

AIRLINK

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Airport MD Speaks

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 he rejoices as Langkawi International Airport (LGK) received its win for Best Airport of two to five million passengers in Asia Pacific (APAC) at the recent Airports Council International Customer Experience Global Summit held in South Korea although the results for the annual Airports Service Quality Awards had been announced earlier in the year. He looks forward to the upcoming Centre for Aviation (CAPA) Asia Aviation Summit and Sustainability Awards for Excellence 2023 from November 2 to 3 where Malaysia Airports plays host.

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

I would like to announce that to date, we have received confirmation from some 20 local and foreign speakers of their participation at the one-and-a-half-day CAPA conference to be held at Sama-Sama Hotel KLIA. As the perfect host, we have arranged an hour of cruise tour of the scenic Putrajaya Lake before the start of the conference proper.

Meanwhile, we are proud that Sama-Sama Hotel KLIA has bagged the Airport Hotel of the Year for the APAC region at the recent Airport Food and Beverage (FAB) + Hospitality Conference & Awards 2023 in Bangkok which returned after a four-year absence due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

During our Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim's recent bilateral meeting with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in New York, it was announced that Malaysia Airports will continue operating the Istanbul Sabiha Gokchen International Airport (SAW) and that Turkiye is keen to expand their airport operations here, including building a longer runway

We are grateful for the confidence they have in us managing SAW, which is the sixth busiest airport in Europe. The airport has been showing strong traffic momentum, surpassing pre- pandemic passenger volumes for at least three consecutive months this year.

As for LGK, we have been working closely with the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) and are in discussions with ITAKA, one of Poland's largest tour operators, to bring in direct chartered flights from Warsaw to Langkawi next year.

Malaysia Airports has an Airlines X-Celeration Programme while LADA has its Charter Flight Incentive Programme to woo charter flight operators to consider our legendary island of Langkawi.

So far, Batik Air Malaysia has been mounting weekly chartered services from Chengdu to Langkawi from July to October using the 180-seat Boeing 737-800 aircraft to bring in tourists who had bought holiday packages from Sichuan Global Travel Service Company, China. Other airlines that fly into Langkawi are AirAsia, Firefly, Malaysia Airlines, MYAirline and Scoot.

On September 28, we had Xiamen Air launching its thrice-weekly direct service from Xiamen to Penang on B737-800. Earlier on September 21, another Chinese carrier Sichuan Airlines commenced its inaugural flight from Haikou to Kuala Lumpur on Airbus A321.

We are always ready to receive more new airlines and routes to our country, with its rich and diverse attractions. 'Selamat Datang' or welcome to Malaysia!



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Global Passenger Traffic in 2024 to Recover to 2019 Level

Entering into the last quarter of 2023, global passenger traffic has been projected to recover in early 2024, reaching 9.4 billion passengers to surpass 2019's 9.2 billion passengers.

According to Airports Council International (ACI) World's latest quarterly air travel outlook, 2024 will be a milestone year for global passenger traffic recovery with 2023's figure expected to reach 8.6 billion passengers or 94.2% of 2019 level.

ACI World said the gap between its Business-as-Usual forecast from 2019 and the current recovery projection reveals that the percentage of lost traffic continues to decrease on a quarterly basis, from -23% in the first quarter of 2023 to -13% in fourth quarter of 2024.

ACI World Director General Luis Felipe de Oliveira projects that global air travel will nearly return to pre-pandemic levels by end-2023, with all regions expected to reach this milestone by 2024, citing upside factors such as the Chinese market reopening and the surge in domestic travel.

The Latin America-Caribbean region will be the first to surpass its 2019 level as it is estimated to reach 707 million passengers in 2023 or 102.9% of 2019 level.

The Middle East, which was the fastest recovering market in 2022, is expected to reach 394 million in 2023 or 96.8% of 2019 level and 429 million passengers in 2024.

Asia Pacific (APAC), meanwhile, is forecast to achieve to about 3.4 billion passengers in 2024 or 99.5% of 2019's level. The region is expected to see a huge jump in passenger traffic in the first half of 2023.

ACI World predicts APAC's recovery in the second half will be slowed down due to challenges in overseas tourism and looming economic concerns.

While Subhas Menon, Director General of the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines acknowledged that uncertainties in the wider macroeconomic environment and increased living costs might lead to reduced travel spending, he envisaged the start of the second half to show continued strong recovery for Asian airlines due to sustained growth in major Asian economies fuelling the appetite for international travel.

Overall, the first seven months 2023 saw the region's airlines carrying an aggregate total of 147 million international passengers, up 259% compared to the previous corresponding period, buoyed by steady resumption of travel within the region and beyond.

“The outlook for Asian airlines remains positive as carriers continue to grow networks to meet travel demand and return gradually to profitability whilst maintaining their dedication to safety and sustainability.”

SUBHAS MENON
Director General
of the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines

According to Centre for Aviation (CAPA) and OAG, a leading data platform for the global travel industry, seat capacity in APAC has recovered to 97.3% of 2019 levels for the week of August 28 2023, driven largely by domestic capacity, which is 6.7% ahead of 2019 level.

Within the broader APAC region, there remains a lot of variance between the sub-regions, with Northeast Asia lagging behind Southeast Asia and Australasia.

Although Northeast Asia's international seat recovery stood at 65% of 2019 level compared to Southeast Asia (78.7%), Southwest Pacific (87.4%) and South Asia slightly ahead of 2019 levels, this sub-region, which includes markets such as Japan, Hong Kong and mainland China, is still key to APAC's recovery rate as they are some of the largest source of leisure travellers before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data by both CAPA and OAG also showed international seat capacity by APAC airlines gaining ground, recovering to 79.1% of 2019 level by end-August fuelled by travel demand.

Although airlines in APAC still have some catching up versus other regions such as Europe and North America, the gap has narrowed considerably this year.

Megahub Airports in Asia Pacific

OAG's newly released Megahubs 2023, which ranks the world's Top 50 most internationally connected airports, has London's Heathrow Airport (LHR) reclaiming its lead position, which it last held in 2019 while KL International Airport (KUL) has climbed eight places from 12th to fourth, showing the resilience and adaptability of airports worldwide.

Narrowing it to the Global Top 20 Megahubs, seven of the airports in located in the Asia Pacific (APAC) region with Tokyo's Haneda International Airport (HND) ranked fifth.

Meanwhile, five of APAC's Top 10 Megahubs are sited in Southeast Asia (SEA). They include South Korea's Incheon International Airport (ICN), Thailand's Suvarnabhumi or Bangkok International Airport (BKK) and Singapore Changi Airport (SIN).

When it comes to the Top 25 Megahub airports for international low-cost connections, 52% of them are located in APAC, clearly reflecting the dominance of

low-cost carriers (LCCs) in South Asia and SEA, where almost 63% and 53% of the flights are operated by LCCs. KUL emerged top among these megahubs, with AirAsia operating 34% of its flights.



In terms of the Top 10 Airline by seats volume for September, Indonesia's Lion Air remains SEA's largest carrier, with almost three million seats capacity unchanged from August's figures.

This is followed by AirAsia's 2.4 million seats and Vietnam Airlines, which has one of the youngest and most modern fleet in Asia that includes the Boeing 787 Dreamliner, Airbus A350-900 XWB and A321neo.



The other airlines are VietJet Air, Batik Air, Cebu Pacific Air, Thai AirAsia, Singapore Airlines, Philippine Airlines and Citilink, Garuda's LCC, which has 250 flights daily throughout Indonesia and international routes such as KUL, Penang (PEN) and SIN.



Emirates Anticipates Unabated International Travel Demand to Continue

Marking one of its busiest summers after carrying over 14 million passengers across six continents with average seat load factors exceeding 80% across its global network between June and August, Emirates expects another spike in international travel demand in the coming months judging from the forward booking trends.

During the summer months, two million customers travelled to the airline's hub Dubai whose top inbound markets include the United Kingdom, India, Germany, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, China, Egypt and Kuwait.

“Travel demand across our network has been strong and resilient despite the rising cost of living pressures in many markets. From June to August, we operated nearly 50,000 flights to and from 140 cities.”

ADNAN KAZIM
Chief Commercial Officer
of Emirates

Celebrating the world-renowned German festival Oktoberfest onboard its triple daily flights from Dubai to Frankfurt and double daily flights to Munich, Dusseldorf and Hamburg, Emirates is serving traditional Bavarian cuisine and German entertainment between September 16 and October 3.

Besides complimentary pastries, passengers will also be given a parting gift of individually wrapped gingerbread hearts with Oktoberfest decoration. Its airport lounges in Munich and Düsseldorf also feature an array of dishes of German fare.



Meanwhile, Emirates has announced it will be adding a third daily flight to Hong Kong via Bangkok operated by Boeing 777-300ER in a three-class configuration from November 1. This new service will complement its existing two daily direct flights, thus increasing its services to 21 flights weekly to meet the growing market demand.

The airline will also be upgrading its services to Sydney into all Airbus A380 double-decker aircraft in a three-class configuration that offers 489 seats with its third daily flight starting November 4, thus replacing B777-300ER currently deployed on EK 416 and 417.

Its third A380 service will translate into nearly extra 2,000 available seats a week besides complementing Emirates' two other Sydney A380 four-class services, which offer its latest Premium Economy cabin.

For more information, visit www.emirates.com



Malaysia Airlines to Expand Connectivity

Oneworld Alliance member Malaysia Airlines is expanding its footprint to its key market India with three additional services from Kuala Lumpur (KUL) to Amritsar (ATQ), Thiruvananthapuram (TRV) and Ahmedabad (AMD) for the northern winter season.

The national carrier will begin flying twice weekly to Amritsar starting November 8 and the following day to TRV. On December 1, it will resume its KUL-AMD route with four-weekly services. These three routes will be operated by Boeing 737-800 New Generation (NG) aircraft comprising 16 business and 144 economy class seats.

The expansion will bring the airline's point-to-point connectivity to nine key hubs in India as it currently operates direct flights to New Delhi, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kochi.

“We are looking at restoring our pre-Covid-19 capacity back in the Indian market by the end of this year and will also look to increase flight frequencies to other destinations.”

DATUK CAPTAIN IZHAM ISMAIL
Group Managing Director
of Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG)

According to OAG Schedules Analyser for December, India will account for about 11% of Malaysia Airlines' international capacity after Australia at 11.5% and Indonesia (15.3%), its top two international markets in terms of seat capacity.

With increasing demands for travel, Malaysia Airlines is also boosting its frequencies in other key markets such as Australia. Starting December, it will increase its frequencies from KUL to Melbourne (MEL) and Sydney (SYD) from 14 flights weekly to 15 and 16 flights weekly respectively.

In China, its flights from KUL to Guangzhou (CAN) will be increased from five to seven flights weekly; Beijing (PKX) from three to seven flights weekly; Shanghai (PVG) from nine to 10 flights weekly and Hong Kong (HKG) from 11 to 14 flights weekly.

In ASEAN, Malaysia Airlines will raise its frequencies to Jakarta (CGK) from 28 to 35 flights weekly; Bangkok (BKK) from 34 to 42 flights weekly and Ho Chi Minh City (SGN) from 15 to 19 flights weekly to offer travellers more travel flexibility and choices.

Besides the new routes and increased frequencies, Dersenish Aresandiran, MAG Chief Commercial Officer of Airlines Business, said Malaysia Airlines has also launched new product offerings such as MHsports, which provides groups of five or more travelling for sporting purposes with various perks.

They include special fares, extra 10kg baggage allowance as well as flexible date and time changes. Besides the convenience of extending their journey with a flexible return date, customers can also change their travellers up to 24 hours before departure, enjoy complimentary pre-selected seating and advance check-in.

For more information, visit www.malaysiaairlines.com



Batik Air Malaysia and CAE Seal 10-Year Pilot Training Deal

Malaysian-based Batik Air and global aviation training leader, CAE, have inked a 10-year pilot training agreement at the 19th Asia Pacific Airline Training Symposium 2023 held recently in Singapore to further elevate its pilot training and standards.

The airline, formerly known as Malindo Air, will adopt CAE Rise's data-driven training system which leverages advanced analytics to deliver more effective training and enhanced operational safety while CAE will operate an advanced Boeing 737 MAX full-flight simulator at Batik Air Malaysia's facility in Kuala Lumpur.

“CAE's B737 MAX simulator will enable our pilots to have real-time handling aircraft experience during the training, which in turn will ensure that our pilots possess the skills and assurance to navigate the skies with confidence.”

DATUK CHANDRAN RAMA MUTHY

Group Strategy Director
of Batik Air Malaysia and Lion Group

CAE's recently released 2023 Aviation Talent Forecast has projected a huge need for aviation professionals in various sectors, with the airlines requiring 252,000 pilots, 328,000 maintenance technicians and 599,000 cabin crew members over the next decade.

Batik Air Malaysia currently operates a fleet of Airbus A330 to A300, B737-8, B737-800 and ATR72-600 aircraft for domestic and international flights.



The airline recently welcomed chartered flights from Guilin to Penang on B737-8 Max in time to support China's Golden Week holidays. “China has always been one of Penang's top three tourist arrivals,” said Wong Hon Wai, Penang State Exco for Tourism and Creativity Economy.

Also present to welcome the passengers from Guilin, popularly known as the Jewel of China with its breathtaking natural scenery, picturesque limestone karst formations and serene Li River, on September 17 was Zhou Youbin, China's Consul General and Batik Air Malaysia sales general manager Navarajan Subramaniam.

This direct twice-weekly chartered service will operate until October 26.

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



Qatar Airways to Increase Flights to Kuala Lumpur in Mid-December

Following the resumption of its daily services from Doha to Penang via Phuket on October 29 on the Boeing 777 aircraft, Qatar Airways will be increasing its flights to four times daily to Kuala Lumpur from December 15.

This brings to a total of 28 weekly flights, where 14 weekly flights will be operated by its codeshare partner, Malaysia Airlines, to meet the growing travel demand from passengers.

Meanwhile, the multi award-winning airline, Qatar Airways recently garnered four wins in Business Traveller Awards 2023 in London. They are for Best Long-Haul Airline, Best Business Class, Best Middle Eastern Airline and Best Inflight Food & Beverage.

“We are particularly pleased that our flagship product Q-Suite and industry-leading Business Class service have been once again acknowledged as the best in the world. We continue to expand our network, engage in thrilling sports and cultural partnerships, and deliver to our passengers the highest quality of experience.”

HIS EXCELLENCY AKBAR AL BAKER

Group Chief Executive Officer
of Qatar Airways

As the official airline partner of BWT Alpine with the Formula 1 (F1) Team, Qatar Airways will be promoting

Qatar Grand Prix 2023 from October 6 to 8 within the country and globally.

This partnership comes after the announcement of it being the Official Airline and Global Partner with F1 earlier this year. To rev up the excitement and reflect its commitment to motorsport enthusiasts worldwide, Qatar national carrier has unveiled a new F1 livery painted on a specially branded B777.



David Gendry, Alpine's Vice President of Sponsoring, Partnerships and Communications said, “Both Alpine and Qatar Airways share the common objectives of a sustainable future and the use of sustainable fuels in line with F1's goal of becoming net zero by 2030.”

As part of the partnership, both parties aim to collaborate on sustainability-focused initiatives to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and strive for a greener future.

For more information, visit www.qatarairways.com

As the sole Central Asian carrier offering direct services to KL International Airport (KUL), Uzbekistan Airways' addition of a third service effective October 30 aims to boost tourist arrivals and bilateral between Malaysia and Uzbekistan.

This follows immediately after the airline's launch of its twice weekly from Tashkent to Bavaria's capital, Munich, on October 29.

The Uzbekistan flag carrier had resumed its twice-weekly flights to Malaysia's capital city last November after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) has announced its intention to participate in the Tashkent International Tourism Fair in Tashkent, tagged Tourism on the Silk Road, from November 15 to 17 and set up a pavilion comprising its members.

Uzbekistan, on the other hand, had taken up a pavilion at the September edition of MATTA Fair in Kuala Lumpur, touted Malaysia's largest international travel show, to raise brand awareness about its destination. In the March MATTA



Uzbekistan Airways Adds Third Service to Kuala Lumpur

Fair Buyers' Contest, Uzbekistan Airways contributed a roundtrip economy class ticket from Kuala Lumpur to Taskent for two persons.

Uzbekistan, on the other hand, had taken up a pavilion at the September edition of MATTA Fair in Kuala Lumpur, touted Malaysia's largest international travel show, to raise brand awareness about its destination. In the March MATTA Fair Buyers' Contest, Uzbekistan Airways contributed a roundtrip economy class ticket from Kuala Lumpur to Taskent for two persons.

Founded in 1992, the airline currently flies to over 50 cities globally. Its fleet includes Airbus A320ceo, A320neo, A321neo, Boeing 767 and 787 Dreamliner.

For more information, visit www.uzairways.com

Headquartered at Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport, Sichuan Airlines has inaugurated its twice-weekly direct service from Haikou to Kuala Lumpur utilising Airbus A321 aircraft with 194 seats on September 21.

Sichuan Airlines is the largest airline in western China with a fleet size of 187 Airbus, including 16 wide-body passenger aircraft, according to the information provided by its representative based in Singapore.

Founded on September 19, 1986, Sichuan Airlines has been in operation for 37 years.

Representing the most important gateway of southwestern China, it exclusively operates high plateau flights to many Tibetan and Xinjiang areas.

For the summer season of 2023, Sichuan Airlines will be operating 293 domestic routes alongside 26 international and three regional routes that connect to a total of 230 destinations.

Compared to 2019, the airline had about 300 domestic routes with an average of 583 flights daily apart from 58 international routes to more than 30



Sichuan Airlines Debuts Maiden Flight from Haikou to Kuala Lumpur

overseas destinations.

Sichuan Airlines is based mainly in the metropolis of Chengdu, which has become the third dual-airport city after Beijing Daxing International Airport. It is owned by a consortium that includes the Sichuan provincial government and China Southern Airlines.

For more information, visit www.global.sichuanair.com



Saudia's Third Consecutive 'World Class Airline' Win

Jeddah-based SAUDIA has won the 'World Class Airline 2024' for the third consecutive year at the APEX Official Airline Rating awards, standing tall among seven top global airlines that received the same accolade.

Developed in collaboration with Yates and Partners, this award evaluates an airline's services and products as well as its commitment to safety, well-being and sustainability, aligning them to the discerning travellers' evolving expectations besides addressing key focus areas within the airline industry.

The APEX Official Airline Ratings programme exclusively relies on certified passenger feedback for their evaluation.

"This recognition not only signifies our dedication to delivering the finest service but also underscores our alignment with the ambitious goals of Vision 2030."

CAPTAIN IBRAHIM KOSHY
Chief Executive Officer
of SAUDIA

Saudi Arabia's national flag carrier's commitment to expand its network saw the launch of its maiden flight from King Khalid International Airport (RUH) on September 21 to the Red Sea International Airport (RSI), which will initially open for domestic flights to and from Riyadh and later Jeddah before spreading its wings internationally next year.

This maiden route is a collaboration between SAUDIA, RSI operator daa International and the Red Sea Global (RSG), a multi-project developer behind some of the world's most ambitious regenerative tourism destinations such as Amaala and The Red Sea.

On track to open along with the first three resorts at The Red Sea destination this year, a further 13 hotels are expected to open under the RSI's first phase. Upon their full completion in 2030, the destination will comprise 50 resorts offering up to 8,000 hotel rooms and over 1,000 residential properties across 22 islands and six inland sites.

The destination will also include luxury marinas, golf courses, as well as entertainment, food and beverage and leisure facilities.

At a memorandum of agreement signed between the three organisations, they will undertake joint research on the use of lower carbon aviation fuel and sustainable aviation fuel at RSI. Encompassing all ground and air procedures, their joint commitment exemplifies a collective dedication to sustainability within the aviation industry.

The use of electric vertical take-off and landing jets to reduce emissions from air travel to the Red Sea will also be evaluated under the agreement.

Captain Ibrahim Koshy remarked, "Our involvement as the first airline to operate from and to the RSI is a source of pride for us all."

For more information, visit www.saudia.com or call **+603-2166 0088**



Air France-KLM Expands Partnership with Etihad Airways

Following Air France-KLM Group's recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Etihad Airways in Paris to enhance their collaboration across passenger operations, loyalty programmes, talent development and maintenance, it has open for bookings to over 40 new routes for travel as early as the winter 2023 season.

The routes cover destinations across Europe, Asia Pacific, Australia and the Middle East. Air France will start operating daily flights between Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG) and Abu Dhabi International Airport (AUH) from October 29.

"This 11-year collaboration is now expanding even further as we aim to explore opportunities in maintenance and loyalty besides enhancing our route network for the benefit of our customers.

The attractiveness of Abu Dhabi as a destination and hub, powered by Etihad's large footprint spanning South and Southeast Asia as well as Australia, brings significant richness to this partnership.

ANGUS CLARKE

Executive Vice President and
Chief Commercial Officer
of Air France-KLM

United Arab Emirates' national carrier Etihad currently operates daily flights to both CDG and Amsterdam Schiphol Airport (AMS) from AUH.

Air France-KLM and Etihad are contemplating expanding their codeshare and interline agreements initiated since 2012. The MoU also proposes that frequent flyers of both Flying Blue and Etihad Guest can earn and redeem miles with Air France, KLM and Etihad.

Other initiatives will involve both airlines exploring terminal co-location, reciprocal lounge access and ground handling.

Meanwhile, Air France-KLM has entered into exclusive negotiations with Airbus to establish a 50-50 joint venture to provide on a worldwide basis A350 component maintenance services.

This will cover supply chain management, repairs and the creation of a pool of aircraft component assets belonging to both partners.

The joint venture, which also involves Air France Industries KLM Engineering & Maintenance, aims to be operational by the first half of 2024 to better meet the growing long-term maintenance needs of the A350 worldwide fleet, where more than 1,000 aircraft are on order and 550 now in service globally.

For more information, visit www.airfranceklm.com



SriLankan Airlines Establishes Interline Partnership with Emirates

SriLankan Airlines has signed a reciprocal interline agreement with Emirates which encompasses 30 routes operated by both airlines.

The partnership also enables access to new points on both airlines' networks via Colombo and Dubai using a single ticket and enjoying the convenience of baggage transfers to the final destination.

SriLankan Airlines' passengers can travel with Emirates on 15 routes across the Middle East, Africa, Russia and the United States.

They are Bahrain, Amman, Dammam, Medina, Cairo, Muscat, Nairobi, Moscow, Tel Aviv, New York JFK, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Boston and Houston.

Emirates' passengers, on the other hand, can seamlessly fly to two new Indian destinations, Madurai and Tiruchirapally and Gan Island in the Maldives via Colombo.

They can also connect to SriLankan's Far East and South Asian destinations, namely Cochin, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Malé, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Jakarta, Guangzhou, Seoul and Tokyo.

"Emirates is a truly global airline and has a long history in Sri Lanka.

RICHARD NUTTALL

Chief Executive Officer
of SriLankan Airlines

Emirates, which launched its services to Sri Lanka in 1986, has since carried more than 11 million passengers to and from Colombo.

Besides providing two direct daily flights to Colombo using the Boeing 777-300ER and an additional daily service via Malé, it is the only international carrier to serve Sri Lanka, known as the Pearl of the Indian Ocean, with first-class services.

While Emirates is listed at the top among the 2024 Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX) World Class Airlines recipients, SriLankan Airlines, a member of the oneworld Alliance, has been recognised by APEX as one Four Star Major Airlines award winners.

Sri Lanka's national carrier also clinched the Best Inflight Food or Beverage Award 2024 from the International Flights Services Association (IFSA) while Emirates received the Best Onboard Amenity accolade.

Launched in 1979, SriLankan Airlines operates an all-Airbus fleet, including the A330-300 and A320/321neo aircraft, and connects to 109 destinations in 56 countries in Europe, Australia and the Middle East as well.

For more information, visit www.srilankan.com

UPCLOSE WITH AZRUL SHAH MOHAMAD

Chief Executive Officer of Tourism Selangor

Armed with 22 years of working experience with Selangor state government and its government-linked companies, Azrul Shah Mohamad believes the key role of Tourism Selangor, the state's tourism promotion agency, is to create demand for travel.

Despite being hit by the COVID-19 pandemic shortly after coming onboard to his current position in January 2020, he led his team to a new level of playing field. Together they have made inroads to chalk up new successes, including its record high sales of RM1 million at the recent MATTA Fair held in Kuala Lumpur.

The 48-year-old confesses he still enjoys playing football as his hobby despite his hectic schedule.

Your career background has been very much into public relations (PR) and corporate communications. How has it equipped you in your current job responsibilities?

When I was an officer at Selangor's Economic Planning Unit during the early years of my career, my interest in the state's tourism promotion had been ignited. It led me to think of building brand awareness as Selangor's tourism sector was just starting to be developed for foreign markets.

Through our domestic tourism campaign, Pusing Selangor Dulu! or Round Selangor First! launched in June 2020, I tapped into my experience in branding, developing corporate identity or image, marketing communications and publicity.

At the same time, I also engaged with product operators, marketers in strategic communication planning and the media.

The tourism industry necessitates a great deal of networking, establishing contacts and coordinated promotion activities. My previous experience as a lecturer and PR practitioner was a big help.

One of your key roles is to increase tourism's contribution to Selangor's coffers. How much has it grown lately?

Selangor was the biggest contributor of RM40.9 billion to the national gross domestic product last year, up 0.7% from 2021. Of this, 26.5% comes from the services sector, which includes tourism.

The state has received an estimated four million tourists until September out of the five million arrivals targeted for 2023.

What are some of the contributing factors to the success of Selangor's tourism industry?

They can be partly attributed to Tourism Selangor's



promotion strategies, which have been successfully executed through our domestic tourism campaign, which was highlighted earlier, and via our global tourism campaign, Splendid Selangor, Take Me Anywhere!

Selangor recorded the highest number of domestic visitors two years in a row, receiving over 22 million domestic visitors to the state in 2022, with shopping being one of the most favoured travel experiences which accounted for 38.9% of the total domestic spending in tourism in Malaysia.

Another reason for our campaign's success is the unique contents we have developed for distribution on social media platforms such as Tiktok. The public also reacted well to our promotional videos featuring our campaign ambassador, Che Puan Juliana Evans.

What strategies and action plans have you mapped out this year to propel the state's tourism industry forward?

We have six initiatives planned for tourism promotion this year. Among them are the pitching and grants for innovation involving the tourism industry players.

Besides empowering our two tourism promotion campaigns, we have also initiated a tourism networking programme and will be organising events and activities that have a high impact on tourism promotion.

We are also focusing on infrastructure developments that are both sustainable and long-term. The promotion and development of the Gombak Hulu Langat Geopark is another of our initiative whereby Tourism Selangor is the executing body for the state's first national geopark covering 13 geo sites in Gombak and seven in Hulu Langat.

Overall, to support our promotional initiatives, we have conducted a series of sales missions in countries such as Germany, Laos and China.

What are your plans for the Visit Selangor Year 2025 campaign?

One of our promotional strategies is to focus on medical tourism to draw more foreign tourists to the state with our top-notch medical facilities which we hope to strengthen further.

Bracing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Selangor came up with several economic plans that included financial aid allocation by the state government for the tourism industry. What is coming up next to accelerate its recovery?

We are Intensifying our tourism promotion initiatives to aid the industry players. In our third Pitching Competition 2023 based on the theme, Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Selangor has allocated a total grant of RM150,000 for 15 tourism industry players for more events to be conducted that will revitalise the sector and make Selangor a premier first-choice travel destination.

Working with the private sector to drive the state's tourism, please share with us your latest initiative.

We have worked with the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) for 12 consecutive years in our participation in the MATTA Fair. Selangor was Malaysia's Featured Destination for the MATTA Fair September edition where we had five pavilions with 20 product

operators under us, including GL Play, our strategic partner.

Tourism Selangor achieved over RM1 million in sales, the highest recorded ever so far through this consumer travel fair, touted as the largest in Malaysia.

In terms of working with the public sector, tell us about your collaboration with Tourism Malaysia Sarawak's recent familiarisation trip to Selangor.

Tourism Selangor has always collaborated with Tourism Malaysia either through its headquarters or its states' office and supported their events.

This stopover programme in the Klang Valley and to the East Coast with Tourism Malaysia Sarawak is in line with our mission to promote the tourist attractions in Selangor such as the royal town of Klang and Gamuda Cove with its outdoor water theme park, Splash Mania.

How does Tourism Selangor work with airlines to showcase the state and Malaysia as a preferred destination?

We have collaborated with both local and foreign airlines such as AirAsia, Firefly, Malaysia Airlines, Kuwait Airways, Turkish Airlines and Salam Air during our international sales missions to travel trade shows like ITB Berlin and the World Travel Market in London.

A few of the collaborations also involved providing digital materials to promote Selangor as a choice destination.

Selangor is well connected with KL International Airport's Terminal 1 and 2 as well as the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport located in the state. What more can be done to improve connectivity to these airports?

While improving connectivity does not come under Tourism Selangor, we have been working closely with Malaysia Airports in terms of tourism campaigns, increasing product awareness in Selangor through their advertising space and platforms.

Who are Selangor's key international markets and what has been

accomplished through your Splendid Selangor, Take Me Anywhere! campaign?

Our target markets are Asia, including China, the Middle East and Europe. Our campaign showcases Selangor's tourism segmentations ranging from ecotourism, agro-tourism, theme parks to culture and heritage.

We deploy four different languages in our marketing on social media platforms and for our promotional materials, we have them in Arabic, traditional and simplified Chinese, Japanese and Korean.

To raise awareness of our campaign, we also work closely with various media outlets, influencers and travel agencies in our target markets.

Your Go Selangor application, launched in April 2022, aims to transform and digitalise the industry under Tourism 4.0 as it recovers from the pandemic. How effective has it been in creating more awareness of the various products and services offered by the state and turning them into sales for the operators and providers respectively?

The app is being improved to get more merchants to be registered. We are in the process of constructing the marketing plans for 2024.

How big is the team helping you achieve your goals or strategic action plans for Tourism Selangor?

We have eight different departments such as Corporate Communications, Promotion, Corporate Strategy, Events and Focus Tourism, Product and Package Development as well as Industrial Development.

They have been our main pillars to ensure our tourism development programmes and promotional efforts are conducted smoothly since we have different tourism segmentations that have to be maintained and continuously improved.

Moving forward, the Selangor virtual reality and aerial view experience is one of the new ways we are using in the tourism industry to market our products and services.



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