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Bid for Routes World After Successful Run of Routes Asia 2024 in Langkawi

At the 20th Routes Asia 2024's recent opening in Langkawi, Transport Minister Anthony Loke expressed Malaysia's interest to host Routes World, the biggest event for route development in the aviation industry. The country last hosted the 14th World Routes Development Forum in 2008 in Kuala Lumpur.

This not only underscores the government's keen interest for the country to become a hub for global aviation discussions but also the potential such major business events can bring in creating greater awareness of Malaysia as a premier travel destination not just for leisure but also for high quality conferences and other activities.

While the 29th edition of Routes World 2024 has been confirmed to be held in Bahrain from October 6-8 and the handover of the next destination for this event in 2025 will be announced then, the likelihood of Malaysia being the host from 2026 onwards appears strong.

With the country gearing up for its Visit Malaysia Year 2026 promotions and desiring for more connectivity to the country between now and the next few years, it looks like Malaysia Airports, Tourism Malaysia and the Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau would have to work hand in hand with the Ministry of Transport and other relevant parties to start preparing for the submission of its bid to hold the prestigious World Routes event.

As pointed out by Mohamed Rastam Shahrom, Acting Group Chief Executive Officer of Malaysia Airports in his welcome address, "As the main airport operator in Malaysia, we are keen to continue contributing towards Malaysia's economic growth through strategic route development, thus promoting tourism and trade for the country.



"In 2023, we registered 119.5 million passenger movements and have expanded our network with the introduction of new routes to Chengdu, Dayong, Kertajati and Siem Reap-Angkor among others."

Having welcomed five new airlines - Air Macau, Loong Air, Flydubai, AirAsia Indonesia, and Turkmenistan Airlines early this year, he said Malaysia Airports

has identified 17 potential airlines from seven regions to operate in the country between 2024 and 2025.

Loke remarked, "By the end of the second quarter of this year, we will be welcoming a further four from Cambodia, China and India. Malaysia is also optimistic that we will see more airlines from Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East by the end of the year."

Among the new routes mentioned by the Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing, in Parliament on March 7 are Phnom Penh to Kuala Lumpur (KUL) by Cambodia Airways, Singapore to Sibul by Scoot and London Heathrow to KUL by British Airways.

Meanwhile, Scoot has announced it will launch direct flights from Singapore to Miri and Sibul respectively on May 20 and June 5. Its Miri flight will be thrice weekly while Sibul's will be four times weekly.

Malaysia's international capacity has increased over the last few months following the government's decision to allow visa-free entry to citizens of China and India for up to 30 days since December last year.

Recap on Routes Asia 2024

During the handover ceremony of Routes Asia 2025 to Perth Airport on February 29, organiser Informa Markets' Brand Director Routes, Steven Small reiterated that Routes Asia 2024 has broken records by having the biggest ever representation from airlines, airports, destination and industry supplier partners.



Over 110 airlines were represented, including the 10 largest Chinese carriers, which participated for the first time. Additionally, over 200 key airline decision makers attended the event and a record 3,500 meetings took place over the three-day duration from February 27-29.

Small said, "We also held our largest ever exhibition and had the highest number of sponsors at Routes Asia 2024."

They included sponsors such as Boeing for its two-and-a-half-days of conference, which was packed with insightful revelations from its impressive line-up of over 30 speakers discussing on opportunities, challenges, sustainability issues and mega trends facing the aviation industry.



Local state tourism boards such as Sabah and Sarawak also took up their own booths which were prominently facing the Mahsuri International Exhibition Centre's entrance near the hosts' booth of Malaysia Airports and Tourism Malaysia, and that of its key partner, Langkawi Development Authority.

Other foreign tourism-related bodies which also took up booths at Routes Asia 2024 included Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO), Marianas Visitors Authority, Okinawa Convention and Visitor Bureau, Saudi Arabia's Air Connectivity Program, Tourism Western Australia and the Philippines' Department of Tourism.

JNTO was crowned the overall winner of Routes Asia 2024 Awards besides grabbing another award under the Destination category during the networking night on February 28 hosted by Malaysia Airports and Tourism Malaysia, which rendered a strong showcase of the country's rich cultural heritage.



Other winners were Clark International Airport in the Philippines, Perth Airport, Melbourne Airport, and Cebu Pacific for the airline category.

Summing up the experience at Routes Asia 2024, Stephanie Juskiewicz, Senior Vice President of Aviation Business Development of Perth Airport said, "Our Malaysian host has done a wonderful job and we all hope to return to Langkawi."





Malaysia Aviation Group Strengthens Strategic Alliances to Fuel Tourism

Ahead of the upcoming MATTA Fair 2024 scheduled from March 22 to 24, Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG) and the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) have solidified their longstanding alliance with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), with MAG as the official airline partner for two years running until 2025.

As a premier sponsor of Malaysia's largest international travel fair, MAG will be supported by its subsidiaries, namely Malaysia Airlines, Firefly, MASwings, Enrich, Journify and AMAL, which provides scheduled and chartered services for pilgrimage to Jeddah and Madinah.

A series of collaborative initiatives supported by MATTA State Chapters are on the horizon while MAG will continue to provide MATTA Fair's Buyers Contest with prize air tickets as well as exclusive fares to participating travel agents besides conducting cross-promotions across MAG assets during the Fair.

“This partnership is poised to ignite the tourism industry, propelling it towards new heights.

AHMAD LUQMAN MOHD AZMI
Chief Executive Officer
of Airlines of Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG)

By leveraging their collective strengths to create exciting opportunities and elevate the travel experiences at

MATTA Fair 2024, Nigel Wong, MATTA President hopes this strengthened alliance will not only drive sustainable growth within the tourism industry but also contribute significantly to the country's overall economy

Earlier this year, Malaysia Airlines' travel and lifestyle loyalty programme also joined forces with international chain casual dining restaurant, TGI Fridays (TGIFs), to enhance exclusive privileges for its Enrich Blue, Silver, Gold and Platinum members, where they can redeem up to 10 TGIFs e-vouchers monthly that grant them up to 50% discounts, and other daily promotions.



Philip See, MAG CEO of Loyalty & Travel Services sealed the partnership with Lee Yew Jin, CEO of Craveat International, who said, "Together, we look forward to offering Enrich members the distinctive 'Fridays Feeling', a celebration of the joy found in everyday moments."

For more information, visit
malaysiaaviationgroup.com.my



British Airways Resuming Direct Flights to Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok

British Airways (BA) has announced its return to two popular Asian destinations, namely Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur on October 28 and November 10, 2024 respectively.

Its Chief Executive Officer Sean Doyle said the airline will return to Bangkok on a thrice-weekly service from London Gatwick using Boeing 777 with the first class dropped while Kuala Lumpur will be a daily service from London Heathrow using a four-class Boeing 787.

BA had suspended flights to most destinations in Far East Asia at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. News of its route resumption was revealed together with its £7 billion modernisation plan.

They include the introduction of free WiFi messaging, a new first-class suite, updated short-haul seating, a working website and mobile app as well as new premium airport lounges.

Earlier, BA also announced it will be using a cutting-edge engineering system deploying real-time data to predict aircraft maintenance issues which will not only help the airline reduce delays but also replace its costly and time-consuming paper-based system.

This system forms part of BA's £7 billion transformation investment over the next two years, its biggest ever investment to revolutionise how teams work, rolling out the latest digital technology to boost customers' experience and safety.

It includes machine learning, automation and artificial intelligence across the airline's operations, driving improvements from bookings to baggage handling and helping cut cancellations and delays.

By providing live performance information on BA's 270 jets, its E-Logs platform also allows the airline to immediately spot potential problems and proactively fix them, thus reducing downtime.

Aircraft technical logs, a regulatory requirement, have historically been paper-based. Flight and cabin crew would log faults in writing, which are then transcribed and transferred to the maintenance teams, who would carry out the required work and update the aircraft maintenance log in writing.



With BA's E-Logs system, specialist iPads will replace the paper-based system, thus allowing for immediate data transfer from the aircraft to engineers within seconds, even before the aircraft arrives at its destination.

This means engineers can pre-order any required parts and resolve issues more quickly on arrival, reducing the time planes are out of action. With this technology, BA can predict faults and pre-emptively correct them before they become an issue that might take an aircraft offline.

For more information, visit www.ba.com



Award-Winning Vietjet Air Shows Robust Financial Performance Post-Pandemic

Vietjet Air (VJ) has been honoured with double accolades by the United Kingdom (UK)-based International Finance Magazine as the Best Low-cost Airline in Southeast Asia and the Best Finance Management of Aviation in Vietnam for 2023.

Organised annually for over a decade, the International Finance Awards celebrates excellence in various sectors, including aviation, banking, insurance, energy and services.

VJ earned acclaim for its exceptional performance, particularly in enhancing the air travel experience for customers and consistently delivering innovative and secured aviation products and services at affordable fares.

They include its initiatives such as Fly Now, Pay Later and the Galaxy Pay payment gateway to ensure secure and convenient payments through various methods, including Apple Pay.

The airline was also recognised for its expansion of the flight network, covering a significant portion of Asia Pacific. They include Thailand, Malaysia, Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Singapore and South Korea.

In terms of financial management, the publication said VJ showed positive business results in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, committed to sustainable development with its focus on environmental, social, and governance goals.

VJ reported 56% year-on-year growth in its consolidated revenue of about US\$2.55 billion in 2023 while its cash and cash equivalents balance more than doubled to US\$205.38 million compared to the previous year.

This not only helped to ensure VJ's financial capabilities but also to position the airline as a resilient and rapidly growing force in the global aviation industry.

As of December 31, 2023, VJ's total assets reached about US\$3.46 billion after the airline invested in three new-generation A321neo aircraft. It currently has a fleet size of 105 aircraft.

At the recently concluded Singapore Airshow 2024, VJ inked a memorandum of understanding to order 20 wide-body A330neos to replace its existing leased A330-300s.

Slated for delivery in 2026, the new aircraft will enable it to extend its operations to Europe, the UK and the United States.

Meanwhile, the airline has an agreement with Boeing for the delivery of 200 737 MAX aircraft over the next five years, with the first 12 arriving in 2024 and going to its affiliate company, Thai Vietjet Air (VZ).

At the annual International Finance Awards 2023 held in Bangkok, the publication also awarded VZ for the most innovative Aviation Marketing Strategies.

For more information, visit www.vietjetair.com



flydubai Grows Network Beyond to Europe

Having expanded its Southeast Asia network with the recent commencement of its inaugural flight to Langkawi via a one-hour stopover in Penang, flydubai has become the first United Arab Emirates (UAE) national carrier to serve these two destinations in Malaysia with a daily service.

The Dubai-based carrier's inaugural flight, which coincided with the first day of Chinese New Year on February 10, 2024, was met with the traditional water cannon salute and a warm welcome by the local authorities.

Datuk Haslina Abdul Hamid, Chief Executive Officer of Langkawi Development Authority remarked, "The opening of this route will bring economic benefits to Langkawi with the arrival of tourists from West Asia, Europe, Africa and other regions."

Wong Hon Wai, Penang State EXCO for Tourism and Creative Economy said, "This will be another key international route from Penang and we applaud flydubai's efforts to make the Pearl of the Orient a destination of choice for many regional travellers."

Renowned for its vibrant street art, Penang's capital city, George Town, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site with captivating colonial architecture and diverse cuisine while Langkawi is a tropical haven with its pristine beaches and natural beauty.

Jeyhun Efendi, Senior Vice President of Commercial Operations and E-commerce of flydubai said it is

expanding its seasonal summer offering by resuming three-times weekly flights to Sochi in Russia between June 16 and September 1 from Dubai.

Earlier, flydubai also announced it will be launching four new services to Basel, Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius to grow its network in Europe to 43 destinations in 21 countries.

Besides making it the first carrier from UAE to operate direct flights to Basel in Switzerland from August 2, the announcement also marks flydubai's foray into the Baltic region with direct flights to Riga in Latvia starting October 11 as well as to Tallinn in Estonia and Vilnius in Lithuania from October 12.

The capital cities of these three Baltic states boast magnificent architecture and whose old towns are UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Ghaith Al Ghaith, Chief Executive Officer of flydubai said, "We are proud to see our network grow bigger than ever with the new route launches.

"We have created a diverse network of 126 destinations, 60% of which previously had very limited or no connections to Dubai."

Meanwhile, flydubai has appointed AVIAREPS as its General Sales Agent in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the Baltic countries to support its growth in these markets.

For more information, visit www.flydubai.com



Scoot Named Value Airline of the Year 2024

Singapore Airlines' (SIA) low-cost subsidiary, Scoot, has been recognised as Value Airline of The Year 2024 at the Air Transport World (ATW) magazine's recent annual Airline Industry Achievement Awards, exemplifying its commitment to ensure a seamless and unique travel experience for its customers.

“This is a testament to the dedication and hard work of the Scoot family, especially after several challenging years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

LESLIE THNG

Chief Executive Officer
of Scoot

In preparation of the Embraer's nine E190-E2 aircraft's entry into service with Scoot that is expected to be in April this year, its pilots have embarked on their E-Jets E2 training using the newly inaugurated E-Jets E2 full flight simulator (FFS) in Asia Pacific (APAC).



This training is the latest programme offered by the recently expanded Embraer CAE Training Services joint venture. Held at SIA Flight Training Centre near Changi Airport, Scoot pilots will experience all aspects of flying in CAE's latest generation FFS and practise multiple scenarios to enhance their skills and preparedness ahead of the aircraft's first revenue flights.

At the biennial Singapore Airshow on February 20 2024, Scoot signed a contract with Embraer for the latter's collaborative inventory planning solution to support its future fleet's operational efficiency, thus becoming Embraer's first customer for APAC.

Offering a usage-based inventory management plan, Embraer said the solution helps operators reduce costs by optimising their expendable spare parts inventory levels.

This latest agreement follows an earlier Pool Programme services arrangement reached between the two last September, giving Scoot access to component exchanges and repair services for more than 300 repairable parts to help minimise maintenance delays.

“Our continued partnership with Embraer shows our commitment to deliver optimal performance with the new E190-E2 fleet,” said Ng Chee Keong, Scoot's chief operating officer.

“Embraer's wide suite of services is built on understanding and anticipating the needs of our airline customers in a very dynamic environment,” said Carlos Naufel, president and CEO of Embraer Services and Support.

For more information, visit www.flyscoot.com



Batik Air Malaysia's Direct Flights from Batam to Kuala Lumpur a Boon to Regional Travel

The launch of Batik Air Malaysia's (OD) direct thrice weekly flights from Kuala Lumpur to Batam, Indonesia on February 16, 2024 represents a strategic move for the airline's expansion of its presence in key markets.

According to OD Chief Executive Officer, Datuk Chandran Rama Muthy, this route's debut underscored the airline's commitment to provide seamless travel experiences, further solidifying its position as a leading airline in the region.

“This route not only enhances connectivity between the two points but also serves as a gateway for passengers to access a myriad of regional and international destinations.”

DATUK CHANDRAN RAMA MUTHY

Chief Executive Officer
of Batik Air (OD)

OD's growing network spans 53 destinations across 22 countries through KL International Airport (KLIA).

As a prominent aviation hub, he said KLIA not only facilitates passenger to explore captivating Malaysian destinations such as Penang, Langkawi and Kuching but also serves as a transit point to other popular international destinations across the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Indian subcontinent, Australia, New Zealand, the Middle East and Central Asia.

Passengers from the inaugural flight were welcomed with goodie bags.

Present at the welcome reception were Yoshi Iskandar, Minister Counsellor from the Indonesian Embassy and top representatives from Tourism Malaysia, which included Dato' Dr Ammar Abd Ghapar and its Deputy Director-General (Promotion) Datuk Musa Yusof.

Also present were Zainuddin Mohamed, Malaysia Airports' Covering Aviation Marketing and Development General Manager and Navarajan Subramaniam, OD General Manager of Passenger and Cargo Sales.

According to Tourism Malaysia's data as at February 2024, OD, with 101 weekly flights and a capacity of 15,786 seats per week into Indonesia, enjoys a 13.8 market share and is ranked third among Malaysia's two other local airlines.

Indonesia, Malaysia's second largest source market, contributed about 3.1 million tourist arrivals in 2023, including those here for medical tourism.

Tourism Malaysia has set the target to receive 4.1 million arrivals from Indonesia in 2024.

Based on Indonesia Central Statistics Agency (BPS)'s newly released statistics for January 2024, foreign arrivals to Indonesia reached 927.75 thousand visits, up 16.19% year-on-year.

Malaysia led its list of international visitor arrivals followed by Australia and Singapore.

Additionally, the majority of its international arrivals (631,961) used air transport as the mode of travel.

For more information, visit www.batikair.com



AirAsia's Fixed Low One-Way Fares for Hari Raya Up for Grabs

To enable more Malaysians to fly home to be with their loved ones for the upcoming Hari Raya celebration from Peninsular Malaysia to East Malaysia, AirAsia Malaysia (AK) has mounted over 22,000 seats at fixed low-fares for late-night for one-way flights from April 5 to 17, 2024.

In addition to these 122 late-night flights at fixed fares to 11 routes, AK also operates 735 flights weekly with regular fares to Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan in support of the government's festive season initiative.

“

The recent announcement of a maximum fare of RM599 for one-way economy class flights to Sabah, Sarawak and Labuan in the days leading up to Hari Raya Aidilfitri demonstrates our proactive approach to meet the needs of travellers while promoting inclusivity and affordability.

”

ANTHONY LOKE
Transport Minister

Those travelling this festive season are encouraged to self-check-in using the AirAsia MOVE app, previously known as airasia Superapp, as early as 14 days before the departure date and use the e-Boarding Pass.

They are also advised to arrive at least two hours ahead of their scheduled departure time for domestic flights to clear all travel formalities during this peak period.

To further bolster connectivity at its East Malaysia hub in Kota Kinabalu (BKI), AK inaugurated a new route to Seoul's Incheon International Airport on March 4 2024, thus increasing the low-cost carrier's network to 282 weekly frequencies to and from Malaysia's second busiest international airport.

AirAsia Aviation Group Chief Executive Officer Bo Lingam said, "This expansion reinforces BKI's position as a dynamic aviation base, boasting nine domestic and nine international destinations."

With South Korea being one of the top three source markets for tourism in Sabah, recording about 150,000 arrivals in 2023, we look forward to flying even more travellers into Sabah this year.

The inaugural flight, with 100% passenger load factor, was marked by a send-off ceremony by AirAsia and Korea Tourism Organisation with mascot appearance and merchandise giveaways for guests on board.

For more information, visit www.airasia.com

Qatar Airways (QR) and gategroup have inked a business management agreement, paving the way for a new catering partnership to elevate inflight dining that will involve a collaboration on passenger dining experiences, sourcing and procurement, healthy eating, as well as sustainability.

The airline will tap into gategroup's expertise in menu design, culinary concepts and operational excellence. gategroup is a global leader in airline catering, retail-on-board and hospitality products and services.

Engineer Badr Mohammed Al-Meer, Chief Executive Officer of Qatar Airways (QR) Group said, "This partnership with gategroup will amplify our brand by delivering refined culinary experiences for our guests, inflight and on the ground in our world class lounges at Hamad International Airport."

Christoph Schmitz, Chief Executive Officer of gategroup said, "It is a journey of discovery, growth, and immense potential, and we firmly believe in the transformative power of collaboration, where two companies come together



Qatar Airways Partners gategroup to Elevate Inflight Dining

with shared visions and values to craft something truly outstanding." gategroup's culinary team, based in Doha, will contribute to the development of a dedicated culinary studio for QR, which will facilitate innovation, co-creation and efficient menu design.

The new culinary creations will focus on high quality ingredients, health and nutrition, incorporating local produce with a view to sustainable sourcing, authenticity and supporting local businesses.

The elevation of culinary quality will be underpinned by robust processes around menu development, efficiency in production and systematic monitoring of food quality, taste and appearance.

Besides marking the next era of QR's inflight offerings, the airline will also explore additional revenue streams and optimise both operational and commercial efficiencies via this collaboration.

For more information, visit www.qatarairways.com

The Jetstar Group has revamped its uniform as the budget airline ushers in a new era of low-cost travel and prepares to celebrate its 20th birthday in May since taking to the skies and flying more than 350 million customers across its international and domestic network.

The Group is made up of Jetstar Airways, a subsidiary of the Qantas Group in Australia and New Zealand, Jetstar Asia in Singapore, and Jetstar Japan.

Designed by renowned Australian fashion designer, Genevieve Smart, Co-founder and Creative Director of Ginger and Smart, the airline's new collection will be worn by over 5,000 of its frontline team members across Australia as well as by its airlines' staff based in New Zealand, Japan and Singapore from late 2024.

Its new pilot uniform, switching from the more traditional black to blue, will feature stylish cuts, new epaulettes and an optional neck scarf while the cabin crew and airport uniforms, offering more options, will cater for individual styles and preferences.



New Uniform for Jetstar Group to Represent New Era

Jetstar Group Chief Executive Officer, Stephanie Tully said the uniform represents the beginning of a new era for the airline, its people and customers.

"We've listened to our people and together wanted to create a uniform that reflects how far we have come as we move into our third decade of operation."

With sustainability being an important part of the process, Jetstar's current uniforms will be repurposed into new products, she added.

For more information, visit jetstar.com

Upclose with Julinus @ Jeffery Jimit Chief Executive Officer of Sabah Tourism Board



Having joined Sabah Tourism in 2011, Julinus Jeffery Jimit has been in various position, including being its Senior Manager before rising to become its Chief Financial Officer, Deputy CEO and current appointment effective December 5, 2023. Prior to this, the 52-year-old chartered accountant by profession was with Arthur Andersen and Ernst and Young for a combined 12 years. Being in the private sector with previous experience in internal and compliance audit as well as strategic planning and advisory has enabled him to adapt comfortably to his current responsibilities.

What are some of the challenges faced by Sabah Tourism in the post Covid-19 pandemic era?

At the initial stage of post-pandemic recovery, the main challenges were instilling travellers' confidence besides tackling the lack of manpower in service sectors and other generic concerns faced globally. However, these challenges have eroded over time and the tourism recovery towards the end of 2023 has been very positive.

On the RM45 million upgrading and development of BKI by Malaysia Airports, which is expected to be completed before the end of 2024, what are your comments on this?

Based on Malaysia Airports' masterplan for BKI, the country's second busiest international airport will be upgraded from nine million passengers per annum (mppa) to 12 mppa by 2027 to cater to the surging travel demand and passenger volume growth over the long term.

Tell us more about your recent memorandum of collaboration with Air Asia on expanding international routes to Kota Kinabalu International Airport (BKI).

AirAsia plays a crucial role in Southeast Asia (SEA) and North East Asia's (NEA) aviation industry and to collaborate with it is very significant for Sabah Tourism. We hope when we finalise the collaboration, Sabah's connectivity towards SEA, NEA and other parts of the world serviced by the airline will be further enhanced. AirAsia is launching eight new routes into Sabah this year.

They include Jakarta, Denpasar, Manado, Osaka, Shanghai, which debuted on February 20, and Incheon on March 4. Sabah Tourism is always open to collaborate with other airlines so long as it benefits the aviation stakeholders as a whole.

Sabah is the third location to receive the triple crown status with the latest addition of Kinabalu UNESCO Global Geopark at the World Travel Market 2023 in London. How are your plans to package Sabah's geopark attractions with those in Sarawak and Langkawi progressing?

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) branding is very important for Langkawi, Sabah and Sarawak. While this initiative is still at the early stage of planning, all the three parties are really excited to make this UNESCO Trail package a reality.

On the destination rebranding of 'Feel Sabah, North Borneo' launched at ITB 2023, how well has it been received since then?

We are doing our best to push the Feel Sabah brand both domestically and internationally. So far, the brand is able to provide a positive impact to Sabah as a preferred destination for nature, adventure, culture and other types of tourism.

Sabah surpassed its target last year with 2.6 million visitor arrivals. It aims to go beyond the 2.8 million arrivals set for 2024. How do you hope to achieve that?

With the growing travel demand both domestically and internationally and coupled with airlines looking for new routes and destinations, Sabah Tourism Board believes that its target for 2024 can be achieved.

What is the current weekly flight frequency and seat capacity like in Sabah? How much do you expect it to improve by this year?

Sabah Tourism is working hard to push for the reinstatement of flights to match its pre-pandemic performance. To-date, we have 15 international destinations with 138 flights weekly besides 384 weekly flights for the domestic market.

Sabah will do its best to achieve pre-pandemic performance of 236 and 455 flights weekly respectively for the international and domestic segment. However, there is no harm to dream more, to have more flights and surpass pre-pandemic performance. We hope to see foreign airlines from India and Turkey land in BKI this year.

Sabah Tourism had about 10 appointments with airlines at Routes Asia 2024. Who are some of these airlines?

Among the airlines we engaged with were Scoot, AirAsia, IndiGo, Lufthansa, Turkish Airlines, Vietjet, Jetstar, HK Express and Air India to cater to Sabah's diverse target markets. Through these partnerships, Sabah Tourism aims to optimise route networks and improve connectivity world serviced by the airline will be further enhanced.

Besides key markets such as China and India, Sabah is also targeting Central Asia. Why so?

The strong commitment from the private sector to push the Central Asia market for Sabah is commendable. Therefore, Sabah Tourism Board will support this initiative and continue with the promotional efforts to ensure Sabah's strong visibility in this emerging market.

For India, the focus is on southern India. Would you care to elaborate on this?

This is due to the 2.89 million arrivals of Indian travellers to Malaysia from 2018 to 2022, of which 34% are contributed by Southern India.

Sabah Tourism is also eyeing flights from the western countries this year. Which countries are these?

They are probably not direct flights but for a tag flight from Uzbekistan and Turkey.

How is hotel supply situation in Sabah currently? Will it be able to cope with the increase in tourist arrivals? What are the new hotels coming in the state?

Presently, Sabah has a total of 27,136 hotel rooms. At this juncture, the slowdown of China market would give certain buffer for hotel rooms in Sabah. However, once the China market picks up followed by other markets such as South Korea and Brunei, and a surge in domestic market, extra hotel rooms might be needed.

So far, the upcoming hotels in Kota Kinabalu (KK) include Club Med Borneo, Sheraton Hotel, Intercontinental Sabah KK Resort, Alila Resort in Tuaran, Crowne Plaza KK Waterfront, Fairfield by Marriot, Avani, Grandis @ The Peninsula and The Peninsula, which will provide an estimated total of 3,000 rooms once completed.

Sabah Tourism raised its ante to receive the silver award at the recent Putra Atria Award 2023 for the transportation, travel and tourism. Are you aiming for gold next year? If yes, what steps are you taking to ensure that?

The award is good for our Feel Sabah brand. As long as it brings values to the brand, we will continue to aim for the sky. We have a strong and smart collaboration with overseas online travel agents to ensure the Feel Sabah brand and Sabah as a preferred destination are well received by international visitors.

Under your leadership, how will Sabah Tourism continue to support the state's industry players in their tourism promotion?

I always believe tourism is government led and private sector driven. Tourism promotion must be carried out with the one goal and one vision mind set between the government and the private sector. Recently, we committed to the reprinting of 10,000 copies of the updated Sandakan Heritage Trail (SHT) map for 2024 to ensure that tourists have access to updated information. Working with SHT founder and Sandakan Tourism Association, Sabah Tourism is keen to revive tourists' interest in Sandakan, which is rich in heritage and food.

I would like to reiterate that Sabah Tourism is always open to venture into high-impact promotional initiatives with the state's tourism players.



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