

# AIRLINK

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## Navigating 2024 Aviation Landscape from Almost Full Recovery in 2023

2023 has been a great year of travel rebound with big aircraft orders by many airlines, including in Asia Pacific (APAC), where the book orders were mostly led by low-cost carriers (LCC).

Leading the pack in this region was IndiGo's record order for 500 aircraft primarily for the Airbus A320 family to be delivered within the next eight years which the Indian LCC announced at the Paris Airshow in June 2023.

This was followed by Air India orders of 470 wide and narrow-body Airbus and Boeing aircraft by its parent company Tata Group to boost its domestic and international market shares.

Overall, aircraft deliveries in 2023 have increased compared to 2022 although the number of those scheduled for delivery has been revised lower due to supply chain issues which created production delays and backlogs from aircraft manufacturers.

However, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Economic Report entitled 'Global Outlook for Air Transport: A local sweet spot' projects, "The number of new aircraft deliveries will reach 1,777 in 2024 and 2,075 in 2025 according to current schedules – a record in the history of commercial aviation."

Released in December 2023, the semi-annual report describes 2023 as a year where "Air transportation very nearly returned to the pre-pandemic pace of activity, and a year of renewed profitability for the industry".

Expecting all regions to reach or surpass their 2019 air passenger traffic levels in 2023 except for APAC, where full recovery is anticipated in early 2024, it views 2023 to be likely a local sweet spot for the industry as its pace of growth and financial recovery are unlikely to be matched in 2024 and beyond.

With the industry returning to profitability in 2023 three years after the historic loss of nearly US\$140 billion in 2020, the report considers this "a stunning performance and testimony to the industry's resilience, adaptability, and hard work".

In terms of APAC's financial performance, although the region showed remarkable revenue growth in 2023, thanks to the domestic markets of China, India and Australia which recovered at a faster rate compared to the rest of the world, its return to profitability is expected only in the second half of 2024.

Global data provider, OAG, in its roundup of 2023, said APAC performed quite well where seven of the world's top 10 busiest international routes and nine of the top 10 busiest domestic routes came from here although the region was lagging behind Europe and the United States in opening up after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Kuala Lumpur (KUL)-Singapore (SIN) sector emerged as the world's 2023 busiest international airline route with 4.9 million scheduled seats, 50% up from 2022.

This international route in APAC, which also made it in the top 10 list in 2022 but in fifth position, is currently served by seven carriers, led by Air Asia taking up 30% of the market's capacity.

### Southeast Asia's December 2023 performance

Zooming into Southeast Asia (SEA), OAG estimated its total capacity in December 2023 at 38.6 million seats, which was still 18% below December 2019 but 15% higher than December 2022.

The domestic capacity accounted for 58% of all seats although international capacity is recovering.

Populous Indonesia led with 11.4 million seats, taking up 30% of the region's capacity followed by Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia, whose capacity grew the most by 16% in December compared to the previous month.

Singapore continued to be SEA's key hub, with KUL to SIN route remaining the busiest, recording 419,000 seats in December - 5% more daily seats than in November.

OAG also listed SEA's top three airports by international seats for December as Singapore's Changi Airport (SIN), KL International Airport (KUL) and Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK) with 282 million, 253 million and 249 million seats respectively.

The region's top airlines by seats were Indonesia's Lion Air with 3.2 million seats but still lower than in 2019 while Air Asia reclaimed its position as number two, adding the most numbers of seats (333,000) in December.

According to an earlier news report from CAPA Centre for Aviation Fleet database, Lion Air has 425 aircraft on order to serve the market followed by Air Asia Group's 362 orders for the 232-seat Airbus A321neo for delivery up to 2035.

As for the total global capacity for 2023, OAG expects it to finish at 5.5 billion. Although great strides were made, the figure is 3.7% down from 2019.

### Revised Projections for Malaysia

Malaysia has achieved an impressive connectivity score of 79.7 in the first three quarters of 2023 to retain its position as the fifth most connected country among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Malaysian Aviation Commission (Mavcom) said the KL International Airport Terminal 1 upheld its position as the region's third most connected airport after Changi Airport and Suvarnabhumi Airport.



The commission granted a total of 173 additional air traffic rights (ATRs) during the first nine months of 2023, of which 129 ATRs are for international destinations and the rest for domestic.

Securing the most international ATRs were Batik Air Malaysia (35) followed by Air Asia (30) and Malaysia Airlines (18).



In terms of regional distribution, ASEAN received the largest share with 48 ATRs followed by Asia (30) with routes to Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Maldives, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Uzbekistan.

Responding to robust growth in passenger traffic in 2023, Mavcom revised upwards its earlier projections of 84.5 million to 86.5 million passengers.

According to its newly released 14th edition Industry Report 'Waypoint', it anticipates total passengers to range from 93.9 million to 107.1 million.

Meanwhile, improved flight connectivity and the potential increase in tourist arrivals from China and India have also led Tourism Malaysia to revise recently its earlier forecast of 16.1 million for 2023 to 19.1 million.

This followed Malaysia's announcement of allowing 30-day visa-free entry for Chinese and Indian citizens starting December 1, 2023.





## World's First 100% Sustainable Aviation Fuel Flight by Virgin Atlantic

Virgin Atlantic's historic Flight100 using 100% Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), which took off from London's Heathrow Airport to New York's John F Kennedy International Airport on 28 November 2023, signals the significant role SAF will play as a mid-term viable solution in the decarbonisation of long-haul aviation leading towards net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Its Flight100 also demonstrated SAF's capability as a safe drop-in replacement for fossil-derived jet fuel. Compatible with today's engines, airframes and fuel infrastructure, the fuel is made from waste products. Inspiring the next generation of solutions, it can provide carbon dioxide lifecycle emissions savings of up to 70%.

Sir Richard Branson, Founder of Virgin Atlantic said, "Virgin Atlantic has been challenging the status quo and pushing the aviation industry to never settle and do better since 1984. Fast forward nearly 40 years, that pioneering spirit continues to be Virgin Atlantic's beating heart as it pushes the boundaries from carbon fibre aircraft and fleet upgrades to sustainable fuels."

Operating one of the youngest and most fuel-efficient fleets in the sky, Flight100 builds on the airline's 15-year track record for leading SAF's development at scale.

Shai Weiss, Chief Executive Officer of Virgin Atlantic said, "We are proud to have reached this important milestone but we need to push further.

There is simply not enough SAF and it is clear that to reach production at scale, we need to see significantly more investment.

"This will only happen when regulatory certainty and price support mechanisms backed by government are

in place. Flight100 proves that if you make it, we will fly it."

This milestone marked a year of collaboration by a Virgin Atlantic-led consortium that included Boeing, Rolls-Royce plc, Imperial College London, University of Sheffield, ICF and Rocky Mountain Institute in partnership with the United Kingdom's Department for Transport. AirBP and Virent are among the consortium's preferred SAF suppliers.



Sheila Remes, Boeing's Vice President of Environmental Sustainability said Virgin Atlantic and Boeing completed the first commercial SAF test flight on a 747 in 2008 and now on Flight100, it is using a 787 Dreamliner.

This represents a key step towards its commitment to deliver 100% SAF-compatible airplanes by 2030.

Meanwhile, Simon Burr, Group Director of Engineering, Technology & Safety of Rolls-Royce is proud that its Trent 1000 engines powered the first widebody flight using 100% SAF.

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



## Emirates Wins Five Accolades at 2023 World Travel Awards

Award-winning Emirates has swept five accolades at the 30th anniversary of the 2023 World Travel Awards (WTA), including being named the World's Leading Airline for the Middle East for the third consecutive year.

The United Arab Emirates' (UAE) flag carrier also scooped top honours as the leading airline for the Inflight Entertainment, Brand and First Class categories. Its Emirates Skywards was also crowned the World's Leading Rewards Programme for the last 10 out of the 12 WTA ceremonies.

Delivering on its brand promise to 'Fly Better', Emirates is investing US\$2 billion to elevate its inflight experience, reimagined its food and beverage offerings such as introducing unlimited caviar in First Class as well as having curated vegan and special cinema menus.



Emirates provides 6,500 channels of ice on-demand entertainment in every class, including exclusive interviews. Additionally, its Premium Economy cabin upgrade is underway with 22 A380s sporting refreshed interiors.

For 2024, Emirates passengers can expect to see exciting developments on ice from new content partnerships to next-generation inflight entertainment systems that offer memorable cinematic and personalised passenger experiences on its incoming 50 Airbus A350 aircraft.

Emirates has been widely recognised for its industry leadership across a broad range of categories, including its recent double win for Best Airline in the World and Best Airline in the Middle East at the 2023 ULTRAs which was voted by global travellers. It also won Transport & Logistics Company of the year at the Gulf Business Awards 2023.

Meanwhile, Emirates passengers flying to or through Dubai can enjoy exclusive discounts with the return of its popular My Emirates Winter Pass. They can use their boarding pass at restaurants, luxury spas, branded stores, private pools, beaches and big family attractions such as At The Top Burj Khalifa, Aquaventure waterparks at Atlantis The Palm and IMG Worlds of Adventure until 31 March 2024.

Passengers who checked in online and downloaded their mobile boarding pass to the Emirates App or Wallet are advised to screenshot it to present at participating venues as the boarding pass will disappear from the applications after they land

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





## flydubai's Plans for US\$190 Million Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul Facility

Dubai-based flydubai plans to have a state-of-the-art purpose-built US\$190 million Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) facility in Dubai South by 2026. Construction of its new hangar and workshop, to commence in 2024, is expected to be completed by the last quarter of 2026.

flydubai signed the agreement during the recent Dubai Airshow with the Mohammed bin Rashid Aerospace Hub, a free-zone destination for the world's leading airlines, private jet companies, MROs and associated industries. It is also home to maintenance centres as well as training and education campuses.

His Highness Sheikh Ahmed Saeed Al Maktoum, flydubai Chairman believes this milestone reaffirms the airline's commitment to operational excellence in Dubai South's dynamic ecosystem. It will provide flydubai greater control over its maintenance requirements as it grows its fleet and capabilities.

The airline has the CAR-145 Base Maintenance Approval from the General Civil Aviation Authority, which enabled it to perform C Checks and Entry-into-Service for its Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, thus bringing added operational and cost efficiencies.

flydubai will have more than 230 engineers join over the next 12 months its existing team of 455 skilled engineers who are responsible for ensuring the airworthiness and safety of its fleet.

His Excellency Khalifa Al Zaffin, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Dubai Aviation City Cooperation and Dubai South expects flydubai's new facility to contribute to the aviation industry's growth and sustainability while reaffirming Dubai's position as a global aviation hub and reinforcing its shared vision of providing world-class aviation services to its partners.

Concurring with him, Ghaith Al Ghaith, flydubai CEO remarked, "The spirit of Dubai is in our DNA and we are proud to announce today the plans for our MRO facility which represents a new chapter in our journey."

Mick Hills, flydubai Chief Operating Officer said, "Having our own MRO facility will ensure a quicker turnaround of our fleet maintenance while adhering to the highest quality standards.

"This increased level of control will result in reduced downtime as maintenance tasks can be efficiently planned and executed, minimising any disruption to our flight schedules in the future and enhancing overall operational reliability."

flydubai currently operates a young and efficient fleet of 80 Boeing 737 aircraft and will take delivery of more than 150 additional aircraft by 2030.



At the Dubai Airshow, flydubai also announced its commitment to purchase 30 Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners valued at US\$11 billion as part of its fleet diversification with the introduction of these highly fuel-efficient wide-body aircraft. This is the airline's fourth aircraft order since it was founded in 2008.

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



## Turkish Airlines' Strategic Collaborations with Riyadh Air and Vietnam Airlines

Turkish Airlines has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Saudi Arabia's second flag carrier, Riyadh Air at the recent ICAO Air Services Negotiation Event 2023 whereby passengers of both airlines will enjoy the convenience of a comprehensive interline and codeshare agreement.

Signed by Levent Konukcu, Turkish Airlines Chief Investment and Technology Officer and Tony Douglas, Riyadh Air Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the agreement will expand the global reach of both airlines and offer more seamless travel options.

Türkiye's national flag carrier also recently signed a letter of intent with Vietnam Airlines on behalf of its air cargo brand, Turkish Cargo, in Ankara, which was attended by Türkiye Vice President Cevdet Yılmaz and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh.

Turkish Airlines CEO Bilal Ekşi said its efforts to increase its presence in Asia, one of its most important markets, will continue unabated, adding that their collaboration, currently focused on Turkish Cargo, will be developed in different categories in the future that would be mutually beneficial to both countries and flag carriers.



"Turkish Airlines will benefit from expanding the scale of its transportation network to previously limited areas such as Oceania, Northeast Asia by taking advantage of Vietnam's central geographical location as a transit point. We hope this cooperation will facilitate Vietnam to become a leading logistics centre in the Asia Pacific region .

**DANG NGOC HOA "**

Chairman of the Board of Directors  
of Vietnam Airlines

For more information, call **+603-2053 1899**  
or visit [www.turkishairlines.com](http://www.turkishairlines.com)





## AirAsia X to Fly Direct to Almaty

Medium-haul airline, AirAsia X (AAX), will be spreading its wings to Central Asia when it commences direct four-times weekly flights to Almaty, the commercial and cultural hub of Kazakhstan on 14 March 2024.

Using the Airbus A330-300 aircraft, AAX Chief Executive Officer Benjamin Ismail said Kazakhstan will be an entirely new market for the low-cost carrier.

This strategic route will not only bring other parts of the world closer to Southeast Asia but will also foster significant trade, commerce and education interchange.

AAX recently announced a slightly higher net profit of RM5.6 million as its revenue rose to RM648.4 million for the third quarter ended September 30, 2023 compared to RM512.9 million in the previous quarter.

After posting five consecutive quarterly net profit and fulfilling other conditions, AAX was uplifted from its PN17 status in November.

PN17, which stands for Practice Note 17/2005, is issued by Bursa Malaysia Securities Berhad to public-listed companies that face financial difficulties.

AAX's PN17 upliftment after more than two years marked a significant milestone for the airline, which was established in 2007.

With a fleet size of 18 aircraft, the airline is confident of maximising the market's upside during the peak year-

end travel season in the fourth quarter of 2023 (4Q23).

Benjamin said AAX Group's recovery strategy is on track with the airline posting a healthy cash position of RM119.6 million and stellar operational performance for the 3Q23.

AAX's seat capacity grew nine times to over one million seats while the passengers carried rose over 10 times to more than 807,000 passengers.

Additionally, AAX expects to register a share of profits from its associate, AirAsia X Thailand, by 4Q23 after concluding the latter's rehabilitation.

To ensure commercial viability in a challenging post-COVID-19 pandemic environment, AAX recently announced its withdrawal from the New Zealand market, suspending its Auckland (AKL) to Sydney (SYD) and AKL to Kuala Lumpur (KUL) services from February 2, 2024 due to weakened demand.

While its AKL-Gold Coast (OOL)-KUL services starting from February 3 have also been suspended due to lower-than-expected demand, AAX assured customers that its SYD, Melbourne and Perth routes from Australia to KUL would continue as normal.

Meanwhile, its OOL to KUL services have been adjusted to meet seasonal demand for 2024 with its new flights scheduled from January 3 to February 28, March 29 to April 21, June 21 to July 14 and December 1 to 29.

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

Philippine Airlines (PAL) and Singapore Airlines (SIA) newly signed a codeshare partnership agreement that will allow both to enhance flight options for their customers travelling to domestic and international destinations via their respective hubs.

PAL will progressively be rolling out its codeshare on SIA's flights to six cities, namely Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Milan, Paris, Rome and Zurich in Europe while SIA will codeshare on PAL's flights from Manila to 27 destinations within the Philippines.

The codeshare services to Copenhagen and Milan represent a historical milestone as it is the first air link to the Danish capital and the Italian commercial hub by a Philippine carrier.

PAL is making a comeback via its codeshare services to Frankfurt, Paris, Rome and Zurich, which the flag carrier previously served in the 1980s and 1990s.

Both airlines will also explore an expanded codeshare agreement to include SIA's flights to additional points in Europe as well as destinations in Australia, India, New Zealand and South Africa.

United Airlines (UA) has become the largest carrier across both Atlantic and Pacific following the recent launch of its international winter schedule for 2023 which saw 50 additional daily flights compared to last winter.

The largest ever in UA's history, the US carrier's winter flights expansion covered more than 110 international destinations. Besides offering direct year-round service to Dubai, Geneva, Edinburgh, Berlin and Amman, UA was also the first US carrier to fly directly from San Francisco to Manila on October 29, 2023 and later to Christchurch on December 8.

To meet the surge in Asia Pacific travel demand, UA expanded its network for this region larger than pre-COVID-19 pandemic level with new flights to Auckland, Brisbane and Hong Kong.

Its Los Angeles hub is now connected to both of Tokyo's international airports with the resumption of its daily direct service to Tokyo/Narita on October 28, 2023. UA recently applied to the US Department of Transportation for daily



## Philippine Airlines' New Codeshare Agreement with Singapore Airlines

Captain Stanley K Ng, President and Chief Operating Officer (CEO) of PAL said, "The partnership is the product of a strengthened relationship with our fellow Association of Southeast Asian Nations mainline carrier and an enduring commitment to expanding our presence in Singapore, a top PAL destination that we have been serving for 58 years and counting."

Goh Choon Phong, SIA CEO said the agreement will support the growing demand for both business and leisure travel between the two countries and beyond that to its key markets worldwide.

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



## United Airlines' Largest Ever Winter Schedule Expansion

direct flights between Houston's Bush Intercontinental Airport and Tokyo's Haneda Airport.

The airline also rebuilt its network in China by increasing its service to Shanghai with daily flights from San Francisco and resuming its daily San Francisco-Beijing service.

With transatlantic demand remaining at a historic high, UA extended some of its popular seasonal winter routes such as Washington-Dulles to Rome through January 8, including its second daily New York/Newark to Paris service.

For its summer schedule 2024 starting in June, UA is expecting its network across the Pacific to grow more than 30% with direct service to 15 destinations, including between San Francisco and Manila as well as San Francisco and Beijing.

UA is the world's largest airline as measured by available seat miles.

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





## Batik Air Malaysia and Emirates' Codeshare Opens Up More Travel Options

The recent codeshare agreement between Emirates (EK) and Batik Air Malaysia (OD), which operates via the KL International Airport (KUL) allows passengers from the United Arab Emirates flag carrier to access five Malaysian cities - Penang, Kuching, Kota Kinabalu, Langkawi, Johor Bahru and three regional Southeast Asia points, Denpasar, Jakarta and Singapore.

All this is done seamlessly using a single ticket and convenient baggage policy.

“We are pleased with the partnership, which has the potential to strengthen Malaysia's role as a prime gateway to the region. We hope to see an increase in KUL's traffic, especially to facilitate connectivity to regional destinations.”

**ANTHONY LOKE**  
Transport Minister

Present at the launch from EK were its Senior Vice President of Commercial Operations (Far East), Orhan Abbas; Senior Vice President Revenue Optimisation and Airline Partnerships, Anand Lakshminarayanan and Country Manager in Malaysia, Saeed Mubarak. OD was represented by its Group Strategic Director, Datuk Chandran Rama Muthy.

Considering Malaysia as an important market in its Far East network, Orhan Abbas said, “Through this partnership, we will further expand our network reach to more than 1,490 cities worldwide.” Emirates, which has been flying to Malaysia since 1996, operates 21 weekly flights to KUL using a mix of Boeing 777 and Airbus A380 aircraft.”

OD also had a roadshow in Hanoi (HAN) and Danang (DAD) before 2023 ended where it joined forces with Tourism Malaysia Vietnam to woo more Vietnamese arrivals into Malaysia. Additionally, 2023 marked the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties between Malaysia and Vietnam.

As of September 2023, Malaysia has 272,852 arrivals from Vietnam, which is one of its top generating tourist markets. There are currently 150 direct flights weekly from Vietnam to Malaysia with OD operating flights from HAN and DAD to KUL using the Boeing 737-8 aircraft.

Parties involved in the roadshow included Nor Hayati Zainuddin, Director of Tourism Malaysia Vietnam, Suresh Vanan, OD Head of Communications and Promotions (South Asia) and representative from its General Sales Agent in Vietnam, Nguyen Duc Khanh, General Director of Tay Ho Trading Travel Company.



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



## Ethiopian Airlines' Historic Deals to Purchase 84 Aircraft Valued at US\$23 Billion

The Ethiopian Airlines (ET) Group has signed deals with aviation's big names such as Boeing, Airbus and Rolls-Royce for aircraft purchase and engine total care service at the recent Dubai Airshow to achieve its strategic goal by 2035 to become one of the world's top 20 most competitive and leading aviation groups.

ET has agreed to order 11 Boeing 787 Dreamliner and 20 737 MAX airplanes with an opportunity for 15 and 21 additional jets respectively from the American manufacturer, Boeing Company, making it a total order of 67 aircraft.

The airline has also committed to buy 11 additional Airbus A350-900s with six more purchase rights. The two deals for its 84 aircraft purchase are worth US\$23 billion at list price.

ET Group Chief Executive Officer Mesfin Tasew said, “The Boeing 787-9, 737-8 and the Airbus A350-900 aircraft models have been in our fleet for several years now. They have demonstrated the highest level of passenger comfort, operational reliability and reduced operational cost.”

Malaysia Airports (Sepang) Sdn Bhd has collaborated with three airport lounge operators with the recent debut of a premium bus shuttle transfer service to ensure a smooth airport experience exclusively for their first and business-class passengers departing from KL International Airport (KLIA) Terminal 1.

They are namely the Golden Lounge operated by Malaysia Airlines, Plaza Premium Lounge managed by Plaza Premium Group and SSP Malaysia, which manages the Global Club Lounge and Travel Club Lounge.

Started in November 2023, the transfer service provides a dedicated premium shuttle lounge that offer coffee and tea facilities as well as comfortable sofas for passengers to relax in before boarding the bus.

The lounge is located next to International Departure Gate G1 of the KLIA's Main Terminal Building where the 18-seater premium bus, customised with spacious seats, operates 24 hours daily to ensure regular transfers.

The bus does not have to wait for it to

“This order is consistent with our long-term fleet renewal and expansion plan. As a customer focused airline, we are particularly excited to boost our fleet with these ultra-modern airplanes that ensure a convenient and memorable onboard experience for our esteemed passengers while being environmentally friendly with reduced carbon footprint.”

ET also signed a memorandum of understanding with Rolls-Royce for a comprehensive total care service agreement for 22 Trent XWB-84 engines that exclusively power the Airbus A350-900 aircraft. It currently operates more than 140 young and ultra-modern aircraft to 133 destinations across Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the Americas.

For more information, call **03-2022 0168** or visit [www.ethiopianairlines.com](http://www.ethiopianairlines.com)



## Premium Bus Shuttle Transfer for KL International Airport Terminal 1's First and Business Class Passengers

be filled up completely with passengers before departing for Gate C of the Satellite Building. Additionally at the Immigration, these first and business class passengers have access to a dedicated lane.



# UPCLOSE WITH NOOR AHMAD HAMID

Chief Executive Officer of Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA)



the community at large. In addition, as custodian of international tourism arrivals data for the region, PATA has always been very strong in providing actual and forecast travel and tourism data for its members to form policies and strategic plans.

## How different are the challenges facing the travel and tourism industry today?

They are unprecedented, diverse and much more complex than four or five decades ago. As we come out from the huge disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, many challenges continue to plague this high-risk industry. Some of the key ones are from within us such as the rapid development of technology which the industry must be fast to adapt.

The ever-evolving consumer behaviour and needs make it challenging for destinations and suppliers to adjust to individual preferences and market demands. We must therefore be steadfast to face the out-of-industry challenges such as the impact of climate change, geopolitical and economic uncertainties, which have enormous bearings on the industry's growth or decline. PATA will continue to play an integral role to help the industry reset in the rapidly changing landscape through collaboration, innovation and diversification.

## What are your immediate action plans in 2024 to spur the desired growth for 2025, especially in Asia Pacific?

One of them is to strengthen PATA by working closely with the Executive Boards, Board of Directors (BoD) and secretariat team in our Bangkok Head Office. We need to review and focus on key areas to stabilise the association and plan for its strategic growth. Engaging with our members will be crucial as they are the holders of knowledge and expertise of the industry. It is our fervent hope to provide the platform for them to be the voice for the region when it comes to travel and tourism.

Secondly, we plan to successfully stage in 2024 PATA's two flagship events for our members and industry leaders to discuss trends, share insights, and foster collaboration during this post-pandemic period. The PATA Annual Summit is normally held in spring. Hosted by the Macao Government Tourism Office with the support of SJM Resorts, S.A., it will be held from May 15 to 17 at the Grand Lisboa Palace Resort Macau under the theme 'Redefining Tourism' while the fall date for PATA Travel Mart will be from October 1-4.

## What can national tourist organisations (NTOs) and destination marketing organisations (DMOs) do to manage tourists' expectations and demands better with the changing landscape?

Some of these NTOs and DMOs need to balance the marketing and promotion of their tourism products, activities and funding with destination management.

**T**asked with bringing stability to PATA following the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, Noor Ahmad Hamid, 60, who took on his current position on October 1, 2023 for a three-year term is the first Malaysian to do so. The former Chief Operating Officer of Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Bureau has over 35 years of experience to drive this 72-year-old association based in Bangkok, Thailand into a new era.

## Please share with us the pivotal role played by associations such as PATA in business events and the tourism sector.

Touted as the voice of Asia Pacific, PATA represents the trade sector of the travel and tourism industry focusing on fostering collaboration, advocacy, knowledge sharing, and promoting responsible and sustainable practices to, from and within the Asia Pacific region. Through our very own and our members' activities, the association provides a platform for inter-sectorial and inter-regional networking besides facilitating partnerships and cooperation.

PATA also addresses industry challenges, thus contributing to the overall growth and development of both business events and tourism. We believe business events are an important segment within the travel and tourism industry as both share similar interests to advance and benefit

This means looking at tourism developmental projects, infrastructure and superstructure tourism facilities, activities and events that can potentially portray the destination's cultural and heritage values while at the same time managing the tourists' demanding expectations.

Ensuring a seamless travel experience for tourists from easy arrival to airport, port or border clearances, and a good public transportation network, we are mindful of sustainable travel best practices, green initiatives, appreciation of local culture and other important aspects of travel. As such, destination management should be collaborative involving all the stakeholders within the industry, public and private sectors included.

## How can integrated destination facilitation (IDF) be made more effective?

In the complex world that we live in today, tourism should go beyond just an agency but should also involve all parties within the destination. The IDF concept has been well coordinated and developed organically in some destinations. It is vital to link public agencies (such as customs, immigration, police, public safety, local transportation networks, culture, heritage, finance, agriculture, science and technology) to the private sector (like hotel owners and managers, travel companies, start-ups, airlines, banking, payment gateways, insurance, media and social media platforms) within the tourism sector.

A destination that understands the importance of tourism to the economy and community will be able to plan to serve tourists better with an integrated approach and facilitate their stay to a seamless and memorable visit. Such IDF can be aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) along with local aspirations to ensure the destination benefits from inter-cultural exchanges with tourists.

## The travel recovery also brings about overcrowding of tourist destinations, which impact sustainability. How does PATA hope to balance that?

Overcrowding is a major issue faced by tourism where the solution must come from both suppliers and end-users. To find the right balance, education and awareness campaigns are crucial. PATA strongly advocates following the guiding principle of the UNSDGs pillars of People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership.

When the destination and tourists form a partnership, only then can over tourism be reduced significantly and the disbursement of tourists to other less crowded destinations be planned cohesively. PATA thus calls for a sustainable destination management strategy, including carrying capacity assessments, community involvement, and the promotion of less-visited attractions to distribute tourism impact more evenly.

## How can airline punctuality or on-time performance (OTP) be improved for passengers as the travel industry recovers?

PATA calls on not only the airlines but also all stakeholders,

including governments, airports, aviation authorities, food and beverage companies and other relevant agencies with direct or indirect involvement to provide punctuality aspects of the travel segment. Introducing advanced technologies, optimising scheduling, and investing in infrastructure improvements can contribute to enhanced OTP for passengers' benefit and at the same time build better customers' experience.

## How do you hope to rebuild PATA membership post-pandemic?

Reflecting resilience and adaptability, our membership is seeing the return of members who have dropped out during the headwinds and the inclusion of new companies entering the industry post-pandemic. PATA remains positive we will be able to stabilise the association as there is a strong demand by the industry to be part of our community. Our focus is to continue delivering membership engagement to existing members and bring other key tourism players into the mix.

We plan to grow our membership by at least 20% in 2024 and are working on a comprehensive plan for the coming years. We are rebuilding more interaction and engagement within the community through innovative events and activities. There is a strong need to reconnect and restore professional network within the industry, especially post-pandemic. We have started some small gatherings, which have proven to be very encouraging.

## Digitalisation and technology are key to PATA's growth. How are you mobilising them moving forward?

PATA has consistently been investing in digitalisation and will continue to do so to serve our members and community better. The PATA secretariat team will be trained to meet the demands of technological advancement and we are here to learn from some of the best companies who are our members. By early January 2024, we will relaunch the PATA Digital Membership Directory to improve communications with our members. The digitalisation within PATA will also cover every aspect of our daily work from events to research, communications and management.

## What does PATA wish to impart to the future generation?

We have always engaged very closely with the next gen. One of our most active membership categories is Education, comprising universities and academic institutions that offer tourism and hospitality courses from around the world. PATA has currently over 60 universities as members.

We provide opportunities for undergraduates to be involved at the global level and have their say within the industry. In most of our events, specific programmes are formatted for the GenZ so as they can be at the forefront. We continue to provide on-the-job training to the younger generations not only at the PATA Head Office via a special project, PATA Protégé, but also link the undergraduates with our members for industry training opportunities. For many years, we have allocated a seat on the BoD for the future generation to be represented.





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