminal.

So far, a number of the local and foreign airlines such as Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia Malaysia and TransNusa from Indonesia, have expressed interest in introducing new flights and flying out from SZB.

Always happy to welcome more airlines to Malaysia and see them introducing new routes, we recently saw the advent of Super Air Jet's first international flight to KUL while Batik Air Malaysia had its inaugural flight from Auckland to KUL. In September, AirAsia X will be resuming its direct four-days weekly flights between Amritsar and KUL using Airbus A330-300. That's the spirit. Happy travelling!





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## Malaysia Sees Connectivity to More New Routes

For Malaysia's airline industry to remain robust, it must not only be responsive to global travel trends and what today's travellers are looking for. At the same time, they must also be able to match it with wider connectivity to more new routes and increased frequencies.

With the Malaysian Aviation Commission (MAVCOM) awarding a significant 87.5% increase in air traffic rights (ATRs) for the second quarter of 2023 (2Q23) compared with the same quarter in 2022, this signals an invigorated momentum within Malaysia's aviation industry as it recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to MAVCOM's latest Air Traffic Rights Report, the upswing in the ATRs bears testament to Malaysia's aviation industry's inherent strength and capacity to adapt and thrive. When compared against the second quarter of 2019 (2Q19), it said the ATR applications represented a 5.3% increase.

Out of the 57 ATRs given between April and June, 45 of them were for international routes and 12 for domestic. There were 12 more ATRs for international routes when compared with 2Q19, thus reflecting that the aviation industry is not only expanding but also returning to normalcy.

AirAsia secured the lion's share of the ATRs applications followed by Batik Air Malaysia. Together with its air logistics solution provider Teleport, AirAsia received 16 ATRs for international and domestic routes, which constituted 28% of the total ATRs awarded by MAVCOM.

#### Approved ATRs for cargo routes

Teleport, the logistics venture seeded by Capital A Berhad, formerly known as AirAsia Group, obtained ATRs for cargo routes plying Hong Kong (HKG) to Kuala Lumpur (KUL) and to key sectors in Kota Kinabalu (BKI), Kuching (KCH) and Tawau (TWU).

The company, which inducted the first of its Airbus A321 freighter aircraft on July 13 based out of KUL, previously used the passenger belly capacity of AirAsia aircraft to transport cargo. Now combined with the freighter and the belly space network capacity, Teleport's cargo market is not only expected to increase but also serve more customers.

Pete Chareonwongsak, Teleport Chief Executive Officer said the company is on track to generate US\$200 million in annual revenue. With its remaining two freighters, expected to be delivered in the fourth quarter of 2023 and the first quarter of 2024, Teleport will leverage on its multi-hub operating model and strengthen its position as Southeast Asia market leader in terms of cargo volume by tonnage.

Meanwhile, AirAsia X also received an ATR approval to service the KUL-Almaty (ALA), Kazakhstan route from MAVCOM while Batik Air Malaysia (OD) obtained ATR approvals to fly to new destinations such as Tashkent, Uzbekistan which it expects to commence later this year.

According to MAVCOM, the airlines are required to use their ATRs within six months from the approved effective date to avoid the expiry of the ATRs granted.

#### Aggressive network expansion

OD not only debuted a number of new routes but also resumed some of them of late. The airline commenced its twice weekly direct KUL-Jeddah (JED) flight on August 15 using its newly introduced Airbus A330-350 aircraft featuring 12 business and 365 economy class seats.

Working with Tourism Malaysia to establish KL International Airport as an umrah or pilgrimage hub, this key trunk service will be increased to six times weekly flights from September 2 and to daily departures by November 1.

Planning to connect the KUL-JED route with feeder services from Lion Group's other affiliate airlines, OD foresees strong growth in the immediate future, especially from the Middle East (ME) markets, including for travels to other Malaysian destinations such as Penang, Langkawi, Sabah and Sarawak. With 25% of the world's Muslim population residing in the ME region, the airline aims to collaborate with Saudi Tourism to further develop this market.

Its other new routes also include its four-times weekly flights from KUL to Naha, Okinawa (OKA) via Taipei (TPE) launched on August 16 using its new Boeing 737-8 with 180 seats. On that same day, the airline also started its new Medan-Penang route operating on the Boeing B737-800NG aircraft.

August 24 saw OD reinstating its direct daily KUL-Chennai (MAA) flights.

“

*By facilitating connectivity between the two, OD guarantees convenient entry to its broader network encompassing ASEAN points, North Asia, popular destinations in Australia and New Zealand (NZ) as well as the new destinations in Japan and South Korea.*

”

#### DATUK CHANDRAN RAMA MUTHY

Group Strategy Director  
of Lion Group

Welcoming its new six times weekly inaugural service from Auckland (AKL) to KUL via Perth (PER) on its new 162-seater Boeing 737-8 on August 25, Tourism Malaysia Senior Director of International Promotion Division (America/Europe/Oceania), Iskandar Mirza Mohd Yusof said Malaysia received 17,972 tourists from NZ from January to June, almost near the 18,000 arrivals for 2022. Its target this year is to achieve over 20,000 tourists.



Tourism Malaysia Deputy Director General (Promotion) Datuk Musa Yusof followed up with a timely week-long sales mission and roadshow on August 28 to Oceania, comprising visits to AKL and three Australian cities, namely Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. He was accompanied by tourism industry players such as travel agents and government representatives from Sabah, Labuan and Putrajaya.

OD is the third carrier serving the KUL-AKL sector besides Malaysia Airlines eight times weekly direct service and AirAsia X's daily service via Sydney using its widebody Airbus A330-300 aircraft.

Another carrier that has jumped into bandwagon to expand its network is MYAirline, which has been awarded by MAVCOM with ATR approvals to Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand. So far, MYAirline has launched its first international flight to Bangkok in June.

In line with Malaysia Aviation Group's (MAG) strategy to position BKI, the second busiest airport in the country to be a full-fledged regional hub for Firefly, MAVCOM has granted ATR approval for four times weekly flights from BKI to Narita (NRT), Japan and to TPE, Taiwan in May.

MAVCOM Executive Chairman Datuk Seri Saripuddin Kasim viewed the approved ATRs for 2Q23 as decisive measures specifically tailored to enhance connectivity, spur economic growth and catalyse the recovery of the aviation sector.

Its other new routes also include its four times weekly flights from KUL to Naha, Okinawa via Taipei launched on August 16 using its new Boeing 737-8 with 180 seats. On that same day, the airline also started its new Medan-Penang route operating on the Boeing B737-800NG aircraft.

“We are particularly encouraged to see airlines seizing these opportunities for expansion,” he added.





## Award-winning All Nippon Airways Continues Pursuit of High-Quality Services and Safety

Third-ranking All Nippon Airways (ANA) in the 2023 Airline of the Year by Skytrax has also received repeat recognition as the top leader in three major categories.

ANA is a 10-time recipient of World's Best Airport Services, an eight-time winner of the Best Airline Staff Service in Asia and a five-time recipient of World's Cleanest Airline.

“

*While we are humbled by these accolades, we are determined to continue improving our quality to bring about further innovation.*

*To meet the evolving needs of our passengers in the post-Covid era, we will raise our efforts to unite the world in wonder by offering customer-oriented service, products and experiences at the next level.*

**SHINICHI INOUE**”

President and Chief Executive Officer  
of All Nippon Airways (ANA)

As Japan's largest and five-star airline for 10 consecutive years, ANA strives to provide attentive and personalised service to its customers at every point of their journey, including check-in counters, lounges and boarding gates.

To realise a more convenient and smooth boarding experience, the airline is developing a new service model, ANA Smart Travel to evolve its digital services to enable its customers to access boarding information in

a timely manner on their mobile devices.

At the same time, it is integrating its staff services into its digital services by prioritising inclusive and universal services for customers.

The eight-time recipient of the Best Airline Staff Service in Asia award has been able to provide timely and personalised customer services by implementing a centralised information management system that connects customer data across various departments.

ANA also hosts customer skill contests at airports in Japan and overseas to enhance its staff's customer service skills and hospitality.

Meanwhile, as the world's cleanest airline, ANA has been credited for fostering staff awareness of hygiene and cleanliness via its in-house education.

On ANA's collaboration with the Pokémon Company, the airline is expanding its Pokémon Air Adventures with the launch of a second uniquely painted aircraft, Eevee Jet NH (IATA code for ANA), which will enter service on August 31.

Its second aircraft will be accompanied by a range of specialty products and services, including merchandise and in-flight entertainment.

ANA's first Pikachu Jet NH took its first flight earlier on June 4.

For more information, call **+603-2032 1331** or visit **[www.ana.co.jp/group/en/my](http://www.ana.co.jp/group/en/my)**



## British Airways Invests Multimillion Pounds in New Pilot Cadet Scheme

British Airways (BA) will level the playing field by providing fund to train for up to 60 places a year under its pilot cadet programme, with those passing the course offered a job with the airline at a starting salary of £34,000 per year, plus allowances.

This multi-million-pound initiative will remove the initial high-cost barrier of training to become a professional pilot, thus making it a realistic option for those aged 18-55 as private training costs for aspiring pilots can cost around £100,000.

“

*Our new Speedbird Pilot Academy will make the ambition of becoming a BA pilot a reality for people who had previously written the option off because of the cost barrier.*

*We fly to more than 200 destinations around the world on a range of aircraft types, providing pilots with an abundance of opportunities and making a career as a BA pilot extremely rewarding. This first-in-a-generation initiative will allow anyone to make it a reality.*

**SEAN DOYLE**”

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer  
of British Airways (BA)

Applications will open in September, with training planned to start in 2024. Successful candidates will gain a place at one of the approved flight training colleges, with all tuition costs covered by BA.

The Speedbird Pilot Academy is one part of the airline's wider pilot recruitment plan. BA, which employs about 4,000 pilots, is working with the United Kingdom (UK)

Armed Forces to provide military pilots new career opportunities in commercial aviation once their agreed service period has ended.

The airline has worked closely with Fantasy Wings, a leading UK organisation for diversity in aviation and a member of the BA Better World Community Fund to promote careers to young people from other backgrounds (such as Asian and minority ethnic groups) as well as young women in the aviation industry.

Meanwhile, BA has announced that Istanbul's Sabiha Gökçen Airport will become a year-round destination as the airline continues with its four-times weekly service launched since June from London Heathrow into the winter season starting October 29.

For more information, visit **[www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)**





Comprising Cathay Pacific Airways (CX) and its low-cost carrier Hong Kong Express, the Cathay Group, expects strong travel demand seen in July to remain through the rest of its summer peak season in August.

Now close to 60% of its pre-pandemic passenger flight capacity levels, the Group is on track to achieve its target of 70% covering 80 destinations by end-2023, said Chief Customer and Commercial Officer of CX, Lavinia Lau.

Confident of returning to 100% pre-pandemic capacity by end-2024, the Cathay Group chalked a milestone when it flew more than two million passengers in July for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic. CX alone carried 1,744,374 passengers in July where its load factor stood at 89.3%, up from 87.7% in June.

She said, "July marked the beginning of the traditional summer peak for passenger travel," pointing out that CX added 11% more capacity compared with June, mainly on its North America, Europe, Japan and Southeast Asia routes due to rising demand for visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and leisure travel.



**Cathay Group Surpasses Two Million Passengers in July**

“Long-haul flights both to and from Hong Kong were especially popular in the first half of July among VFR travellers. Subsequently, with the start of the school holidays in mid-July, there was a substantial increase in demand for popular short-haul destinations around Asia.”

**LAVINIA LAU**

Chief Customer and Commercial Officer of Cathay Pacific (CX)

CX recently won Skytrax 2023 Award for Best Inflight Entertainment for the first time and ranked eighth among the world's best airlines.

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

Low-cost carrier (LCC) Super Air Jet flew into KL International Airport (KUL) Terminal 1 on its first international flight on August 23, connecting Malaysia's capital city to two of Indonesia's popular destinations, Lombok (LOP) and Surabaya (SUB).

The flight was welcomed by His Excellency Hermono, Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to Malaysia, Mohamed Sallauddin Mohamed Shah, General Manager Aviation Marketing and Development of Malaysia Airports as well as Captain Boentoro Suharianto and Novianti M Harahap, Operations Director and Commercial Director respectively of Super Air Jet.



**Super Air Jet's Maiden International Route to Kuala Lumpur**

departs KUL to return to LOP at 8pm.

Targeted at the young business professionals and millennial travellers looking for new adventures and unique destinations, Super Air Jet places top priority on convenience, promptness and excellent service, said its Main Director and Chief Executive Officer Ari Azhari.

Incepted since June 25, 2021, Super Air Jet's fleet comprises 59 Airbus A320-200s, which currently serves 204 routes across 29 cities in Indonesia, with an average of 240 departures daily. The airline is guided by its vision, which is "To Empower the Next Generation to Reach New Heights".

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



**Bangkok Airways' Milestones Achieved In Its 55th Year**

Bangkok Airways Public Company Limited, which is celebrating its 55th anniversary this year, has not only been receiving recognition for the airline but also for two of the airports it manages.

Under the EIA Symposium and Monitoring Awards 2023 for transport (airport) projects, Samui Airport received the Outstanding Award while the Excellent Award went to Sukhothai Airport for the fourth time.

Also known as Asia's boutique airline, Bangkok Airways operates good environmental standards and shows both social and environmental responsibility in its business operations. It considers these two awards as another success.

At the recent Skytrax 2023 World Airline Awards held in Paris, Bangkok Airways was named the World's Best Regional Airline for the eighth year and Best Regional Airline in Asia for 13 years. For the World Airline Awards, regional airlines are defined as full-service carriers that primarily operate domestic and/or international flights up to six hours.

Bangkok Airways is now ranked 29th among the Top 100 World's Best Airlines category by Skytrax.

The airline recently commenced its thrice-weekly direct service between Lampang and Mae Hong Son using the 70-seater ATR 72-600 aircraft, with its promotional fare for this new route valid until end-2023. Bangkok Airways has a fleet size of 30 aircraft, of which 11 are ATR 72-600s as of March 31.

Meanwhile, Bangkok Airways has been granted Airline Retailing Maturity (ARM) status under the ARM Index programme.

Being the first airline in Thailand to attain the ARM Index certification is an important milestone for us.

In recent years, airline retailing has been one of the biggest disruptions in the industry. Bangkok Airways has been actively developing additional enhanced retailing capabilities for our New Distribution Capability (NDC) channel.

Bangkok Airways' strategy is geared towards our goal of becoming an omni-channel airline, where customers have the choice of when and how they interact with the airline.

**PUTTIPONG PRASARTTONG-OSOTH**

President of Bangkok Airways

NDC is a travel industry-supported programme launched by the International Air Transport Association that allows airlines and travel agents to communicate more easily using an extensible markup language-based data transmission standard.

For more information, call +603-2148 0829 or visit [www.bangkokair.com](http://www.bangkokair.com)





## Vietnam Airlines Expands Tie-up with Expedia Group

Vietnam Airlines has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Expedia Group to expand their relationship to drive growth with its fares and inventory available on the latter's global online platform, thus ensuring real-time availability, accurate pricing and seamless booking processes.

The two parties plan to collaborate in areas of mutual interest to enhance customer experience, expand market reach and increase revenue streams.

Vietnam's flag carrier will also be engaging with Expedia Group Media Solutions to raise the airline's brand awareness as well as promote and market its flights to Expedia Group's global customer base. The airline currently operates 97 routes to 21 domestic and 29 international destinations.

“As travel recovery continues in Asia, Expedia Group is committed to expanding opportunities to experience this unique region. Over the years, we have had a great relationship with Vietnam Airlines in select markets. We are proud to further expand upon that on a global scale.”

**GREG SCHULZE**

Senior Vice President of Strategic Travel Partners for Expedia Group

Meanwhile, Vietnam Airlines, voted as one of the world's 20 best airlines in 2023 by Airline Ratings, has been selected as the host airline for the inaugural World

Aviation Safety and Operations Conference (WSOC) to be held in Hanoi from September 19 to 21, 2023 partly in view of its safety capabilities.

Themed Leadership in Action: Driving Safer and More Efficient Operations, the WSOC is organised by the International Air Transport Association (IATA). It brings together the previous Cabin Ops Safety Conference, the IATA Safety Conference and the Emergency Response Planning and Aircraft Recovery Forums.

Vietnam Airlines President and Chief Executive Officer Le Hong Ha, IATA Director General Willie Walsh and Philippines Airlines President-cum-Chief Operating Officer Captain Stanley K Ng will be participating in the WSOC Opening Plenary panel discussion.

For more information, call **+603-2031 1666** or visit **[www.vietnamairlines.com](http://www.vietnamairlines.com)**



## Premium Aero FastTrack Transfer for Smoother Airport Experience

The Airport FastTrack service offered at the KL International Airport (KLIA) Terminal 1 and Terminal 2 has added a dedicated Aero FastTrack transfer from the Main Terminal Building (MTB) to the Satellite Building (SB) and vice versa.

Introduced in May 2023, the transfer service is targeted at those looking for the ultimate comfort and luxury VIP treatment for their airport journey besides appealing to the time-conscious travellers wishing for a hassle-free experience, particularly for their departure and arrival at KLIA Terminal 1.

Among those who used the Aero FastTrack service are the corporates, travel agents and hotels. On hand to provide a smooth navigation throughout their airport journey is its helpful and friendly Airport FastTrack Greeter who will meet the passenger at the counter next to the International Departure Gate A.

The passenger will then be accompanied to take the buggy ride to the holding area. From there, the transfer will be done using a premium vehicle to the Satellite Building. Subsequently, the passenger will be escorted to the departure gate.

The Aero FastTrack service also includes access to the immigration fast lane as well as buggy rides at both the MTB and SB.

Premium vehicles are deployed to ensure a seamless transfer experience for those choosing this paid instead of using the complimentary buses provided by the airport for passengers which run around the clock.

Open to all passengers travelling with any airline and on any ticket class for both their departure and arrival, the Aero FastTrack service is available at RM350 per transfer. Each transfer can take up to three persons.

Travellers can purchase an add-on package for a full Airport FastTrack service, which includes meet and greet from the airport's kerbside to the departure gate or vice versa for arrival, speedy clearance for arrivals and/or departures, transit or transfers and baggage assistance.

For more information, call **+603 8776 4606** or visit **[www.myairportfasttrack.com](http://www.myairportfasttrack.com)**







## IndiGo Continues 17 Years of Its Trailblazing Legacy

Having established many 'firsts' over the last 17 years, India's low-cost carrier (LCC), IndiGo, remains dedicated to forge new frontiers and elevate its customers' flying experience.

With a fleet size of 316 aircraft, the airline operates about 1,900 daily flights and connects 79 domestic destinations.

Soon to grow its international footprint to 32 destinations, IndiGo commenced its new daily direct flights between Mumbai and Nairobi, Kenya's capital and largest city as its 27th international and 105th overall destination in its network on August 5.

This route marks its maiden foray into the African subcontinent and the safari capital.

Celebrating its 17th anniversary on August 4, IndiGo highlighted 17 game-changing achievements that propelled the LCC to be a pioneering force and contributed to its legacy of innovation and excellence.

IndiGo was named the Best Low-Cost Airline in India and South Asia for the 13th time in a row at the recent prestigious Skytrax 2023 World Airline Awards in Paris.

It also earned the recognition as the only Indian airline to be ranked among the world's top 50 most valuable airline brands in 2023 by Brand Finance for three consecutive years.

During the first quarter (1Q) of its financial year (FY) 2024 ended June 30, a record 26.2 million passengers flew

with IndiGo, 30% up compared to the 1Q of FY 2023.

Operationally, despite a myriad of complexities and intricacies related to operating at such a large scale, IndiGo operated an average on-time performance of 89% and a very low cancellation rate of 0.30% during the June quarter.

“Going forward, we remain committed to our promise of providing on-time, affordable, courteous, and hassle-free travel experience across a wide network

**PIETER ELBERS**

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)  
of IndiGo

On June 19, the airline announced a sizeable firm order for 500 aircraft of the Airbus A320 family. It is not only IndiGo's largest order but also the largest ever single aircraft order placed by any airline with Airbus to be delivered until the middle of the next decade.

“This order speaks of the growth and future of Indian aviation where we are proud to play a pivotal role,” said its Dutch CEO while reminding of IndiGo's previous orders totalling around 480 aircraft yet to be delivered between now and the end of this decade.

For more information, call **+603-2145 8533** or visit **www.golndigo.in**



## Strong Travel Rebound Propels Thai Airways Forward

Thai Airways International Public Company Limited, which reported a group net profit of 2.2 billion baht for the second quarter (2Q), expects to complete its rehabilitation plan by the fourth quarter of 2024 ahead of its initial target set in 2025.

Thanks to strong demand for flights to China and Japan, Thailand's flagship carrier has increased flight frequencies to several popular destinations, namely Beijing, Shanghai, Kunming, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Haneda and Fukuoka, thus resulting in higher passengers served in the 2Q.

For its summer schedule from August 2 to October 28, the airline has resumed its Bangkok-Sapporo route to five times weekly using the Boeing 787-9 aircraft. Europe and Australia are other its key markets.

Thai Airways, together with its subsidiaries, currently operates a total of 67 aircraft, including the Airbus A320-200s under Thai Smile Airways.

To further strengthen its position as the gateway carrier to Thailand and Asia Pacific, the airline plans to start daily service to Istanbul from its Bangkok hub in December following the recent signing of a memorandum of understanding with Turkish Airlines.

The two will work towards a joint venture to maximise the synergies arising from this strategic partnership to promote tourism between both countries, among other things.

“This cooperation would enhance our efficiencies and Turkish Airlines's in terms of connectivity and route network.

Our customers will be able to conveniently travel between Thailand and Türkiye as well as on to Europe and other points in Asia, making full use of the extensive networks offered by both airlines.

**CHAI EAMSIRI**

Chief Executive Office  
of Thai Airways

For more information, call **+603-2034 6999** or visit **www.thairways.com.my**





# UPCLOSE WITH DATIN CHRISTINA TOH

National President of Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH)

**P**enang-born Datin Christina Toh, in her mid-50s, is also the chairwoman of MAH's training arm, Malaysian Association of Hotels Training and Education Centre (MAHTEC).

Appointed since May 2022 as MAH's first lady national president in the 49 years of its establishment, the association and its 13 chapters represent 1,089 members and 1,007 hotels nationwide.

They supply a total of 162, 705 rooms, which is almost half of the country's guest accommodation.

Much as she likes to read self-empowerment books and non-fiction novels, she has not been able to do so since the borders reopened.

**Being the association's first lady president, how does it feel? What initiatives were introduced in order to help the hospitality industry recover from the Covid-19 pandemic?**

My appointment shows that our members acknowledge gender equality and realise the important role women play in today's commercial world. We were just coming out from the pandemic when I assumed my position in 2022. Our focus then was on the safety and cleanliness to ensure that our hotels meet or exceed the international hygiene and safety standards.

Through the Travel Safety Alliance Malaysia where MAH appointed Bureau Veritas Malaysia as an independent auditor of this certification programme, we collaborated with the Malaysian Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers (MACEOS), Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents and the Malaysia Aviation Group to ensure that it is clean and safe to travel to Malaysia.



The pandemic experience over the past two years made us realise that the hotel industry could reinvent itself with hotel being used as quarantine centres. We had a lot of sharing on innovative ways to get enough staffing as well as to reskill and upskill our team.

**Tell us more about the efforts to innovate and uplift the hospitality industry now that you are more than a year into your term.**

Since we did not have enough manpower during the recovery period from the pandemic, everyone went on flexi working hours. We procured support from the administration to have the staff perform multi-tasking, where certain hours the administration team were dressed down into their t-shirts to help clean the hotel rooms or assist to set up for breakfast and were F&B servers as well.

MAH recently organised the first Hospitality Leadership Conference to elevate knowledge sharing towards hospitality and tourism post-pandemic for the General Managers and Senior Managers of the industry. Through MAHTEC, we collaborated with a few local universities as well as hotel and tourism colleges to enhance, upskill and reskill the MAH members.

We must also generate a sense of ownership and pave their hospitality career.

The introduction of artificial intelligence machines and systems are one of the few ways to address manpower shortage but in the hotel business, we are always at the forefront. Hence, face-to-face customer service will continue to be prioritised.

**How do you describe your leadership style?**

I am a firm advocate of inclusive management. To me, in today's working environment, you need to have empathy and respect for your peers and subordinates. Teamwork also plays a pivotal role in our hotel business.

We need to understand and integrate the stakeholders' job responsibility in meeting customer service. We must also generate a sense of ownership and pave their hospitality career.

**During your last 20 years as a Board with MAH, you have seen the hotel industry go through its ups and downs. What are your observations on it?**

Every cycle has a learning and upscaled journey. Digitalisation, technology, automation and data analytics are the key trends in supporting the hotels' service standards of operations, and to also measure and gauge through data on customers' experience and expectation.

Additionally, the industry needs to redefine how we can establish an education system to overcome workforce challenges and to equip Gen Z with a new lifelong learning.

We need to transform our commercial approach in doing business via online bookings and the various approaches through social media marketing.

**What has MAH done to woo more leisure and MICE tourists to Malaysia as we prepare for Visit Malaysia Year 2026?**

We have bonded very well with tourism and other hospitality and travel-related associations and by having more collaborative networking sessions, be it physical or hybrid.

We collectively work together with the airlines, travel agencies, convention bureaus and theme park associations to promote Malaysia as a tourist destination of choice. We can never do this on a silo basis.

**What are the measures undertaken by MAH to address the manpower shortage in the hospitality industry?**

Besides upskilling and reskilling our hotel associates, we are also working with the local hospitality, tourism and culinary schools.

We recently had a human resource conference for the hotel industry and asked ourselves, "How do we introduce hospitality as an industry of choice?".

We would most likely need to reach out to the Education Ministry to create more awareness among public school students of the diverse opportunities offered by hotel industry.

There are multiple options. For example, administration, finance, technical, mechanical and electrical as well as sales and marketing. Other fields open to them are marketing and communications, which include digital social media marketing.

Students are now more selective and prefer to work in more fun-loving places in the gig economy related jobs as part-time drivers. Perhaps we need to create community job opportunities and create more awareness on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

**What is MAHTEC's current focus?**

Started since 1998 as a learning and development service provider, MAHTEC has now taken a different portfolio and gone into collaborations on two prongs. One is on skill sets to understand our members' needs and the other is on their career enhancement via continuing education.

We are collaborating and partnering through the various hospitality and tourism colleges as well as universities, both locally and internationally.

**Have your member hotels recovered from the pandemic?**

We are still in the recovery stage. Thankfully, there are now more airlines and flight resumption, which are flying directly and through the various domestic and international destinations.



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