

# AIRLINK

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Division**

**Managing Editor**  
Zainuddin Mohamed

**Editorial & Concept**  
Mediate Communications Sdn Bhd  
airlink@mediate.com.my

**Advertising & Production**  
Noor Hafiza Ruslan  
hafiza@malaysiaairports.com.my

Nurul Farehah Norsam  
farehahn@malaysiaairports.com.my

**Design & Distribution**  
Mediate Communications Sdn Bhd

**MALAYSIA AIRPORTS HOLDINGS  
BERHAD**  
Reg. No: 199901012192  
(487092-W)

Aviation Marketing and  
Development Division  
Level 3, Arrival Hall (Domestic)  
Main Terminal Building  
KL International Airport  
64000 Sepang  
Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia  
Tel: +603-8776 4949  
Fax: +603-8776 4040  
Email: marketing@  
malaysiaairports.com.my





Subang Airport's Jet Operation Takes Off

Following the government's approval of Malaysia Airports' Subang Airport Regeneration Plan (SARP) to upgrade and develop the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport or Subang Airport (SZB) as it is popularly known and its surrounding 1,179.5 acres, certain strategic developments have taken shape involving its three main segments.

They are namely the business aviation, aerospace ecosystem and SZB as a city airport. The business aviation segment focuses on fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, providing a full suite of services such as fixed-based operator, hangarage or workshops for maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO), apron parking and ground handling services.

The aerospace ecosystem segment, on the other hand, has the Subang Aerotech Park serving as the flagship of the airport industrial cluster centred on high-tech manufacturing, sub-assembly and MRO operations. The last segment involves the development of an integrated city airport terminal and mixed development of a smart city airport with terminal-linked commercial outlets.

At a walkabout media briefing at SZB led by Transport Minister Anthony Loke on July 30, 2024, he said the security screening, customs and immigration processes will be improved with the installation of additional facilities and equipment.

For instance, the immigration counters have been increased from three to four for departures and from three to eight for arrivals.

Passengers can also expect better comfort and smoother journey with the extension of the domestic and international holding lounges, which now have three additional boarding gates, of which one is for international flights and two for domestic flights.

There is also a new domestic baggage reclaim area and another baggage reclaim area dedicated for international flights.

Loke said the airport operation's fully integrated trial run initiated on July 26, 2024 followed by another fully integrated trial run involving a live simulation with aircraft the next day were both successfully conducted prior to the onset of SZB's interim jet operation kicking off on August 1, 2024.

The operations commenced with Batik Air Malaysia's (OD) maiden domestic service from Penang (PEN) to SZB in the morning using its upgraded Boeing 737 aircraft followed by TransNusa's (8B) daily international flight from Jakarta Soekarno-Hatta International Airport (CGK) Terminal 3 to SZB arriving later in the afternoon the same day on the narrowbody Airbus A320, which was given a water cannon salute.



OD's thrice weekly PEN to SZB flights will be increased to a daily service from August 15, 2024. Plans are afoot to add new destinations such as Kota Bharu, Kota Kinabalu (BKI) and Kuching (KCH).

Given SZB's upgraded facilities, nine daily flights are scheduled for operations from Firefly (FY), AirAsia Malaysia (AK) and Scoot (TR) besides OD and 8B.

FY will be flying daily to both BKI and PEN beginning August 29, 2024 using the B737 aircraft while AK will start its 14 times weekly service respectively on its A320 to BKI and KCH on 30 August, 2024.

However, FY will continue to maintain its 266 times weekly ATR flights to Alor Setar (29 times), Johor Bahru (33 times), Kota Bahru (43 times), Langkawi (14 times), Penang (72 times), Kuala Terengganu (29 times) and Singapore's Seletar Airport (46 times).

Combined with FY's ATR operations, SZB's connectivity will be enhanced with direct links to eight (previously six) domestic and to three (one before) international destinations. Meanwhile, foreign low-cost carrier, TR, announced it will only be commencing its daily operations to SZB on September 1 using the A320.

**Malaysia Airports Inks Strategic Deal and MBI Selangor**

Malaysia Airports recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Menteri Besar Selangor Incorporated (MBI Selangor) at the Farnborough International Airshow (FIA) 2024 in the United Kingdom to advance the development and marketing of Zone 3 and Zone 4 at Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang, Selangor.

These zones, designated for business aviation and aerospace segments under the Subang Airport Regeneration Plan (SARP) will include the creation of a new area dedicated to business aviation hangars as well as the amplification of the aerospace ecosystem catering to aerospace manufacturers, assemblers as well as component maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) operators.

Expected to create a robust ecosystem that fosters innovation, sustainability and economic growth in the region, the document exchange ceremony between the two parties was represented by Malaysia Airports' Head of KLIA Aeropolis Sdn Bhd, Randhill Singh, and MBI Selangor's Group Chief Executive Officer (GCEO), Saipolyazan M Yusop, a technologist (Ts.).

Also present were the Chief Minister of Selangor, Dato' Seri Amirudin Shari, Selangor State EXCO for Investment, Trade and Mobility, Ng Sze Han, High Commissioner of Malaysia to the United Kingdom, His Excellency Dato' Zakri Jaafar and CEO of the National Aerospace Industry Corporation Malaysia, Professor Ts. Shamsul Kamar Abu Samah.



The two parties also discussed potential collaboration on off-terminal real estate development at KLIA Aeropolis, the nation's flagship airport city development, which encompasses a vast aerospace park and aeronautical support zones surrounding the KL International Airport (KLIA).

Randhill viewed the collaboration as a significant milestone in Malaysia Airports' efforts to position SZB as a global hub for aviation and aerospace community. "The SARP development is poised to become a cornerstone of Malaysia's economic growth, offering state-of-the-art facilities and a dynamic environment for businesses to thrive," he said.

Ts. Saipolyazan remarked, "This strategic collaboration aligns perfectly with the Selangor First Plan, particularly its focus on developing growth corridors in the state."

They include the economic spillover into the economic corridors of the Selangor Maritime Gateway's Economic Development Zone, and the Integrated Development Region in South Selangor.

The partnership between Malaysia Airports and MBI Selangor is expected to attract high-value investments for the leasing of hangars, industrial lots and buildings for Zone 3 and 4, spanning about 55.41 acres and 33.88 acres respectively.





### Award-Winning Japan Airlines Recognised for Safety and More

Japan Airlines (JL) has been honoured with the Richard Crane Award by the Flight Safety Foundation (FSF) for the third time for its continuous promotion and operation of the Safety Promotion Centre since the JL123 accident in 1985.

“  
In the past few decades, JL has transformed its approach to safety, creating a robust and enduring safety culture.

**DR. HASSAN SHAHIDI**

President and Chief Executive Office  
of Flight Safety Foundation (FSF)

Earlier this year, JL was certified as SKYTRAX 5-Star Airline, the world's highest rank for its safety and excellent products and services inflight and at the airport for seven consecutive years.

At the recent 2024 Skytrax World Airline Awards ceremony held in the United Kingdom, the oneworld® alliance member was awarded for the first time the World's Best Premium Economy Class title.

This is in addition to the airline winning the World's Best Economy Class award three times.

JL also won first place in the Best Premium Economy Class Airline Seat, Best Premium Economy Class in Asia and Best Economy Class Airline Seat categories.

Among JL's initiatives, its new Airbus A350-1000 aircraft, introduced in January 2024, has been praised for its Premium Economy class for having large dividers for increasing privacy and motorised leg rests that adjust horizontally for enhanced comfort. It also boasts a 16-inch 4K large-screen monitor, 1.3 times larger than the previous model.



Meanwhile, JL recently awarded Brahim's Food Services Sdn Bhd (BFS) the Most Improved Caterer Worldwide under its Hygiene Quality Award Category as part of its hygiene audits conducted twice a year on caterers at all its operating sites and regularly on its self-operated lounges.

This ensures that hygiene management standards appropriate for the JL brand are strictly controlled.

Ichihara Yukiko, JL Director of Safety Management Group presented the award certificate to Faizal Rosli Datuk Abdullah, BFS Chief Operating Officer, who remarked, "Together we will strive to serve Japan Airlines better!"

Also present at the award presentation ceremony were Kamiya Shigeo, JL Assistant Manager of Catering Operation Group and Siti Sarah, BFS Head of Marketing.

For more information, call **+603-2287 6888** or visit **www.jal.co.jp/my/en**



### Qingdao Airlines' Maiden Flight To Kuala Lumpur

Qingdao Airlines' (QW) inaugural flight arrived at KL International Airport Terminal 2 (KLIA T2) on July 9, 2024, carrying 169 passengers on the Airbus A321. The aircraft, which has a 208-seat capacity, comes in a two-class configuration comprising six business class seats while the rest are economy class seats.

Flying three times a week, Shahrinnizam Abd Jamil, General Manager of Operations of KLIA T2, said QW's commencement of this new route is a testament to the strength and growing ties between China and Malaysia, which is celebrating 50 years of diplomatic relations this year.

Several organisations and travel agents involved in promoting the two-way travel of this direct route include the Shandong Provincial People's Congress, Shandong Provincial Tourism Administration, China-ASEAN Business Association (CABA) and China Travel Service (Shandong) Ltd.

CABA President Tan Sri Lim Gait Tong, who is also President of Malaysia-Hospitable Shandong Cultural and Tourism Association, said CABA had earlier signed an agreement on June 12, 2023 with the People's Government of Shinan District in Qingdao, Shandong Province to promote this route

According to OAG, Shandong, is among China's top 10 provinces by seat capacity in July 2024. This coastal province in East China is ranked sixth.



The global travel data provider also cited that China's seat capacity to Malaysia has recovered, increasing by 25% compared to June 2024 and 16% higher than in July 2019.

Director General of Tourism Malaysia, Manoharan Periasamy said the 438 weekly flights from China to Kuala Lumpur with 959,000 seat capacity are expected to rise further this year, exceeding the 370 weekly flights during the pre-COVID-19 pandemic.

Based at the Qingdao Jiadong International Airport, QW currently has a fleet of 37 Airbus aircraft flying to over 20 destinations.

For more information, visit **www.qdairlines.com**





## Diversity, Inclusivity and Equality Among Malaysia Airlines' Award-Winning Cabin Crew

As part of Malaysia Airlines' (MH) cabin crew and cadet pilot outreach programme, the airline will be participating in a special career carnival for Orang Asli or also known as Indigenous Peoples on August 24 and 25, 2024.

The national carrier had conducted a recruitment outreach covering diverse ethnic groups such as Jakun, Temuan and Semai in Pahang, Perak and Johor in partnership with the Department of Orang Asli Development in December 2023.

MH currently has its first four Orang Asli cabin crew serving onboard its flights following the successful graduation of 56 cabin crew from the first and second batches this year at MAB Academy after undergoing a

“This milestone reflects our ongoing commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion within our workforce, ensuring equal opportunities for all, regardless of their background.”

**DATUK CAPTAIN IZHAM ISMAIL**

Group Managing Director  
of Malaysia Aviation Group

MH also continues to ramp up the recruitment of international cabin crew from key markets such as India, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines to promote

diversity and personalise its service for its global customers.

Meanwhile, the airline has moved up to the 10th spot in the 2024 Skytrax World Airline Awards for its exceptional cabin crew service from its previous 17th position in 2023.

MH also enhanced its standing among the World's Top 100 Airlines by securing 39th place, up from 47th in 2023, thus reflecting the growing trust and confidence in its brand.

Other recent enhancements introduced include on-arrival lounge access for Business Suite and Enrich Platinum members, curated lounge menu offerings and premium private transfer services at KL International Airport Terminal 1 for departing and arriving passengers.

Onboard, passengers can enjoy upgraded amenities such as special giveaways for young travellers on selected international routes, larger blankets and redesigned duvets and mattress covers.

The airline recently signed a multi-year partnership with RateGain Travel Technologies to elevate further its performance across its network by leveraging the latter's advanced AirGain platform to boost its competitive edge via real-time pricing intelligence and to set market trends.

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



## Vietnam Airlines Receives Its First Airbus A320neo

Vietnam Airlines (VN) has taken delivery of the first of its three Airbus A320neo aircraft that it will be receiving in 2024 to meet the increasing travel demand during the peak summer season.

The aircraft will be used to serve domestic routes such as from Hanoi (HAN) to Dalat and Phu Quoc as well as from Ho Chi Minh City (SGN) to Thanh Hoa and Chu Lai.

According to OAG's latest July 2024 data, Southeast Asia's (SEA) top domestic route remains HAN to SGN with 976,700 seats with its daily capacity up 8% compared to the previous month. Additionally, three of the top 10 domestic routes SEA are in Vietnam.

VN said the delivery of the Airbus A320neos would provide nearly 40,000 seats during summer and 300,000 seats in the second half of 2024.

generation engines that will result in 16% fuel savings, 75% noise reduction and 50% lower emissions.

They represent an important addition to VN's fleet given the current aircraft shortage situation arising from Pratt & Whitney's engine recalls globally.

VN's 182-seat aircraft offers eight business class and 174 economy class seats providing a seat pitch of 28 to 29 inches and a five inches recline. Its amenities include the wireless IFE system.

In 2023, Vietnam's national flag carrier transported over 24.1 million passengers and 230,000 tons of cargo, up 16.4% and 5.8% year-on-year respectively. VN's domestic route network continued to operate at pre-2019 levels while it has restored its international route network to 90% of 2019 levels.

“In 2024, challenges continue to face the aviation sector such as macro-economic uncertainties. The company will focus on restructuring assets, capital, investment portfolio, organisational structure and corporate governance reforms.”

The primary goal is to reduce losses and balance revenue and expenditure in 2024.

**DANG NGOC HOA**

Chairman  
of Vietnam Airlines (VN)

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



These modern narrowbody A320neo features next-





## Saudia's Outstanding On-Time Performance and Positive Growth in the First Half of 2024

Saudi Arabia's national flag carrier, Saudia (SV), was named The World's Most Improved Airline and ranked top for the Best Economy Class Airline Catering at the recent 2024 Skytrax World Airline Awards.

The airline leapt from 23rd place in 2023 to 20th position in 2024, thanks to its SHINE transformation programme and launch of its new digital transformation and cutting-edge technologies.

Ranked among the top 10 airlines globally in On-Time Performance (OTP) throughout 2023 and maintaining its position for six consecutive months, SV was among the top five for arrival OTP and first globally for the highest departure OTP in May 2024.

The airline was the leader in June 2024 with 88.2% OTP, according to global data from aviation analytics firm Cirium's while in the Middle East, it came in fifth.

Supported by over 94,300 scheduled flights and additional services, SV carried 16.3 million guests on both domestic and international route for the first half of 2024 (1H24), up 19% compared to the same period in 2023.

Out of its 16.3 million guests, over 9.1 million of them were from its international operations.

“In the 1H24, we successfully executed both our summer and Haj season plans.”

### HIS EXCELLENCY ENGINEER IBRAHIM AL-OMAR

Director General  
of Saudia Group

SV has a current fleet of 144 aircraft, which connects to over 100 destinations across four continents. It is poised for more growth with two major agreements with manufacturers, Boeing and Airbus, for the acquisition of 103 new aircraft over the coming years.

Additionally, the airline is undergoing a radical overhaul of its guests' cabins, including its business class seats besides introducing high-speed inflight internet and upgrading its onboard entertainment screens to the highest resolution in the industry.

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

Batik Air Malaysia (OD) will launch Hat Yai and Krabi Thailand, its two latest destinations from Kuala Lumpur on September 13, 2024. Operating daily using the Boeing 737, the aircraft is configured into business and economy class seats.

Last year alone, 4.62 million Malaysian tourists explored Thailand's wonders while the number of Thai tourists visiting Malaysia exceeded 1.5 million last year, reflecting the robust tourism ties between the two countries.

According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Malaysia ranks as the top visitors to Krabi while Hat Yai welcomes about 2.5 million Malaysian visitors annually. From January 1 to July 25 this year, Thailand reported 20 million international visitors led by China's almost four million visitors followed by Malaysia (2.8 million).

Hat Yai, famed for its bustling markets and street food, serves as a gateway to southern Thailand's pristine beaches and natural wonders.

Krabi, meanwhile, captivates nature enthusiasts and adventurers with its



## More New Routes to Thailand and Indonesia by Batik Air Malaysia

breathtaking limestone cliffs, crystalline waters and idyllic islands such as Railay Beach, Phi Phi Islands, and the Emerald Pool.

Marking OD's seamless connectivity across Southeast Asia as the airline aligns itself to meet the rising demand and deliver exceptional travel experiences, it also expanded its Indonesian routes to Lombok on 31 July, 2024 followed by Surabaya on August 1 while Padang and Pekanbaru will both commence on 10 August.

OD will be operating four weekly flights to Lombok, 14 weekly flights to Surabaya and seven weekly flights each to Pekanbaru and Padang.

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

Express Rail Link Sdn Bhd (ERL) has signed a partnership agreement with South Korea's Airport Railroad Co Ltd to provide a seamless bundled purchase of train tickets from both in one transaction at klook.com.

This will significantly enhance passengers' experience when they travel abroad as the airport transfer arrangements are taken care of before they fly, thus eliminating the hassle of looking for transport when they are in Kuala Lumpur and Incheon.

ERL is the operator of KLIA Ekspres and KLIA Transit services connecting KL International Airport's (KLIA) Terminal 1 and 2 to the capital city of Kuala Lumpur (KL) while Airport Railroad runs AREX, an express train as well as all-stop train services between Incheon International Airport's two terminals and Seoul.

ERL, into its 22 years of service this year, has carried over 122 million passengers onboard its trains while its South Korean counterpart, with 18 years of service, has over one billion passengers onboard today.

To mark their partnership, both parties



## Express Rail Link Offers Bundled Train Tickets on Klook

offered a 10% discount for a KLIA Ekspres and AREX one-way adult ticket to the first 500 tickets purchased.

The signatories at signing ceremony in Kuala Lumpur were Noormah Mohd Noor, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of ERL and Kim Jong-dae, CEO of Airport Railroad. The event was witnessed by His Excellency Yeo Seung-bae, Ambassador of Republic of Korea to Malaysia.

Noormah hopes to tap into the South Korean market through this partnership and create more awareness of its train services when passengers are planning for their travel to KL.

With more than 25 dedicated air rail services in the world, she believes this number is sufficient for airport rail operators to form an alliance similar to airline alliances, where the members can cross advertise and offer exclusive benefits to passengers while promoting sustainable travel.

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





## flydubai Reviews Expansion Plans After Boeing's Delivery Delays

With flydubai's (FZ) announcement that no new aircraft will be joining its fleet for the rest of 2024 after receiving an update from the Boeing manufacturer on further delays in its aircraft delivery schedule, the Emirati government-owned low-cost airline has been forced to evaluate its route development plans and potential frequency revision across its network.

“Boeing's short-noticed and frequent delivery schedule revisions have hindered our strategic growth plans, resulting in significant disruptions to our published schedules.

The reduced capacity will ultimately affect our customers as well as our projected financial performance.

### GHAITH AL GHAITH

Chief Executive Officer  
of flydubai (FZ)

Boeing's multiple revisions of its delivery schedule for 2024 means that it will be unable to deliver the 14 B737 MAX aircraft originally scheduled for FZ. The aircraft delivered in the first half of 2024 were from the backlog of previous years.

FZ has more than 125 B737 MAX aircraft on order to be delivered over the next decade.

Urging Boeing to take immediate action and implement measures to stabilise its production and delivery processes to avoid further delays while upholding the highest standards, Al Ghaith added, “We look forward to a swift resolution of this issue.”

The airline currently operates a single fleet-type of 88 B737 aircraft that serves more than 125 destinations across 58 countries. They comprised 29 Next-Generation B737-800, 56 B737 MAX 8 and three B737 MAX 9.

Meanwhile, FZ has entered into Aircraft, Crew, Maintenance and Insurance agreements to mitigate the delays in aircraft deliveries and meet the surge in demand for travel by adding capacity, particularly during peak travel periods.

The airline also extended the lease on some of the aircraft scheduled to be returned to the lessors under its Sale and Leaseback agreements but this has led to FZ incurring further costs.

Additionally, FZ invested in an extensive retrofit programme for its Next-Generation Boeing 737-800 aircraft to ensure a consistent onboard experience and align its cabin products.



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



## Malaysia Airports' Licence to Win Shopping Campaign Returns

Making a comeback this year, Malaysia Airports' Licence to Win (LTW) campaign runs from July 1 to December 31, 2024, offering shoppers and travellers alike a chance to win the RM1 million grand prize in shopping vouchers, and other prizes.

During the campaign's recent launch in Kuala Lumpur, a Million Possible theme was enacted with a covert operative seen jumping off a helicopter and entering the ballroom with a mission briefcase to hand to a secret agent.

“We expect to achieve more than RM200 million in sales receipts from LTW 2024 this year. This initiative aligns with our commercial reset strategy to elevate the shopping experience with exciting retail offerings at Malaysia Airports.

### HANI EZRA HUSSIN

Senior General Manager of Commercial Services  
for Malaysia Airports

Notably, duty-free outlets are getting major facelifts to elevate the airport shopping experience with the retail partner for LTW, Eraman Duty Free, having revamped two of its stores at KL International Airport (KLIA) Terminal 1. More stores are undergoing renovation, with the grand reopenings set for the fourth quarter of 2024.

Hani added, “By introducing a diverse range of new outlets, we aim to enhance the overall atmosphere and provide a variety of options that cater to every taste and preference. Simultaneously, this presents a great opportunity to introduce our vibrant retail landscape and drive sales to our airport retailers.

“Since 2019, we have significantly expanded our retail offerings to create a more enticing shopping and dining experience for our visitors.”

Malaysia Airports' sales rose 27% via its LTW 2019 campaign with receipts surpassing RM178 million. The grand prize then was a McLaren 570S Coupe.

To participate in the LTW 2024 campaign, shoppers and diners can submit their entries online via the campaign's website, <https://licencetowin.com.my>, manually via contest entry forms or at the digital kiosks.

They only need a minimum spend of RM350 on a receipt, which can present a maximum of two receipts on the same day to qualify for one entry. However, those who spend a minimum of RM350 at any Eraman stores can get double entries.

The participating airports for the LTW 2024 are KLIA Terminal 1 and 2, Penang International Airport (PEN), Kota Kinabalu International Airport (BKI), Langkawi International Airport (LGK) and Kuching International Airport (KCH).

Besides the RM1 million grand prize, the first prize is RM50,000 worth of shopping spree at Eraman followed by RM30,000 and RM20,000 shopping sprees as the second and third prizes respectively.

Additionally, there is four monthly prizes of RM2,000 shopping spree each, and a bonus prize worth RM10,000 shopping spree exclusively for entries from PEN, BKI, LGK and KCH.

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



## Upclose with Nizran Noordin Director General of Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC)



As a strong believer of value creation in our products and services, I look forward to going the extra mile and continuing to deliver high impact programmes and initiatives for Malaysia.

**Under your year-long leadership, what are some milestones reached by ITC?**

It has been a team effort all the while, and whatever successes ITC celebrates today is the result of the legacy left behind by my predecessors since its establishment in 2009. One of the key milestones was the China Imam Fam Trip in January 2024 organised for some 35 *imams* or Islamic leaders from 14 provinces in China. Through the familiarisation programme, we provided the *imams* with a first-hand experience of Malaysia's multicultural, vibrant and tolerant environment for them to promote Malaysia to their friends, family, and community back home. It is an honour for me to be part of this ambitious new project aimed at enhancing Islamic tourism.

**Tell us more about this Fam Trip, which exceeded your expectations and resulted in increased interest and bookings from Chinese Muslim tourists.**

We collaborated with the Malaysian Inbound Chinese Association (MICA) along with support from MOTAC's promotion arm, Tourism Malaysia, and other industry players to achieve this record-breaking success. MICA reportedly brought in 58,000 Muslim tourists from China with expenditure amounting to RM92.8 million between February and March 2024 as a result of the fam trip.

The driving factors can be attributed partly to the power of innovative public-private partnerships between ITC and MICA as well as the appointment of *imams* from China by MICA as travel and cultural ambassadors. Malaysia's robust Muslim-friendly environment and its abundant choice of tourism products and services for Muslims were other contributing factors. This success will further open up opportunities for us to tap into the 30 million Chinese Muslim market.

We are working towards establishing Malaysia as an *umrah* or pilgrim's hub, offering Muslim tourists within Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Oceania the opportunity to explore Malaysia's diverse attractions either before or after performing their *umrah*.

**What are the initiatives undertaken by ITC to promote Malaysia as an *umrah* hub?**

Appointed to lead this Special Task Force, ITC has been engaging with various ministries, government agencies and tourism industry players to detail out the implementation plan. The proposal involves areas such as promotion, package development, provision of accommodation and transportation for the pilgrims as well as language, and customer service courses for frontliners. The foundation work is being set and once approved, we will all work together to promote and position Malaysia as an *umrah* hub.

**Nizran Noordin, 47, helms ITC as it celebrates its 15th anniversary this year. Since taking up his appointment on 10 July 2023, the former Group Chief Executive Officer-cum-Executive Director of the public-listed Majuperak Holdings Berhad, has been entrusted to lead ITC, an entity under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) into its next phase of transformational growth.**

**With the ground works for ITC's Muslim-Friendly Tourism & Hospitality Assurance and Recognition (MFAR) and the Muslim-Friendly Tourist Guide (MFTG) programmes already in place, our Petaling Jaya-born city slicker, armed with his extensive corporate background that spans over 24 years, enters into an exciting phase with global tourism going through post COVID-19 recovery and Malaysia gearing for its Visit Malaysia Year 2026.**

**How would you describe your leadership style having come from a corporate background?**

In all my years in corporate ventures, nothing is truer than the wisdom of results speaking louder than anything else. I am prone to taking a solutions-based and return on investment-based approach to any strategy we want to introduce to the industry. My limited tourism experience before joining ITC was when I turned around the Tasik Cermin. Once an economic backwater, this new tourism product in Perak is now the pride of Ipoh, welcoming throngs of visitors daily worldwide. It is this action-oriented outlook in my working style that aligns well with what ITC has been tasked to do. Another wisdom that I learned from corporate life is that networking is gold. Thus, I try my best to nurture cross-sectoral relationships and collaborations between tourism, finance and technology as well as bringing in fresh perspectives and innovative ideas.

**What are the key markets that ITC is eyeing for Muslim-friendly (MF) tourism?**

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation countries are a key focus with its 1.1 billion Muslim market. Southeast Asia with its 255 million Muslim population and the 350 million Muslims residing in non-Muslim-majority countries are other potential markets. ITC collaborates closely with Tourism Malaysia and sometimes join them to participate in global exhibitions in China, Russia, London and the Middle East to introduce Malaysia as a destination.

**Who are the participants in the upcoming Islamic Tourism Month (ITM) consumer event?**

To be held from 16 August to 30 September 2024, ITM is a platform to promote MF products and services nationwide through special offers and promotions by our partners, whom we target to have 250 participants. ITC hopes to spotlight on Malaysia's vibrant and exciting Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Hospitality (MFTH) ecosystem, including facilities and activities attractively tailored for domestic and international tourists. They include hotels, spas, healthcare tourism and travel packages, restaurants, events, shopping and retail, mosque tourism as well as seminars and training. Visit [www.itm.itc.gov.my](http://www.itm.itc.gov.my) for more information.

**ITC will host the fourth World Islamic Tourism Conference (WITC) on 12 and 13 September 2024 at Sunway Resort Hotel in Selangor. Are you targeting international participants and what efforts have been made to promote this event?**

We are targeting 30% international participation. To achieve that, ITC is working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Tourism Malaysia to promote through their overseas offices. During our participation in overseas exhibitions and events, we have been promoting WITC 2024. We also promote it via social media.

**What does ITC hope to achieve through the WITC 2024 as the travel industry recover from the pandemic?**

We aim to provide new perspectives on the Muslim tourist market, which extends beyond the Middle East. With a global Muslim population of two billion last year, its potential is vast and geographically diverse, with women and youth being significant drivers of this demographic. Opportunities also abound for cross-sectoral collaborations between tourism and finance, technology, social media, and beyond – which can contribute to a more robust post-pandemic recovery. Discussions at the WITC will also cover the sustainability and inclusive aspects of tourism, ensuring responsible practices for both businesses and tourists.

**How does ITC promote sustainability in Islamic tourism?**

Through our collaborations with universities to conduct research on the sustainability of Islamic tourism, we discovered that the Islamic principles of *Maqasid Shariah* and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG) are aligned. We have incorporated sustainability in our MFAR guidelines to ensure that our MFAR recipients also have sustainability practices that

contribute to their MFAR ratings. Additionally, we work with mosque administrators and *pondokstay* operators to introduce them to Islamic tourism and explore how their products and services can be expanded to attract the overseas Muslim tourist market for income generation.

**Share with us MFAR's progress and how many organisations have participated in it thus far.**

Within a few years after MFAR was introduced in 2019, ITC managed to sign up some 54 hotels. After the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were lifted, we further harmonised the guidelines through workshops with the industry players and rebranded MFAR to cover various business sectors. They include accommodation premises, spa and wellness premises, medical facilities, travel operating businesses, transportation hubs, tourism products, shopping centres, theme and entertainment parks, rest and recuperation areas, as well as trade and convention centres. It is now more inclusive and offers opportunities for all sectors to be part of the Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Hospitality (MFTH) ecosystem. We onboarded 26 hotels this year and are targeting 350 MFAR recipients by the end of 2025.

To ramp up awareness on MFAR, ITC implements a two-pronged approach to engage with the public and the industry players. We promote MFAR businesses to consumers through media campaigns such as our ongoing collaboration with TV AlHijrah, and also through our consumer website, [mymuslimtrip.com](http://mymuslimtrip.com). We will be rolling out the brand awareness for MFAR on billboards soon. To encourage more industry players to subscribe or sign up for MFAR, we conduct awareness seminars, participate in trade exhibitions and share information through our social media and corporate website, [itc.gov.my](http://itc.gov.my).

**How many MFTGs are there in Malaysia currently and how significant is their services?**

Some 211 MFTGs are now registered with ITC. We target 380 MFTGs by the end of 2025. These MFTGs are registered with the MOTAC and have undergone three days of MFTG training with ITC, where they learn about the Muslim tourist market, Muslims' religious obligations and their faith-based needs when travelling, halal concept and more. Our holistic MFTG training modules add value to their profession. Tourists are assured that these guides understand their Muslim needs and know how to interact with them accordingly.

**Moving forward, how does ITC use data to capture more Muslim tourists to Malaysia?**

We harness data by analysing trends, needs and preferences to develop targeted strategies and campaigns for this market. Such data-driven insights support the industry players in designing and marketing products that meet the Muslim tourists' specific demands while also helping ITC to create relevant training modules to educate industry professionals on providing suitable facilities and services. This comprehensive approach ensures effective market engagement, relevant product offerings and well-informed service delivery.



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