

# AIRLINK

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## Malaysia Airports' Drive to Improve Operational Efficiency and Sustainability

Coupled with the ongoing recovery in passenger traffic at its airports and Malaysia Airports' long-term growth strategy, the Group continues to be resilient in its profitability, reporting a 137.3% growth in its net profit to RM606.2 million for the first nine months of 2024 compared to RM255.5 million for the same period last year.

Its Group's revenue was also 20.3% higher at RM4.26 billion year-on-year (yoy). Nearing the end of its financial year 2024, the airport operator expects its passenger traffic to approach pre-pandemic levels, particularly from its key markets such as China, India and Southeast Asia.

The Group's intensified efforts to expand network connectivity at all its airports resulted in the number of airlines operating in Malaysia this year exceeding that of 2019 despite the aviation industry facing challenges such as the delays in new aircraft deliveries and spare parts constraints.

Malaysia Airports' ongoing efforts to attract new airlines and routes, coupled with the resumption of services by existing carriers, are expected to further fuel passenger growth.

According to the Malaysian Aviation Commission, Malaysia is expected to meet passenger traffic of between 95.4 million and 97.6 million passengers for 2024. Its previous estimate was 93.9 million to 107.1 million passengers.

### International Accolades

Meanwhile, Malaysia Airports' strategic focus on improving infrastructure, enhancing operational efficiencies, and offering elevated passenger services earned the airport operator recognition from various organisations for three of its key international airports.

KL International Airport (KUL), for instance, was named Centre for Aviation (CAPA) Large Airport of the Year 2024 at CAPA Airline Leader Summit and Aviation Awards for Excellence held in Belgrade, Serbia recently.

This global award is given to airports handling over 30 million passengers annually which show exceptional strategic leadership and significant contributions to the aviation industry. The process involves independent research by CAPA's team of analysts, with the selection done by an international panel of experts.

Malaysia Airports Managing Director, Dato' Mohd Izani Ghani said, "This international recognition reflects the team's dedication to delivering excellence across all aspects of our airport operations from passenger experience to innovative infrastructure development.

"Over the past year, we have undertaken many initiatives in enhancing the convenience, comfort, and satisfaction of every passenger. In a fast-evolving industry, we continue to focus on resilience, adaptability and forward-thinking strategies to meet the ever-changing needs of travellers."

Malaysia Airports previously won the CAPA Asia Pacific Large International Airport Award in 2014.

Additionally, its Kota Kinabalu International Airport (BKI) and Langkawi International Airport (LGK) were recently recognised by Airports Council International (ACI) for achieving the Airport Carbon Accreditation (ACA) Level 1 Mapping.

BKI successfully implemented solar panels with total capacity at 3.8 MW and introduced an Energy Management System to enhance energy efficiency across its operations. With 6.6 million passengers year-to-date (ytd), it saw a 13% increase from 5.9 million passengers during the same period last year.

On the other hand, LGK, with 2.1 million passengers ytd, operated on solar panels with total capacity at 1.1 MW. Its Airfield Ground Lighting, upgraded to energy-efficient LED lighting from halogen bulbs, reduced energy usage by up to 90%.

BKI and LGK joined over 600 other airports worldwide, including KUL, in advancing towards net-zero carbon emissions through ACI's seven-level programme, which encourages collective action on carbon reduction and climate change.

ACI's seven levels of certification are Mapping, Reduction, Optimisation, Neutrality, Transformation, Transition besides maintaining Net Zero balance on Scopes 1 and 2 while addressing Scope 3 emissions.

Viewing sustainability as a key strategic theme for Malaysia Airports' long-term vision and operational practices, Dato' Mohd Izani added, "We are also actively working towards certifying Penang (PEN) and Kuching (KCH) and ultimately aim to bring ACA accreditation to our entire airport network."

Accredited since 2015, KUL is now at Level 3 Optimisation of ACI's programme, reflecting Malaysia Airports' ongoing efforts in carbon management and environmental sustainability.

### KUL A-CDM Initiative, A Game Changer

To drive long-term efficiency and sustainability while elevating operational excellence across Malaysia Airports' flagship airport, KL International Airport (KUL), the airport operator has implemented a new Airport Collaborative Decision Making (A-CDM) initiative early this year.

At KUL A-CDM's launch on November 19, 2024, the event marks the culmination of a strategic initiative implemented in 2022 to unite diverse stakeholders after the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding. By enhancing coordination among airlines, ground handlers, air traffic controllers and airport operators.



This innovative platform aims to streamline processes, reduce delays and deliver a smoother, more reliable travel experience for passengers.

Speaking at the launch, Datuk Hasbi Habibollah, Deputy Transport Minister said KUL A-CDM's implementation exemplified Malaysia's steadfast commitment to aviation excellence with Malaysia Airports not only addressing the immediate needs but also preparing to meet the demands of tomorrow.

"This is more than a technological upgrade; it is an investment that will strengthen Malaysia's standing as a regional aviation hub, contributing significantly to our economic growth.

"A-CDM provides a platform for stakeholders to access consistent, reliable real-time data, facilitating collective decision-making. I am confident this platform will be a game-changer, enhancing our nation's aviation reputation on the global stage," he added.

Highlighting the key benefits of the initiative, which included enhanced operational efficiency, optimised resource management and improved planning, Malaysia Airports Managing Director Dato' Mohd Izani Ghani said, "A-CDM also reduces fuel consumption and emissions, supporting Malaysia Airports' environmental, social and governance commitments."

"With A-CDM proven at over 30 airports in Europe and more than 20 in Asia, I believe it will position Malaysia at the forefront of technological advancements in aviation infrastructure."

The KUL A-CDM initiative at KLIA will primarily benefit airlines by reducing runway waiting times, boosting customer satisfaction and enhancing ground handling efficiency via improved punctuality, optimised gate planning and better overall flow management.

The seven key stakeholders involved in the initiative are the Civil Aviation Authority of Malaysia, Malaysia Airlines, AirAsia Malaysia, Batik Air Malaysia, Aerodarat Services Sdn Bhd, Pos Aviation Sdn Bhd and Ground Team Red Sdn Bhd.

Through this initiative, KUL not only improves its operations but also contributes to the broader sustainability goals, thus leaving a lasting impact on the future of airport management by Malaysia Airports.



### Jeju Air's Winter Schedule Sees More Flights to Kota Kinabalu

Increased travel demand on short and mid-haul routes to Japan and Southeast Asia have helped buoy Jeju Air (7C), South Korea's biggest low-cost carrier's (LCC) net profit rise 59% to US\$31 million for the third quarter 2024 (3Q24) from a year ago.

According to South Korea's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, 7C ranked first among the LCCs with 3,324,143 passengers and 14.2% of the market share in the 3Q24.

7C recently added six weekly flights for its new Busan (PUS) to Kota Kinabalu (BKI) route following the success of its existing daily Incheon (ICN) to BKI service. The airline now offers 13 weekly flights from the two South Korean cities to BKI.

As part of its northern winter 2024/25 schedule, 7C's new direct twice-weekly flights from Muan (MWX) to BKI using Boeing 737-800 aircraft, commencing on December 10, 2024, will further enhance South Korean's access to Sabah.

South Korean tourists represent the third largest international arrivals to Sabah, with 124,631 arrivals from South Korea up to August 2024.

Sabah's warm climate makes it a prime destination, especially for avid South Korean golfers with the soon approach of its country's winter season from December 2024 to March 2025.

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Julinus Jeffery Jimit, Chief Executive Officer of Sabah Tourism Board, who welcomed the PUS to BKI maiden service on October 27, 2024, said Kota Kinabalu, Sabah's capital city, is a top choice among South Koreans due to its beaches, mountains, and cultural attractions.

Additionally, 7C will be introducing thrice-weekly flights between MWX and Nagasaki (NGS) on December 10, 2024 as part of its new winter routes and strategy to enhance connectivity from South Korea's regional airports. The LCC will also resume its Jeju (CJU) to Macau (MFM) service in December 2024.

According to Korea Tourism Organization's September statistics, the Japanese tourists accounted for 311,000 after China's 423,000 tourist arrivals out of an estimated 1.46 million tourists from abroad, which surpassed the level in the same month of 2019.

For more information, visit [www.jejuair.net](http://www.jejuair.net)



### Award-Winning Ethiopian Airlines Receives First A350-1000 Aircraft

Ethiopian Airlines (ET), celebrated the recent arrival of its first Airbus A350-1000 from Toulouse, France with a spectacular water cannon salute and a demonstration flight of the aircraft's capabilities.

*"This aircraft embodies cutting-edge advancements, offering superior passenger comfort, enhanced fuel efficiency and reduced environmental impact.*

*Together, we are pioneering a sustainable future for aviation in Africa.*

**MESFIN TASEW**

Group Chief Executive Officer of Ethiopian Airlines (ET)

The A350-1000 boasts a revolutionary design with innovative aerodynamics and a carbon-fibre fuselage, powered by the fuel-efficient Rolls-Royce Trent XWB engines, thus ensuring a quieter, smoother journey for long-haul travel.

Additionally, this state-of-the-art aircraft is the first to feature Thales's AVANT Up inflight entertainment system and the HBC+ connectivity system, providing passengers with luxurious amenities, spacious seating, large screens and a unique landscape camera.

Convenience is also prioritised with direct aisle access for all business class seats.

The addition of the A350-1000 to ET's fleet reaffirms its commitment to innovation, sustainability, and customer satisfaction, charting a new course for African aviation excellence.

Its momentous delivery was accompanied with a of medical supplies valued at over 100,000 Euros, which was donated to the Ethiopian Airlines Foundation by Aviation Sans Frontières in collaboration with Airbus.

At the recent 2025 APEX Passenger Choice Awards, ET won the Best Overall in Africa recognition, underscoring its outstanding performance for Best Cabin Service, Best Entertainment, Best Food and Beverage, Best Seat Comfort and Best Wi-Fi.

Earlier at Zambia Airports Corporation Limited's 35th Anniversary, the airline also bagged multiple honours for Exceptional Commitment and Outstanding Partnership in the overall award category.

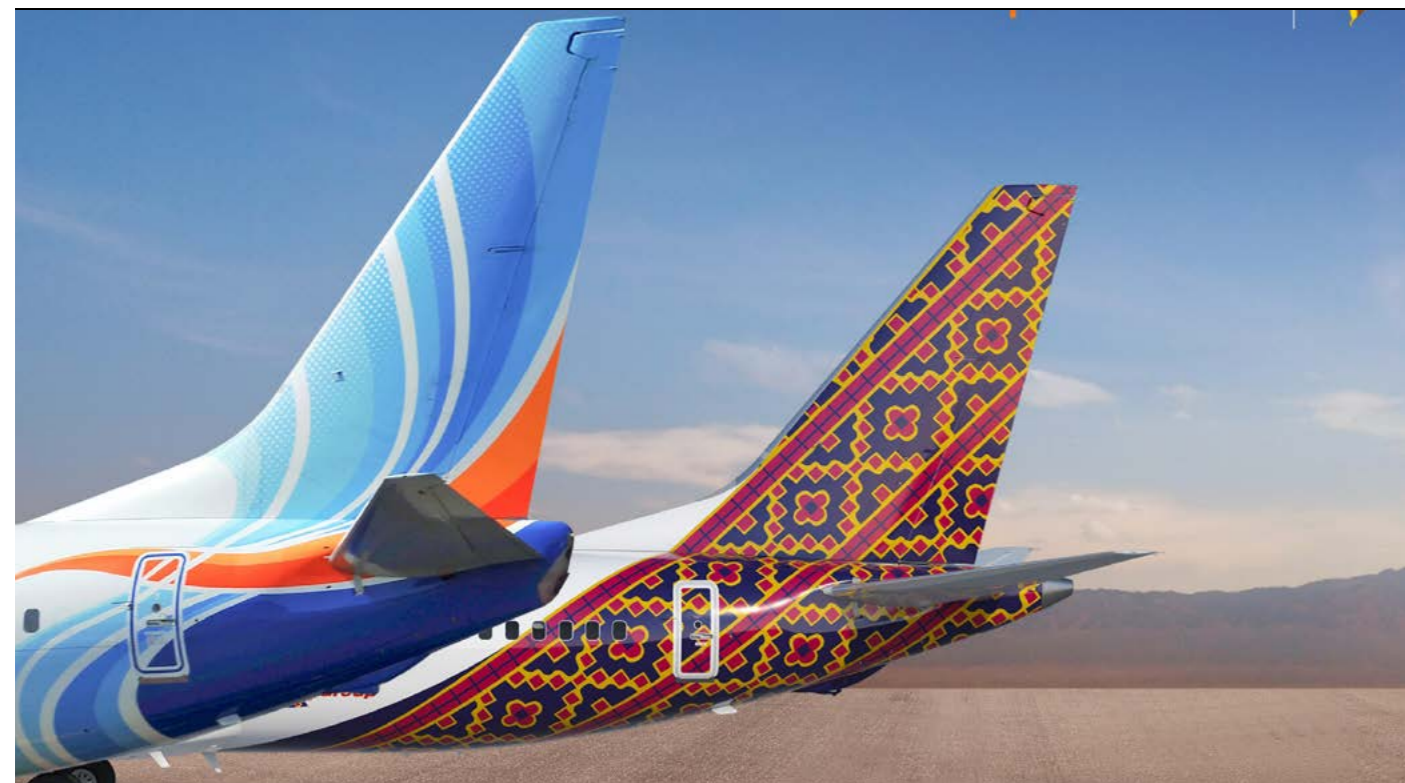
ET was presented the Outstanding Tourism Transportation Award at the annual African Tourism Leadership Forum in Gaborone, Botswana as well as the Star Wide Awards 2024 for Efficient Service Provider Government Organisation Sector of the Year based on public voting.

Looking ahead, Africa's largest airline remains committed to enhancing the travel experience through innovation and a relentless focus on customer satisfaction.

Aligned with the ET's ambitious Vision 2035 plan, the Star Alliance member will be welcoming three additional A350-1000 aircraft in the upcoming months.

ET's existing fleet comprises ultra-modern and environmentally friendly aircraft such as Boeing 737s, B777s, B787s, A350-900 and De Havilland Q400.

For more information, call +603-2022 0168 or visit [www.ethiopianairlines.com](http://www.ethiopianairlines.com)



### Strategic Interline Partnership Between flydubai and Batik Air Malaysia

flydubai's (FZ) latest interline collaboration with Batik Air Malaysia (OD) promises passengers a wealth of flexible travel options and seamless connectivity between Malaysia, the Middle East and other destinations worldwide.

FZ's network spans the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Central and Southeast Europe as well as the Gulf Cooperation Council countries while OD has 42 destinations spread across Southeast Asia (SEA) and beyond via KL International Airport (KUL).

Besides enhancing the travel experience by streamlining check-in and baggage handling to ensure effortless transitions on multi-leg journeys, OD Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Datuk Chandran Rama Muthy said, "We are also strengthening ties between Malaysia and a vast array of global locations."

Ghaith Al Ghaith, CEO of FZ remarked, "We look forward to offering our passengers more opportunities to explore SEA and beyond."

Since February 2024, flydubai has been operating daily services to Langkawi via Penang in Malaysia with its young and efficient fleet of 88 Boeing 737 aircraft.

He added, "We remain committed to creating free flows of trade and tourism and supporting Dubai's (DXB) position as a thriving aviation hub."

The Dubai-based carrier recently celebrated its second anniversary of operations to Uzbekistan's Samarkand, which is renowned for its Islamic architecture such as the Registan Square with its mosques and madrasas.



Al Ghaith said, "We started operations to Uzbekistan in 2019 with the launch of flights to its capital Tashkent and expanded our operations with flights to the historic city of Samarkand on September 20, 2022."

Over the last few years, FZ has carried more than 680,000 passengers between Dubai and Uzbekistan.

The airline operates twice-daily flights to Tashkent and thrice-weekly flights to Samarkand, with convenient connections to Jeddah, Madinah, Riyadh and other destinations via its DXB hub.

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



### Myanmar Airways International Increases Frequencies to Kuala Lumpur

Myanmar Airways International's (8M) launch of three additional frequencies between Yangon (RGN) and Kuala Lumpur (KUL) effective November 26, 2024, means an increased total of 10 flights per week from seven.

8M had launched this sector during the COVID-19 pandemic to accommodate essential travel needs. The service later expanded to daily flights in January 2022 due to market demand.

As the only carrier operating consistently in this sector over the past three years, its daily connectivity had facilitated seamless travel options for both leisure and business travellers.

Coupled with the increased flight frequencies and a robust codeshare and interline partnerships with various airlines partners, 8M offers access to a multitude of destinations via KUL.

The airline's appointment of Abadi Aviation Services Sdn Bhd (AAS) as its General Sales Agent (GSA) for Malaysia on November 1, 2024, further strengthened its footprint and enhanced its service offerings for passengers travelling between Malaysia and Myanmar.

"This appointment underscores our vision to bring efficient travel options to Southeast Asia and beyond. We look forward to making travel between the two countries as seamless and enriching as possible."

**TANES KUMAR**  
Chief Executive Officer  
of Myanmar Airways International's (8M)

The GSA appointment also represents a significant milestone in 8M's regional strategy of prioritising customers satisfaction and having close collaboration with industry partners to deliver reliable travel experiences.

Calvinn Lai, Director of AAS said, "8M has established itself as a regional carrier showcasing the warmth and hospitality of Myanmar, with the aim to grow its influence and network beyond in Asia."

AAS's responsibilities include overseeing the airline's sales, marketing and promotional initiatives, providing dedicated support to both travel agents and guests while fostering collaborative partnerships in the Malaysian market.

Committed to continually enhance its service offerings to meet the evolving needs of its passengers, 8M partnered earlier on October 17, 2024 with AirAsia MOVE to promote Myanmar as a destination, joining over 700 other airlines on the latter's online travel agency platform.

Operating from its primary hubs in RGN and Mandalay (MDL), the airline serves 35 destinations across Myanmar and internationally.

They include Cambodia, China, India, Laos, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam and the United Arab Emirates.

Its fleet comprises six Airbus A320 family aircraft, two Embraer E190s, four ATR72-600s and one Boeing 737 freighter.

For more information, call **+603-2142 4311** or visit [www.maiair.com](http://www.maiair.com)



## Best Ever Half-Year Results for Emirates Group

The Emirates Group recorded its best ever half-year financial performance with a profit before tax of US\$2.8 billion for the first six months ended September 30, 2024, surpassing its previous pre-tax profit for the same period last year.

The Group's profit after tax stood at US\$2.5 billion for its financial year 2024-25 while its group revenue rose 5% to US\$19.3 billion year-on-year, reflecting consistently strong customer demand across its business divisions and regions.

Closing its first half year of 2024-25 with a solid cash position of US\$11.9 billion, the Group was able to tap on its own strong cash reserves to support its business needs, including payments for its new freighter aircraft orders and other debt payments.

*"This again illustrates the power of our proven business model working in combination with Dubai's growth trajectory as a city of choice to live, work, visit, connect through and do business in."*

*We expect customer demand to remain strong for the rest of 2024-25 and look forward to increasing our capacity to grow revenues as new aircraft join our fleet and new facilities come online at dnata."*

**HIS HIGHNESS SHEIKH AHMED SAEED AL MAKTOUM**  
Chairman and Chief Executive  
of Emirates Airline (EK)

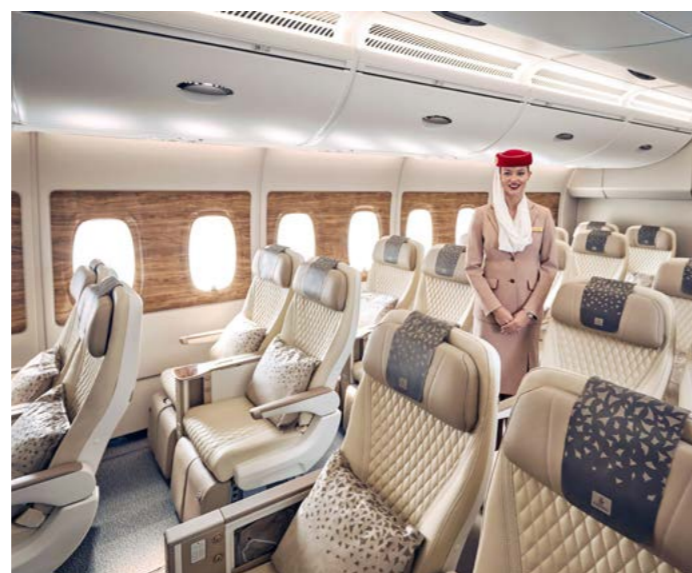
Between April 1 and September 30, 2024, EK rolled out eight aircraft comprising three Airbus A380s and five Boeing 777s with fully refreshed interiors under its US\$4 billion retrofit programme.

Its first retrofitted B777 was deployed to Geneva in August followed by Tokyo Haneda and Brussels. As more of its aircraft are retrofitted, the airline has lined up 10 more routes for its refurbished B777s over the next six months.

They are Riyadh, Zurich, Kuwait, Damman, Chicago, Boston, Dallas Fort Worth, Seattle, Newark-Athens and Miami-Bogota.

By year-end, EK's latest A380 and B777 inflight experiences will be available to customers on over 30 routes, enabling the airline to accelerate the deployment of its latest cabin products.

These include its popular premium economy and latest four-class B777 featuring a new one-two-one layout of lie-flat seats with personal minibars in business class.



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



## MASKargo and Qatar Airways Cargo's Interconnected Network Extends Global Reach

Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG) subsidiary, MASKargo's collaboration with Qatar Airways Cargo, which officially began on October 1, 2024, has seen the successful movement of about 2,500 tonnes of cargo, including perishables and pharmaceuticals.

Using the Boeing 777 aircraft, Qatar Airways Cargo now flies from Doha (DOH) to Kuala Lumpur (KUL) twice weekly, increasing its cargo capacity by over 200 tonnes a week with its seamless connections and state-of-the-art handling facilities.

*"We are now better positioned than ever to serve as a bridge between SEA and key international destinations. This alliance strengthens our infrastructure and capacity, empowering us to support the regional economy and facilitate the movement of high-demand goods to a larger global market, further setting new standards in cargo transportation."*

**MARK JASON THOMAS**  
Chief Executive Officer  
of MASKargo

Chief Officer Cargo at Qatar Airways Cargo, Mark Drusch said, "This partnership is a testament to our commitment to providing exceptional service and tailored solutions while expanding our global network through sponsorships.

"By combining our strengths, we are able to offer our customers enhanced connectivity and efficiency, ensuring their products reach global markets in optimal condition.

The two cargo airlines signed a memorandum of understanding to deliver an enhanced product offering to cargo customers and achieve operational synergies in July 2024.

Their collaboration extends beyond cargo as both are members of the oneworld alliance and have a codeshare agreement on the passenger side, which includes 62 destinations across Africa, Australia, Europe, Malaysia, New Zealand, SEA, the Middle East and the Americas, thereby facilitating increase in flight options and destinations.

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



The strategic partnership inaugurated between the two cargo airlines on November 19, 2024 further solidifies connectivity to Sydney (SYD) and Melbourne (MEL) with MASKargo's Airbus A330 freighters carrying more than 75 tonnes of weekly cargo capacity to these two Australian cities in just eight hours from KUL with its operational efficiency.

MASKargo, the cargo division of Malaysia Airlines, have access to key points in Africa, Europe, Levant and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries while Qatar Airways Cargo gains increased capacity access to Australia, New Zealand, Southeast Asia (SEA) and Northeast Asia.

Additionally, the partnership supports the local market in Kuala Lumpur by enabling the export of products to more global markets.



**TransNusa Inks Strategic Alliances with AIROD and Medical Centres**

PT TransNusa Aviation Mandiri has signed with AIROD Aerospace Technology Sdn Bhd a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to provide its aircraft with maintenance, repair and operations (MRO) services as well as a standard ground handling agreement (SGHA) for the technical handling of its aircraft at Subang Airport (SZB) in Selangor.

TransNusa (8B) was the first foreign airline to start daily scheduled flights to SZB from Jakarta (CGK) on August 1, 2024.

The two signatories for the recent MoU and SGHA held at AIROD Complex in Subang were between Datuk Bernard Francis, 8B Group Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Datuk

Firhad Uzir Abdul Rahim, AIROD Aerospace Technology CEO.

Reflecting the airline's commitment to ensure that its aircraft operate at peak performance and adhere to the highest standards of safety and efficiency, Datuk Bernard said under the MoU, AIROD Aerospace Technology, a subsidiary of AIROD Sdn Bhd, will plan, develop and conduct inspections and maintenance work for 8B's A320 family of aircraft in Malaysia starting December 2024.

The airline also recently inked agreements with three medical centres - Sunway Medical Centre, Subang Jaya Medical Centre and Ara Damansara Medical Centre - with the last two owned by Asia OneHealthCare.

The aim to provide its passengers with access to healthcare options, including specialised and customised healthcare packages.

Besides offering discounts for the packages and check-ups, 8B passengers can also enjoy free seat upgrades and complimentary airport transfer from SZB Airport to the two medical centres owned by Asia OneHealthCare.

According to the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council, Indonesia is the highest contributor to medical tourism in Malaysia, accounting for nearly 70% to 80% of the total number of health tourists in 2023.

For more information, visit [www.transnusa.co.id](http://www.transnusa.co.id)



**Penang Welcomes HK Express' Re-Entry**

Hong Kong Express' (UO) re-entry into Penang (PEN) with its direct flight from Hong Kong (HKG) on November 21, 2024 not only reduces travel time and provides greater convenience for its passengers but it also brought over 100 dragon boat athletes, airline representatives and media for the Penang International Dragon Boat Regatta 2024.

Penang State Tourism and Creative Economy Committee Chairman Wong Hon Wai, in welcoming the flight said it included prominent teams such as the Dignified Dragons, China's Dongguan Shui Nan Starway, Hong Kong's Amazing One and the Amazing Grace for the two-day regatta from November 23 to 24, 2024. "This flight exemplifies the dynamic opportunities for collaboration through sports and cultural exchanges."

It also represents another significant step in enhancing PEN's global network. Currently, PEN has 33 international direct flight routes operated by various airlines that connect to 18 cities worldwide, including Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Xiamen, Dubai, Singapore, Bangkok and Taipei.

Besides Wong, Deputy Director of Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, Daniel Chan and Penang Global Tourism Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Ooi Chok Yan were also part of the welcome reception at PEN.

UO is the third airline that operates non-stop flights between HKG and PEN after its parent company, Cathay Pacific (CX), and AirAsia Malaysia (AK).

Its night flights from HKG complement CX's daily flights to PEN.

UO Jeanette Mao said, "As Hong Kong's only low-cost carrier, we are committed to offering affordable fares and with our comprehensive flight network, it will enable our customers to effortlessly explore Asia's vibrant cities

"Southeast Asia is generally known for its value-for-money proposition and Penang is no exception."

"With our competitive pricing, travellers can save money to indulge in local cuisine and cultural experiences, truly embodying the spirit of Live More."

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



**Elevated Experience at Eraman's Revamped Duty-Free Mall**

Celebrating the transformative journey of Eraman with the opening of its revamped Duty-Free Mall (DFM) at the Contact Pier of KL International Airport Terminal 1 (KLIA T1) on November 25, 2024, Malaysia Airports Managing Director Dato' Mohd Izani Ghani commended the team for their outstanding accomplishment.

*"Your dedication and innovative spirit have culminated in a space that exemplifies the aspirations of our Commercial Reset Strategy to refresh airport offerings and raise the retail profile of our airports beyond transportation hubs."*

**DATO' MOHD IZANI GHANI**  
Managing Director  
of Malaysia Airports

Dato' Mohd Izani said the launch could not come at a more opportune time with Malaysia assuming the chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) next year. As Chair, there will be more than 350 meetings held in the country, with Kuala Lumpur being the main gateway together with Kota Kinabalu, Langkawi and Penang.

The revitalised Eraman DFM serves both as a key touchpoint in welcoming visitors and showcasing Malaysia's vibrant culture, world-class offerings, and renowned hospitality. More than just a retail space, it also embraces Malaysia Airports Group's commitment to innovation and sustainability.

Citing Eraman's self-checkout kiosks, he said they not only enhance convenience for travellers but also align with the Group's broader environmental goals by reducing paper waste as it marches towards net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

General Manager of Malaysia Airports (Niaga), Md Fadzwin Abdul Rahim quipped, "Eraman is the first duty-free operator in Malaysia to introduce self-checkout kiosks, which is now available at most of our DF outlets."

"We are excited to soon launch radio frequency identification, a wireless technology in our stores, further streamlining the shopping experience with faster, more efficient transactions, thus making it easier for customers to shop with ease."



Its 29,600 sq ft new space recently saw the debut of Southeast Asia's first Charlotte Tilbury store at KLIA T1, underscoring Eraman's efforts to introduce global trendsetting brands to Malaysia's airport retail scene. "We are not just meeting but exceeding travellers' expectations by offering an exclusive and elevated shopping experience in KLIA."

A leading duty-free and retail brand of the airport operator's subsidiary, Malaysia Airports' (Niaga) Sdn Bhd, Eraman currently has over 550 renowned brands across premium travel retail and duty-free categories.

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

## Upclose with Mint Leong Hoon Min

### President of the Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association (MITA)

**From tourist guide to tour operator and now the first lady President of MITA, Mint Leong Hoon Min, is always scouting for new business opportunities and trends in the tourism industry.**

**With 21 years of experience behind her, the 52-year-old managing director of Sunflower Holidays wears several hats, including being the Secretary General of the World Research Travel Organization (WRTO) Malaysia Chapter.**

**Loving what she does, she will do what it takes to climb the many mountains before her.**

**Having started your career as a tourist guide in 2003 and later helped set up the Malaysian Women Tourist Guide Association (MWTGA), what are the issues plaguing them that need to be addressed?**

Since leaving the tourist guide profession about 15 years ago to become a tour operator, I am no longer involved with MWTGA but noticed that many of the concerns faced by women tour guides are still unresolved. These include having to share a room with the driver and no additional allocation for them when they are leading a group. More initiatives to look into their welfare are required besides providing training and organising activities for them.

**How many years have you been involved in MITA?**

I have been in MITA for more than 16 years having served as its Vice President of Inbound Tourism, Secretary General and Deputy President.

I was elected as its President on December 23, 2023. When I first joined, it was a very small association led by the veterans in the tourism industry. MITA comprises multi-racial members from various backgrounds and business segments.

**How have you benefitted from your years with MITA?**

As I grew with the association, getting involved in its various activities and now helming the very challenging presidency position, I was in contact with many local and international players in the tourism industry. This enabled me to garner massive information that helped me to be proactive and conduct research on new projects.

**What are some of the challenges that beset MITA, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic?**

While MITA's membership includes travel agencies, retail shops, restaurants, homestays and transport operators, we currently have about 1,800 members but only a third of them are active. We are faced with market challenges and a shortage of data to help us recover faster.

**Under your leadership, what are some of the plans you have executed for MITA so far?**

Immediately after the annual general meeting of my election at Sama-Sama Hotel KL International Airport, I had a tour arranged for our members to explore Malaysia



Airports' Fast Track services which offer swift clearance and hassle-free passage with dedicated immigration lanes. The Airport Fast Track also provides meet and greet, baggage assistance, buggy and VIP services and the use of Sky Suite Lounge.

Next on my list was improving the management of MITA and its membership by moving towards digitalisation and the provision of training programmes. We also organised MITA Day for our members in Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Melaka.

I always believe in building good relationship with both our members and the industry as well as voicing the issues faced particularly by our members to related organisations and government agencies.

**How about collaborations with other parties?**

We have been collaborating with other industry players and associations for cross-sector promotions and to create new business models. An example is MITA's term agreement with Instant Exhibition Sdn Bhd to offer secured digital media rooms powered by KROOM to cater to the needs of travellers and travel agents by providing relevant real-time services.

We aim to protect against scams, fake news, deep fake artificial intelligence, fraud and data breaches with its innovative feature, and also provide a unique virtual space where travel experiences can be enjoyed through digital or physical journeys.

While this partnership will be ending soon, MITA will be entering into a collaboration with Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology to create a platform on tourism destination promotion. We will be training those who are keen to discover more about Malaysia's attractions and how to promote them. This programme will be launched soon to help our members get more prospects and sales.

**MITA is 20 years old this year. Any activities lined up to celebrate this milestone?**

We are having our 20th anniversary dinner and awards night to honour the outstanding performance and contributions of our long-standing members.

**During the pandemic lockdown when cross-border travel was prohibited, how did your Sunflower Holidays' business survive during this tough and unprecedented period?**

We downsized the business and kept expenses low. I continued to travel and scout for unique tourism products that will serve the needs of the new generation of travellers besides focusing on developing my personal skills and upgrading my knowledge on the evolving travel landscape. As a result, I managed to add new business segments.

**You were involved in the recently concluded World Research Travel Conference (WRTC) 2024 held outside of China for the first time where Penang played host. Please share how this event came about.**

I came to know about WRTO at the end of 2019 when I

I was invited by its Executive Chairman Yang Zhenzhi to Chengdu and Leshan when the China Chapter was being set up. The Chinese government had made it compulsory for schools to organise research travel every semester for students under its education policy. After going through several days of seminars and discussions, I saw the opportunities for research travel to grow, especially in Malaysia.

Unfortunately, as I moved forward with my plans for research travel, the pandemic halted them. Nevertheless, we managed to form the WRTO Malaysia Chapter to tap into this potential market.

A combination of research, study and tour, research travel might be new to some in the tourism industry but it has been around with an emphasis on the learning content, experiential activities and self-involvement in the tour programme.

**What experience did you gain from WRTC 2024 and how do you see research travel changing the travel and tourism landscape in Malaysia?**

Held from 3 to 6 November, the WRTC 2024 in Penang was an eye opener for the conference participants, especially those who were unfamiliar with it. Given Malaysia's abundant research travel resources, especially in nature with its abundant rainforests, marine life and rich cultural heritage, we do not want to be left behind where research travel, touted as a game changer, is concerned.

Our country has many potential attractions such as the Endau Rompin Belum Rainforest and the Turtle Sanctuary which are yet to be developed for research travel. In Singapore, the major corporates have already ventured into this new trend. Singapore's Changi Airport has built an experience studio and is recognised for managing the world's best airport learning journey programme, showcasing digital innovation in edutainment and experience creation.

Likewise, another exhibitor at WRTC 2024, Resorts World Sentosa's Sea Aquarium has also enhanced its learning contents.

**Bringing in big incentive groups from China into Malaysia has been your strength. What is the recipe for your success?**

Dare to think, dare to create and dare to try. Incentive groups want wow factors and these big players require experienced planners and a capable team who are on the same wavelength as them. The ability to give clear instructions in executing their plan and knowing what they want to achieve are essential.

**How do you maintain your well-being and work-life balance?**

Firstly, you must love what you are doing; only then can you enjoy it. For me, that includes meeting up with people and friends and exchanging information with them. To unwind, I enjoy travelling and keeping myself physically and mentally fit. Having enough rest and a positive mindset helps as well.



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