

# AIRLINK

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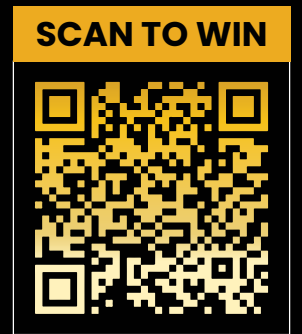


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## Charting Aviation's Future in 2025

Latest air passenger traffic data for November 2024 from both the Malaysian Aviation Commission (MAVCOM) and the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA) shows sustained recovery and growth in Malaysia's aviation sector.

According to MAVCOM, the regulatory body for local aviation industry under the Transport Ministry, the eight million passengers for the month represented 88.7% of the traffic recorded in November 2019 while it was a 15.8% increase compared to November 2023.

This increase in passenger movements was driven primarily by a surge in international travel, new route launches and expanded seat capacity.

International air passenger traffic stood at 4.2 million passengers in November 2024.

The growth was distributed evenly between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and non-ASEAN regions, each contributing 2.1 million passengers.

"Major airports in Malaysia posted strong year-on-year (yoy) growth in November 2024 for both domestic and international routes.

"Notably, Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport (SZB) recorded the highest yoy growth at 42.1%," MAVCOM added.



This was followed by KL International Airport (KUL) which saw 18.2% yoy growth and Penang International Airport (PEN) a 13.2% rise.

Kota Kinabalu International Airport (BKI) registered 12.8% yoy growth while Kuching International Airport (KCH) and Langkawi International Airport (LGK) posted 9.7% and 8.1% respectively.

The new routes include KUL to Dalat (DLI) in Vietnam, Nairobi (NBO) in Kenya, Sri Vijaya Puram (IXZ) in India and Chiang Rai (CEI) in Thailand as well as BKI to Kaohsiung City (KHH) in Taiwan and Shantou (SWA), China.

Datuk Seri Saripuddin Kasim, MAVCOM Executive Chairman is confident this momentum will carry forward in 2025.

### Sustained Passenger Growth

Based on Airports Council International's (ACI) World Airport Traffic Forecasts 2023-2052, Asia Pacific, which showed the biggest passenger recovery in 2023, is expected to attain 3.5 billion and 3.9 billion passengers in 2024 and 2025 respectively.

AAPA's newly released preliminary November 2024 traffic figures showed growth in both international air passenger and cargo markets on the back of robust consumer and business demand.

The region's airlines collectively carried 31 million international passengers for the month, up 19.8% compared with the same corresponding period in 2023.

Underpinned by the strength of long-haul markets, demand in revenue passenger kilometres grew by 21.7% yoy while the average international passenger load factor (LF) rose by 2.7 percentage points to 82% for November 2024 after accounting for a 17.6% expansion in available seat capacity.

Subhas Menon, AAPA Director General said for the first eleven months of 2024, the region's carriers recorded a 31% increase in international passengers carried with a combined total of 334 million.

With demand now fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels and increasing further into the year-end holiday season, this also resulted in air cargo markets having healthy growth in November 2024 and contributing to a 14% yoy increase for the first eleven months of 2024.

In the air cargo segment, AAPA's growth in shipment volumes was supported by sustained e-commerce demand and the front-loading of export orders ahead of anticipated tariff hikes by the United States.

International air cargo demand, measured in freight tonne kilometres, surged by 10.5% yoy, slightly outpacing a 10% rise in offered freight capacity.

Consequently, the average international freight LF edged up by 0.2 percentage point to 62.3% for November 2024.

Menon said, "Based on current trends, 2024 is anticipated to conclude on a positive note for both passenger and cargo markets.

"However, uncertainty about the global economy and supply chain disruptions pose challenges to the region's carriers.

"Asia Pacific (APAC) airlines remain well-poised to navigate these challenges whilst maintaining the highest safety and service standards."

Reviewing 2024's performance on the world's busiest flight routes, OAG said all routes across APAC saw significant growth in 2024 as the region continued the post-pandemic recovery.

In fact, seven of the Top 10 Busiest International Routes for 2024 were in Asia, with the Hong Kong (HKG) to Taipei (TPE) route showing the most substantial increase with 6.8 million seats.

The Seoul Incheon (ICN) to Tokyo Narita (NRT) route, ranked third with 5.4 million seats, was followed closely by KUL to Singapore Changi (SIN), short of 28,293 or 0.5% seats less.

Nevertheless, this route was above 2023 levels by 10% and below 2019 levels by 3%.

On the upcoming new routes in 2025, Qingdao Airlines (QW) will commence its Chengdu (TFU) to BKI service on January 11 while AirAsia Cambodia (KT) will start its Phnom Penh (PNH) to Hanoi (HAN) sector on January 24.

Both airlines will be operating their thrice-weekly flights using the Airbus A320.

### What to Expect in 2025

OAG Chief Analyst John Grant warned that the capacity challenges of 2024 faced by the airlines will continue into 2025 and 2026 due to maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) issues and production delays from major aircraft manufacturers.

Grant does not anticipate average airfares to fall significantly in 2025 despite oil prices falling to one of its lowest levels since September 2018 amidst rising operational costs and shortages in the supply chain.

Corporate travel demand will continue its gradual recovery in 2025, compensating for the loss from the surge in revenge spending by travellers earlier when demand for air travel recovered after the lifting of global borders resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, he added.

Besides expecting capacity to grow by between 3% and 4% this year, Grant envisaged both airports and airlines increasing the use of artificial intelligence in their operations to drive further efficiency and reduce cost.

Additionally, most airports worldwide will be improving their facilities to cater to the rising demand in air travel.

He surmised that new technology and the expansion of long-range single-aisle aircraft will lead to a series of new routes being launched to smaller market pairs in regions such as South and Central Asia in 2025.





### Qatar Airways Cargo Strengthens Partnership with Japan Airlines and Cainiao

The world's leading Qatar Airways (QR) Cargo has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Japan Airlines (JL) to further strengthen their partnership and enhance their product offerings to cargo customers as oneworld partners, thus achieving operational synergies.

The MoU was signed by QR Cargo's Chief Officer Cargo, Mark Drusch, and JL Executive Officer, Senior Vice President, Head of Cargo and Mail, Yuichiro Kito in the presence of QR Group Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Engineer Badr Mohammed Al-Meer.

Both parties are committed to streamlining the transfer of cargo between them and optimising their mutual networks.

Plans are afoot to extend their cooperation into various fields, with their partnership further enhanced next year when QR Cargo begins freighter services between its Hamad International Airport (DOH) hub and JL at Tokyo Narita Airport (NRT) hub.

The partnership is expected to generate significant economic value by enhancing trade flows between the regions served by JL and those served by QR Cargo.

Over the past 12 months, both carriers have transacted 4,462 tonnes of import and export cargo in Japan. Kito said, "For the first time in 13 years, we have commenced the operation of our own freighters."

Meanwhile, QR Cargo also agreed to strengthen its existing partnership established since 2021 with Cainiao to support the growth of cross-border e-commerce and enhance consumer experiences worldwide.

E-commerce remains the largest driver of air cargo capacity demand worldwide. By utilising its DOH hub, QR Cargo aims to expedite shipments to customers in Africa, Europe and the Middle East, reinforcing its commitment to Cainiao.



The cargo airline is the launch customer for the innovative Boeing 777-8F featuring advanced technology as well as 25% improvement in fuel efficiency and emissions, with the first delivery arriving in 2027.

Currently, QR serves a global network of more than 60 freighter destinations and 170 passenger destinations using freighters and belly-hold passenger aircraft. Its freighter fleet includes 28 Boeing 777 freighters and 230 belly-hold planes.

Wan Lin, CEO of Cainiao, a global leader in e-commerce logistics and technological expertise said, "We are committed to building a smart, future-proof logistics network for e-commerce."

Spanning over 200 countries and regions worldwide, Cainiao long-term mission is to achieve nationwide delivery within 24 hours and worldwide delivery within 72 hours.

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



### Multiple Global Acclams for Air India

Air India (AI) has won global recognition for its generative artificial intelligence-driven booking feature which will enhance the customers' reservation experience once it is rolled out on the airline's digital channels such as the mobile application, website and chatbot.

This innovative concept, which won the Red Dot award recently, is now showcased in the Red Dot Design Museum in Singapore.

Instead of navigating many pages of screens with selections to be made and data to be entered, the users can just specify their intent to travel using a simple request and complete the reservation instantly, thus reducing ticket-booking time and making the booking journey from research to travel seamless.

“Being ‘customer-obsessed’ and ‘design-rich’ are two key operative principles we have adopted in our digital transformation journey.”

**DR SATYA RAMASWAMY**  
Chief Digital and Technology Officer  
of Air India (AI)

India's leading global airline also won two other global awards for its ongoing transformation. Its Vista Verve inflight product received the Good Design Award Australia 2024 for innovation and design excellence of its new range of bespoke tableware, Slovakian lead-free glassware, and plush linens with premium mattress toppers.

The tableware and mattress toppers, specifically highlight Air India's commitment to sustainability, comfort, and luxury.

The Star Alliance member also won three Airline Passenger Experience Association Awards at the recent Future Travel Experience in Singapore showcasing its growing reputation as a leader in global passenger experience.

These awards were given for Four Star Global Airline 2025, Best Cabin Service in Central or Southern Asia as well as Best Food and Beverage in the same regions.



Earlier at the World Travel Awards 2024 in Manila, AI was the first Indian airline to win the coveted Asia's Leading Airline Inflight Entertainment 2024 title.

The award recognises AI's full suite of Inflight Entertainment (IFE) content on its Airbus A350s serving its New Delhi (DEL) to London Heathrow (LHR) route, and its daily direct DEL to New York's John F Kennedy International Airport (JFK) using its flagship Airbus A350-900 aircraft which commenced in November 2024.

This was followed by its five times weekly A350 service from DEL to Newark's Liberty International Airport (EWR) on January 2, 2025.

These IFE offerings will also be featured on AI's 64 new widebody aircraft on firm order as well as its legacy widebody aircraft undergoing full interior retrofit of seats and entertainment systems.

For more information, call **+603-2697 2100/3100** or visit [www.airindia.com](http://www.airindia.com)





### Direct from Subang to Sabah and Within with Batik Air Malaysia

**B**atik Air Malaysia (OD) is introducing a new non-stop daily service route from Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport (SZB) in Subang, Selangor to Kota Kinabalu (BKI), Sabah with onward connection to Tawau (TWU) on January 17, 2025. This marks its third destination from SZB.

“With the launch of this new direct route, we are not just offering an alternative to ease the congestion at KL International Airport (KUL) but are also tapping into the growing demand for seamless connectivity within East Malaysia.”

**DATUK CHANDRAN RAMA MUTHY**

Chief Executive Officer of Batik Air Malaysia

BKI and TWU, which collectively handled over 3.5 million passengers in 2023, are expected to reach four million passengers by the end of 2024.

From January 14, 2025, OD will be flying from KUL to Miri (MYY) in Sarawak to complement its other domestic routes such as KUL to Bintulu (BTU) launched on November 1, 2024 and KUL to Sandakan (SDK) in Sabah on December 1, 2024.

Additionally, the airline launched its daily direct KUL to Alor Setar (AOR) on December 9, 2024 using the Boeing 737 aircraft ahead of Visit Kedah Year 2025. A special welcoming celebration and cake-cutting ceremony, attended by dignitaries, were held on December 12, 2024 at AOR.



Strengthening further the ties between Malaysia and China, OD is growing its route network to two Chinese cities in Beijing (PKX) and Changsha (CSX) this year.

The airline's inaugural thrice weekly flights to PKX, well known for its landmarks such as the Forbidden City and the majestic Great Wall, will take off on March 21, 2025 to be followed by the four times a week flights to CSX, capital of Hunan Province, the next day.

These two new destinations will be OD's seventh and eighth routes in China, joining the airline's existing services to Chengdu, Guangzhou, Haikou, Kunming, Zhangjiajie and Zhengzhou.

China is the third largest source of international arrivals, making a significant contribution of over RM8.83 billion to Malaysia's economy.

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



### Uzbekistan Airways Reinstates Codeshare with Malaysia Airlines

**T**he renewed codeshare partnership between Uzbekistan Airways (HY) and Malaysia Airlines (MH) not only strengthens their networks in response to the growing demand for international connectivity but also unlocks new, seamless travel opportunities for passengers across Southeast Asia, Central Asia and beyond.

With the reinstatement of their agreement, the MH flight code introduced on the Tashkent (TAS) to Kuala Lumpur (KUL) route operated by HY offers a direct link to the Central Asia region while the HY flight code on selected routes operated by MH provides access to popular resort destinations such as Langkawi (LGK) and Kota Kinabalu (BKI) via KUL.

HY representatives recently held a presentation on the potential of pilgrimage tourism in Uzbekistan at the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Kuala Lumpur which was attended by over 30 major tourism companies from Malaysia and the Bukhara region.

Other tourism programmes and tour packages involving cultural tourism, gastronomy and business events in Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent and ancient Khorezm were also explored.

His Excellency Karomiddin Gadoev, Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Malaysia, who has been actively promoting his country on many other occasions, shared about the large-scale reforms in its tourism sector and the facilities being created for foreign tourists.

HY not only boasts the most extensive route network in Central Asia but is also the only airline in the Commonwealth of Independent States to operate regular direct transcontinental flights.

Uzbekistan's largest airline and national carrier operates flights to over 75 destinations worldwide.

These include regular and charter passenger flights, and cargo services while the low-cost flights come under its Uzbekistan Airways Express brand.

The HY Group umbrella also includes Uzbekistan Helicopters and the regional carrier Silk Avia.

Currently, the Group's fleet consists of more than 45 aircraft such as Boeing 787, B767/767 Freighter, Airbus A320neo or A321neo Long Range, A320ceo as well as ATR 72-600 and LET L-410 aircraft.

Other components under the Group are Uzbekistan Airways Technics, Uzbekistan Airways Catering and Uzbekistan Airways Training Centre.

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







## IndiGo Airlines Expands Malaysian Network

One of the world's fastest growing low-cost carriers, IndiGo Airlines (6E) celebrated the launch of three new non-stop flights from two Indian cities to Malaysia in December 2024, catering to the increasing travel demand between the two countries.

Langkawi (LGK) became 6E's 36th international and 124th overall destination when the airline's inaugural daily flight from Bengaluru (BLR) landed on December 16, 2024.

Five days later on December 21, 2024, 6E resumed its direct daily BLR to Kuala Lumpur (KUL) flights after nearly a five-year lapse due to the COVID-19 pandemic, making KUL the airline's 13th international destination from BLR.

On the same day, 6E also started its new Chennai (MAA) to Penang (PEN) daily flights using the Airbus A320neo aircraft, with a seating capacity of 186 passengers, which reduces the travelling time from seven hours to four.

MAA's strategic location serves as a vital hub connecting passengers from other major Indian cities such as BLR, New Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai travelling to PEN.

A prime destination for leisure and business, PEN is the private airline 37th international destination and the third in Malaysia.

6E Head of Global Sales Vinay Malhotra said the airline operates 28 weekly flights to Malaysia from MAA and BLR, which included the newly added flights to PEN.

Wong Hon Wai, Penang State Executive Councillor for Tourism and Creative Economy, said the direct MAA to PEN flights "creates fresh opportunities for tourism, trade and cultural exchange, paving the way for a future of mutual growth and collaboration".



“The connectivity will undoubtedly attract more Indian delegates and stakeholders, contributing to the growth of our business events industry.”

**ASHWIN GUNASEKERAN**

Chief Executive Officer  
of The Penang Convention & Exhibition Bureau

According to Tourism Malaysia, the new IndiGo flights bring the total number of direct flights from India to Malaysia to 246.

India is Malaysia's fifth largest source market. Between January and November 2024, Malaysia welcomed 1,009,114 Indian tourists, up 71.7% compared to 2023, reaffirming the country's appeal as a preferred destination for Indian tourists.

For more information, call **+603-2145 8533** or visit **www.golndigo.in**



## Award-Winning Saudia to Continue Raising the Bar

Saudi Arabia's national flag carrier, Saudia (SV) plans to add 130 new aircraft, double its seats capacity and expand its network as it enters into 2025 to align with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

SV signed recently a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Air France-KLM to expand and localise its maintenance, repair, and overhaul capabilities.

On the commercial side, these two SkyTeam members will focus on enhancing their codeshare agreement which includes expanding their reciprocal partnership across a wider range of domestic and international routes as well as increasing connectivity and frequency.

On the commercial side, these two SkyTeam members will focus on enhancing their codeshare agreement.

This includes expanding their reciprocal partnership across a wider range of domestic and international routes as well as increasing connectivity and frequency.

The MoU also supports SV's efforts to optimise its operations at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport to improve efficiency and guest experience.

The airline also inked an agreement with Elm, a pioneer in digital solutions, to provide a technical integration service for verifying SV guests' mobile number ownership and reviewing their data to ensure these information match trusted official records.

At the recent 18th edition of the Aviation Business Middle East Awards 2024, the airline earned the Cabin Crew of the Year title for delivering exceptional service and elevating its guest experience.

SV was also honoured with the Editorial Award for Best Airline Cabin Crew at the recent Business Traveler US Awards 2024.

Cirium's latest report on the airline's operational efficiency saw SV emerging as the new global leader for November 2024 with an on-time performance (OTP) of 89.85%, marking its third first-place ranking after similar successes in June and July 2024.

Jeremy Bowen, Cirium Chief Executive Officer said SV's sister carrier, flyadeal, also secured an impressive second place OTP of 90.48% in the global low-cost carrier category for the second consecutive month.

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



## Cathay Pacific's Big Wins at TheDesignAir Awards 2024

Hong Kong's flag carrier Cathay Pacific (CX) won the Design Airline of the Year title for Asia as well as two other honours at TheDesignAir Awards 2024.

The awards were for Best New Business Class for Aria Suite and Best New Premium Economy. Both CX's Aria Suite and new Premium Economy cabin products were launched in October 2024 onboard the airline's retrofitted Boeing 777-300ER aircraft.

CX General Manager of Customer Experience and Design, Vivian Lo said, "Human-centric design is at the heart of our newly launched Aria Suite Business class and our all-new Premium Economy cabin products, both of which have been thoughtfully crafted and masterfully designed with our customers' comfort in mind."

With an outstanding overall design score of 81.9, CX's placing among the top six Design Airlines in the world reflects its commitment to excellence in design and customer experience.

TheDesignAir Founder and Director Jonny Clark said: "From airborne art galleries to intuitive seat design and soft trim and finish details across both Business class and Premium Economy, there is a new lease of life in the airline's fleet as the 777-300ER retrofit takes place.

Other accolades achieved by CX in 2024 include being named the top five world's best airlines in the 2024 Skytrax World Airline Awards and in the top three best premium airlines in the world in AirlineRatings' rankings.

CX's Economy class also clinched the world's best title by Skytrax.

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





### First Airbus 330neo for Malaysia Airlines

Malaysia Aviation Group's (MAG) recent launch of its first Airbus A330-900 (A330neo) aircraft for Malaysia Airlines (MH) at Hangar 6, MAB Engineering Complex marks a pivotal step in the national carrier's fleet modernisation strategy to enhance operational efficiency and elevate passengers' comfort and service level.

With the arrival of this state-of-the-art aircraft delayed several times, Transport Minister Loke Siew Fook, who officiated the launch, described it as "a story of overcoming obstacles, embracing innovation, and emerging stronger than ever."

MAG, the 20th global operator of the A330neo, plans to introduce a total of 20 of these aircraft into its fleet by 2028 to replace its aging A330-300 following a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with Airbus, Rolls-Royce and Avolon in August 2022 to support its future route expansion.

Following the A330neo's launch on December 19, 2024, the aircraft flew on its maiden flight later in the evening from Kuala Lumpur (KUL) to Melbourne (MEL) but was grounded for 48 hours upon its return flight on December 21, 2024 due to technical issues related to Rolls-Royce engine and other manufacturing processes.

The addition of this A330neo brings to a total of 25 A330s operated by MAG.

The new aircraft comprises 28 business class and 269 economy class seats. Of the 269 seats, 24 of them come with extra legroom.

MAG, which operates a fleet of 107 aircraft across its subsidiaries including Firefly, MASwings and MASkargo, plans to expand it to 62 narrowbody and 52 widebody aircraft by 2033.

Its fifth Boeing 737-8 aircraft was delivered mid-December, with the remaining 20 expected between 2025-2026.



At the A330neo launch, MH also unveiled its partnership with Mercedes-Benz as its private terminal transfer service provider between the Main Terminal Building and Satellite Building of KL International Airport Terminal 1 starting January 2025.

The airline's eligible passengers will be chauffeured using the all-electric Mercedes-Benz EQS 500 4MATIC and the S 580 e plug-in hybrid models to elevate their travel experience at the airport.

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



### Loong Air's New Direct Xi'an to Penang Route

Penang (PEN) welcomed its 36th international direct route when low-cost carrier (LCC) Loong Air (GJ) flew from Xian (XIY), the capital city of Northwest China's Shaanxi province on December 30, 2024.

Using the Airbus A320 with a capacity of 168 seats, the LCC is operating twice-weekly flights every Monday and Friday on this route with a flight duration estimated at five hours 20 minutes.

Based in Hangzhou Xiaoshan International Airport in Zhejiang, this Chinese airline founded in 2012 was previously known as CDI Cargo. It is certified three star by Skytrax.

Dato' Yeoh Soon Hin, Tourism Malaysia Deputy Chairman said, "This new route is part of GJ's strategy to expand its international reach.

It is also a testament to Malaysia as a preferred destination for Chinese tourists, especially from northern China."

Through the collaboration with the Transport Ministry, the process for foreign airlines to apply for these new routes was streamlined, he added.

Malaysia Director General Datuk Manoharan Periasamy, Ding Qiao, Vice Consul General of the People's Republic of China in Penang, Malaysia Airports representatives, Loong Air officials and its ground handling partner, Ground Team Red Sdn Bhd as well as Penang state representatives.

GJ's presence in Malaysia is not new, with the airline launching its inaugural thrice-weekly direct flights from Hangzhou to KL International Airport (KUL) Terminal 2 from February 1 to March 30, 2024 in conjunction with the celebration of 50 years of diplomatic relationship between China and Malaysia.

From January to November 2024, Malaysia saw an increase of 132.7% to 3,038,314 tourist arrivals from China compared to the same period in 2023. Despite its impressive growth, it has yet to reach its targeted five million Chinese tourists by 2024.

With the visa-free policy now extended until December 2026 and the growing connectivity between the two countries, the prospects are expected to be brighter in 2025.

For more information, visit [www.loongair.cn](http://www.loongair.cn)





## Upclose with Tan Sri Teo Chiang Hong

### President of Malaysian Association of Hotel Owners (MAHO)

**Tan Sri Teo Chiang Hong, has been helming MAHO's presidency since 2016, representing its members in safeguarding their return on investments and promoting the development of the hotel and tourism industries in the country.**

**Not only is he an owner of two hotels, this 68-year-old mechanical engineer by profession, also has his vast experience spread out to cover real estate development, mortgage financing and logistics.**

**MAHO celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 2024. What are some of its achievements over the past 25 years?**

Established in March 1998, the association started with 13 companies as founding members who own about 45 hotels of three to five-star category.

Our membership has now reached close to 90 companies with an inventory of 195 hotels and more than 40,000 rooms.

With the recognition given by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) as well as the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA), MAHO membership is a requirement when dealing with both of them. Additionally, we have joined their sales and trade missions abroad.

MAHO is an active participant in issues concerning investment, business policies, incentives and taxes among others with the government agencies and relevant authorities such as the Finance Ministry, Human Resources Ministry, Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry as well as the Department of Statistics.

Besides being invited to their meetings, we are also made a committee member in working groups dealing with these related issues.

We regularly contribute our views and inputs to them on the hotel sector and tourism, and they are well received.

**To what extent have hotel businesses recovered to-date from the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Given the positive domestic and international tourist arrivals in 2024, the occupancy rate for the hotel sector has improved in tandem to around 60% to 70% post-pandemic, reaching more than 80% during the peak season.

**What are the major concerns plaguing hotel owners or investors post-pandemic?**

Manpower shortages, generally low hotel room rates and rising operational cost are among the primary issues burdening hotels operators and owners alike.

The cost of resources and services are also much higher now.



With the recent Budget 2025 announcing that monthly minimum wages will be raised from RM1,500 to RM1,700 for employers with five staff or more from February 1, 2025, we expect to see consumer prices surging further for goods and services.

Compounded by the increase in the Imbalance Cost Pass-Through for electricity tariffs from RM0.02/kWh to RM0.16/kWh in July 2025, this will put further pressure on the operational cost for business owners.

Despite all these increases, hotel room rates in Malaysia have remained relatively low, especially when they are pitted against the US dollar and other major foreign currencies.

**What is the status on MAHO's plans to establish its Chapters in other states of Malaysia apart from those in the Klang Valley?**

It is our association's wish to have state Chapters but the Registrar of Societies' regulations require us to have at least seven members in a state for a Chapter to be established. Currently, we do not have enough members in a state to form one.

Hence, MAHO is now making efforts to get more hotel owners, especially those outside the Klang Valley to be members.

Roadshows and membership drives will be undertaken to encourage more hotel owners and operators to join MAHO.

**Hotels are said to be your passion, with you owning two of them in the Klang Valley. What is the difference between them?**

The hotels under two different companies: M Resort and Hotel Kuala Lumpur under M Resort Hotel Sdn Bhd and M World Hotel, formerly Avante Hotel, which is owned by Bandar Utama City Assets Sdn Bhd.

Both hotels are five-star category but M Resort and Hotel is more exclusive and luxurious being a city resort with convention facilities.

**How do you ensure their long-term profitability and competitiveness?**

In hospitality, service standards and well-maintained facilities are very important. So, keeping a manageable cost of operations without affecting the required service standards is very important.

Maintaining a proper number of manpower and adequate skilled personnel to provide high quality service standards and hospitality are essential.

Additionally, the hotels must have special attractions to draw customers to its hardware as in the property or building and its facilities.

Likewise, the software such as outstanding service by its hospitable and skilled manpower are also crucial.

Most importantly, their room rates should reflect the hotels' star-rating and service standards.

**Are there plans to open more hotels in the near future?**

Certainly!

**Looking at the 34 million visitor arrivals to Malaysia from January to November 2024, does the country have ample hotels and flights to cater to the growing demand?**

There are 5,041 hotels with a total of 132,163 rooms registered under MOTAC as of June 2024. Although hotels have seen an increase in occupancy, there are still many rooms available, especially from non-registered and illegal tourism premises under the short-term rental accommodation (STRA) via booking portals, in particular Airbnb.

With several high-end hotels expected to be opening soon, this will increase the room inventory further and exacerbate the problem.

MAHO and the other hotel associations such as the Malaysian Association of Hotels have been pursuing the STRA issue and persuaded the government to get these premises to be quickly licensed and subject to regulations and enforcements as per the legal hotel operation.

As for flights, they are improving with more frequencies to popular and new routes. Targeted market destinations are also being planned by both the local and foreign airlines.

In principle, we should focus more on high-yield tourist markets which give better tourism receipts that will benefit premium-class tourism facilities or upmarket service providers, including hotels, shopping malls as well as food and beverage outlets.

**On the preparations for Visit Malaysia Year 2026 (VMY26), what is MAHO's engagement with its Secretariat thus far?**

MAHO gave our views, inputs and proposals during our engagement with VMY26 Secretariat on targets and promotional activities in September 2024.

**With the emphasis on environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices, what are hotel operators and developers doing to be more sustainable?**

Hotels have long taken up initiatives and efforts on sustainability even before the term ESG practices was established.

It has been a major consideration for hotels since initiatives such as energy saving, going green and efficient resources consumption will result in long-term cost savings apart from protecting the environment.

Owing to the demand by hotel guests globally, hotels are now reducing and even banning the use of plastic bottles for drinking water besides maintaining room or premise temperatures at optimum level.

**How do you unwind? Do you still have time to play golf?**

No time for golf these days, but I do find some time for workouts at the gymnasium. Family gatherings are good opportunities for me to unwind, meet up and cherish each other and spend time with the children.





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