

# AIRLINK

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## More New Airlines Flying to Malaysia in 2025

As growth in the aviation sector continues to reverberate globally, Malaysia Airports expects to see more new airlines, flight resumptions, increased frequencies and additional destinations in the coming months.

These also include the resumption of Kuwait Airways' four times-weekly flight to Kuala Lumpur (KUL) on Airbus A330-800neo in second half of the year which the airline last served until October 2023.

The other much anticipated return is British Airways' relaunch of its London Heathrow (LHR) to KUL on Boeing 787-9 service, starting 1 April 2025.

Malaysia Airports, which manages a network of 39 airports in the country, saw significant growth last year with 12 new airlines, 16 resumptions and 24 new destinations.

With 73 foreign carriers and six local ones, excluding freighters, operating flights to 138 international and 31 domestic destinations, the airport operator handled a total of 93.8 million passengers reaching 89.1% of pre-pandemic levels.

Of this, international traffic rose 28.4% YoY to 49.6 million passengers in 2024, representing 93.1% of 2019 figures despite challenges such as disruptions in maintenance, repair and overhaul services, while the domestic sector increased 2% YoY to 44.2 million passengers or 85.1% of pre-pandemic levels.

Malaysia Airports Managing Director Dato' Mohd Izani Ghani said, "The encouraging performance in 2024 highlights our collaborative efforts with airline partners, government agencies and the tourism industry in positioning Malaysia as a premier destination.

"The addition of new airlines and destinations reflects growing confidence in Malaysia as a hub for tourism and business travel. Looking ahead to 2025, we aim to further enhance connectivity with the introduction of more than 10 new airlines, focusing on key markets in Asia and Europe.

"This will help drive traffic growth as we prepare for Visit Malaysia 2026 (VM2026), reaffirming our commitment to connecting the nation to the world and delivering seamless travel experiences."

Meanwhile, extensive multi-phase transformation at its busiest international gateway, KL International Airport (KLIA), has been undertaken to enhance passenger comfort, modernise infrastructure and optimise operations.

### New Aerotrains Undergo Intensive Testings

During a recent media tour to provide an in-depth overview and update on the Aerotrains project at this flagship airport, Dato' Mohd Izani stressed, "Passenger safety remains our utmost priority."

Also present during the tour were Malaysia Airports Chief Operating Officer, Gordon Andrew Stewart and Project Director Ir Bibi Sabrena Sakandar Khan, who gave a media briefing in the newly improved control room to provide insights into the system's sophisticated operations and monitoring processes.

There will be three sets of new aerotrains, with each set comprising three cars,

thus increasing its capacity from 90 to 270 persons. Two sets will be used for operations while the third will be for back-up.

Reaffirming the airport operator's commitment to passenger safety with comprehensive and intensive testing of the new Aerotrains, the target date set for the commencement of their full operation is in the second quarter of 2025.

Initially planned as a three-year Aerotrains project, which commenced in March 2022, it is now almost 84% completed and is in the final Testing and Commissioning (T&C) phase where it undergoes comprehensive verification against rigorous safety, operational and performance requirements.



Subject to the necessary approvals from the Land Public Transport Agency (APAD) and Ministry of Transport (MOT), the Aerotrains project has to undergo 80 critical tests, including the Static, Dynamic, Interface and System Integration Tests.

Under the final Testing and Commissioning phase from April 2025, comprehensive verification against rigorous safety, operational and performance requirements will be conducted.

The Fault Free Run Test requires the first Aerotrains to run for over 2,000 kilometres (km) without any failures, and subsequently for the other two Aerotrains to run for 1,000 km without any failures.

Mandatory trials and assessments to ensure the system operates seamlessly across all components and meets safety requirements will be conducted to boost convenience, efficiency and overall satisfaction for all travellers at KLIA.

A live train test was also conducted during the media tour to show firsthand the meticulous steps involved in validating and fine-tuning the Aerotrains system.

Among the new features of the Aerotrains is the onboard closed-circuit television linked to the main KLIA security system, seamless onboard communication system and real-time information feed.

"This project is critical to both Malaysia Airports and the country. It is in tandem with our goal to enhance passenger experience and elevate KLIA's reputation as we prepare for VM2026," Dato' Mohd Izani added.

### Global Air Passenger Demand to Moderate in 2025 as Challenges Persist

With record high global air passenger demand of 10.4% achieved in 2024 and Asia Pacific (APAC) having the largest share of the pie at 33.5%, International Air Transport Association (IATA) expects travel demand to continue to grow in 2025, albeit at a moderated pace of 8% that is more aligned with historical averages.

IATA Director General Willie Walsh said the passenger demand growth reached last year compared to 2023 saw record numbers both domestically and internationally.

Domestic full-year passenger traffic for 2024 rose 5.7% compared to a year ago while capacity expanded by 2.5%. International passenger traffic in 2024, which saw growth in all regions, increased 13.6% year-on-year (YoY) while capacity rose 12.8%.

Walsh remarked, "Airlines met that strong demand with record efficiency. On average, 83.5% of all seats on offer were filled, a new record high, partially attributable to the supply chain constraints that limited capacity growth."

On the international passenger market performance in APAC, airlines posted a 26% rise in the full-year 2024 compared to 2023, maintaining the strongest YoY growth among the regions while capacity rose 24.7% and load factor (LF) climbed to 83.8%.

Despite this strong growth, IATA envisaged opportunities for further growth to be high as international revenue passenger kilometres (RPKs) remain 8.7% below 2019 levels.

Newly released preliminary traffic figures for the full-year 2024 by the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA) on the strong growth posted for both international air passenger and cargo markets, showed airlines in this region carried a combined total of 365 million international passengers, up 30.5% from the previous year.

Increased flight frequencies alongside network expansions supported the solid growth in travel demand while robust e-commerce activities and persistent disruptions to maritime shipping led to higher air cargo volumes.

Subhas Menon, AAPA Director General said, "The post-pandemic recovery on Northeast Asian routes, helped by the relaxation of visa policies, together with overall healthy demand across the region, drove growth in both leisure and business travel markets.

"Consequently, the region's carriers achieved a record-high international passenger LF of 81.6% in 2024 amidst capacity constraints stemming from ongoing supply chain shortages and delays in aircraft deliveries."





## Second Route by Lucky Air from Dali to Kuala Lumpur

Lucky Air's (8L) launched its maiden flight connecting Dali (DLU) in China to KL International Airport (KUL) Terminal 2 on 10 January 2025, offering twice-weekly services on Mondays and Fridays using the Boeing 737-700 aircraft.

The duration of its first international direct air route from DLU, southwest of the Yunnan Province was estimated at 3.5 hours.

Currently, there are 321 weekly flights connecting southern China and Malaysia, of which 33 are from Yunnan, with the growing connectivity between the two countries facilitating cooperation in areas such as the economy and education, according to Muhamad Akmal, the Consul-General of Malaysia in Kunming.

The Chinese low-cost carrier's inaugural flight to KUL was welcomed by Nuwal Fadhilah Ku Azmi, Tourism Malaysia Director of International Promotion Division for Asia/

Africa as well as representatives from Malaysia Airports and Pos Aviation, the ground handling partner for Lucky Air.

This is the second route offered by 8L, which operated once a week charter flights from Lijiang (LJG) to KUL for two months from September 2024.

As part of its international route expansion, the Kunming-based airline will be launching non-stop bi-weekly flights from DLU to Hanoi (HAN) in Vietnam on 23 February 2025, also using B737-700.

Vietnam's capital city, ranked seventh on Tripadvisor's 2025 world's top destinations as part of its Travelers' Choice Awards this year, also came up second place among the world's culture destinations.

8L is part of the Hainan Airlines Group.

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



## Vietnam Airlines Ranked 22nd Among World's Safest Airlines in 2025

Airline Ratings' recognition of Vietnam Airlines (VN) as one of the top 25 safest airlines in the world for 2025 makes it the only full-service airline in Vietnam to be on this list alongside other leading airlines.

Besides bolstering VN's global reputation, the ranking by the aviation safety and product rating website also enhances passenger trust in the airline.

“VN has not had a fatal accident in 27 years, nor have they had any serious incidents.

The airline operates a fleet of 100 modern aircraft, with an average age of under 10 years, and has passed the International Air Transport Association's (IATA) Operational Safety Audits (IOSA) certification without fail since 2006.

**SHARON PETERSEN**  
Chief Executive Officer  
of Airline Ratings

Airline Ratings' ranking is based on stringent criteria, including serious incidents over the past two years, aircraft age, fleet size, incident rates, profitability, IOSA certification, and pilot training.

VN, which successfully implemented a Safety Management System since 2007, has the Civil Aviation Authority of Vietnam's approval. This is viewed as a model for other domestic airlines in Vietnam to follow.

During the IATA World Safety and Operations Conference in 2023 hosted by VN, the airline signed IATA's Safety

Leadership Charter, further contributing to the ongoing evolution of its safety culture.

The airline also uses cutting-edge technologies to enhance safety and operational efficiency. In terms of operational safety, VN achieved an Innovative Safety Culture Rating of 6.2/7.

It is also first and only Vietnamese airline to receive the Federal Aviation Administration's approval to operate scheduled flights to the United States, having successfully passed its stringent safety examination in 2022.

Vietnam's national flag carrier remains at the forefront of investing in state-of-the-art aircraft, including the Boeing 787, Airbus A350 and A321neo.

VN will also be investing in 50 narrow-body aircraft to develop VN's domestic and regional flight network, enhance competitiveness, improve business efficiency, and ensure sustainable development goals.

This is in line with the strategic vision for VN during the recovery and sustainable development phase, according to the airline's newly released 2024 Report on Corporate Governance where its board of directors identified key investment projects for 2024-2025.

These include aircraft investment and airport service infrastructure at Long Thanh International Airport as well as projects that will boost innovation capacity, digital transformation, customer experience, an improve safety and security management.

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





### Award-winning flydubai's New Business Lounge

Dubai-based carrier, flydubai (FZ), was recognised at the ninth Aviation Innovation Awards for Exceptional Products and Services Innovation in the airline Industry category as well as for Innovative Collaborations and Partnerships in the air cargo and logistics category.



Launched in 2012, FZ Cargo's global operation spans over 150 destinations in 53 countries, with shipments transferred from one cargo flight to another in as little as one hour from arriving in Dubai. flydubai Cargo has continued to enhance its cargo capabilities through its partnerships.

Mohamed Hassan, FZ Senior Vice President of Airport Services and Cargo said, "Through strengthening our partnerships and investing in the latest technologies, we will continue to grow our cargo operational reach and reaffirm Dubai's position as a leading international aviation hub."

Committed to enhancing its customer experience, FZ recently unveiled a 900 sq m business class lounge, following the opening of a check-in facility for business class passengers in October 2024.

Located after the passport control and security lanes at Dubai International's Terminal 2 Departure area, customers can look forward to dining options, ranging from international buffet to à la carte dishes at the new lounge, which also has shower facilities and a prayer room.

Other amenities include complimentary Wifi, workstations and multiple charging stations.

Additionally, this modern lounge features a glass facade offering uninterrupted tarmac views and inviting natural light.

Mohamed Hassan said the lounge and boarding gate provide added convenience to its passengers looking for a more personalised and efficient travel experience, be it for business or leisure travel.

Emirates' (EK) Skywards members can also enjoy select benefits of this lounge depending on their membership tier. Both EK and FZ are airlines owned by the Dubai government.

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



### The All-New Batik Air Club

Batik Air Malaysia's (OD) new frequent flyer programme, Batik Air Club, formerly known as Malindo Miles, has been completely reimagined, revealing a refreshed reward system aligned with its new identity.

Offering broader coverage for earning and redeeming points for free flights with OD and other airlines within the Lion Air Group, the points are rewarded based on the fare class booked starting from value fares. The bookings, however, must be made directly via OD website.

Additionally, Batik Air Club members can turn their shopping indulgences into points using its partner banks' credit cards to redeem for free flights.

Other privileges include up to 25% extra points, priority access and exclusive promotions benefits.

The members' existing Malindo Miles points will be converted into Batik Air Club points.

Every 1,000 Malindo Miles equivalent to 10 Batik Air Club points.

The redemption value of one Batik Air Club point is one Ringgit Malaysia.

The members can enjoy up to 100% higher redemption value depending on the fare class they booked.

Meanwhile, following OD's recent announcement of upcoming launches to Beijing (PKK) and Changsha (CSX) in China in March 2025, the airline will be introducing another new direct route between Kuala Lumpur (KUL) and Xiamen (XMN) to further enhanced connectivity between Malaysia and China.

Starting 11 April 2025, this new four-times weekly service using the Boeing 737 aircraft will be its ninth destination in China.

XMN, a major economic hub and key player in international trade, serves as a gateway for business and tourism between China and the rest of the world.

OD Chief Executive Officer, Datuk Chandran Rama Muthy said as China's economic growth continues to thrive with a projected gross domestic product growth rate of 4.5% in 2025, the demand for international travel and connectivity has increased, making this new route a valuable asset for fostering greater business and tourism flows between the two countries.

Malaysian citizens can enjoy visa-free entry to China for up to 30 days while Chinese citizens also benefit from visa-free access to Malaysia for the same duration.

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





**Guinness World Records' Title for Turkish Airlines**

Turkish Airlines (TK), which has held the title for the most countries flown to by an airline in the world since 2012, was recognised yet again as the record holder by Guinness World Record.

Turkiye's national flag carrier was presented the certificate at Santiago Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport after TK's inaugural flight to Chile in December 2024.

Based on Guinness World Records' evaluation criteria, TK set the record with flights to 120 countries, reflecting its active routes over a 12-month period.

The Star Alliance member set has a 30-country lead over its closest competitor in this hard-to-break record.

TK Chief Executive Officer Bilal Ekşi said, "As the only airline to hold this distinction for over a decade, we proudly

showcase the strength of our flight network and reinforce our mission to connect people, cultures, and destinations around the globe."

Despite the airlines' temporarily suspended routes and inaugural flight to Chile, TK's network now spans 131 countries.

It recently resumed its thrice weekly flights to Damascus, Syria's capital, which were first started on February 1984 and suspended since April 2012.

This followed after its three times a week flight resumption to Benghazi, Libya's second largest city using the Boeing 737-78D aircraft on 14 January 2025.

For more information, call **+603-2053 1899** or visit **www.turkishairlines.com**



**Singapore Airlines Earns Recognitions in Fortune's 2025 World's Most Admired Companies**

Singapore's flag carrier, Singapore Airlines (SQ), has received several titles in Fortune's 27th edition of the World's Most Admired Companies (WMAC) 2025.

According to the business magazine, SQ is the best airline in Asia, the second best in the world and the 28th most admired company globally.

As the second highest ranked Asian company and second highest employer in this part of the world after Toyota, the airline has consistently made it onto Fortune's list for 23 years, improving its position from 29 last year to 28 in 2025.

The WMAC rankings are evaluated by consulting firm, Korn Ferry, with Fortune, analysing 650 companies from more than 50 industries with representation from the United States, Europe and Asia Pacific.

Over 3,300 executives participated in the survey, in which companies were assessed on nine attributes, including management quality, innovation and global competitiveness.

Laura Manson-Smith, Korn Ferry's global leader of organisation strategy consulting said, "The WMAC do not earn their ranking through financial results alone.

"They also get there through the reputation of their leadership, their ability to attract and retain top talent, and a strong culture."

One of the key factors contributing to SQ's move to the top spot in the airline industry rankings this year from second place in 2024 is its focus on customer service.

SQ is also known for its hospitality, well-designed cabins and in-flight experience, which have earned it multiple accolades, including World's Best International Airline and World's Best Cabin Crew Staff.

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



**2024 Putra Brand Awards Recognition for Malaysia Airlines and Firefly**

Malaysia Airlines (MH) recently received the coveted Platinum Award in the Transportation, Travel & Tourism category in the 2024 Putra Brand Awards, a significant leap from its Bronze win the previous year.

On the other hand, its sister company Firefly (FY) under Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG) Berhad, secured the Bronze Award, underscoring the Group's collective dedication to delivering superior service for its customers.

Endorsed by the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation and supported by various associations, the Putra Brand Awards use consumer research to determine the country's most preferred brands across multiple categories from Platinum, Gold, Silver and Bronze honours.

Meanwhile, MH was accorded the Airline of the Year at the Voyage Awards in China, further solidifying its brand and commercial presence in this key market.

"In celebration of these achievements, we are expressing our gratitude with an exclusive offer of up to 15% off at [malaysiaairlines.com](http://malaysiaairlines.com), using the code THANK YOU

**DATUK CAPTAIN IZHAM ISMAIL**  
Group Managing Director of Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG)

In line with its ongoing commitment to enhancing passenger experience, MH recently extended its complimentary Wi-Fi on selected narrowbody aircraft, with three out of six its Boeing 737-8 equipped with this service.

Plans are afoot to activate the six aircraft by February 2025 following the successful introduction of free Wi-Fi for all passengers on selected widebody aircraft in November 2023.

MH and Firefly were the official airline partners at the ASEAN Travel Exchange (TRAVEX) from 15 to 18 January 2025 held at the Persada Johor International Convention Centre.

As a key component of the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2025, TRAVEX served as a business platform connecting ASEAN buyers and sellers, showcasing a diverse range of destination products and services.

At the TRAVEX luncheon by MAG for hosted buyers and media on 15 January Nur Hayati Aziz Rashid, Senior Manager of the Regional Sales Central (Malaysia and ASEAN) updated the audience on the Group's three focused business portfolios, namely Airlines, Loyalty and Travel Services, and Aviation Services.



To encourage travellers to rediscover the joy of exploration, immerse themselves in diverse cultures, and create unforgettable experiences, MH recently launched its global Time For marketing campaign, inviting travellers to make 2025 a year of memorable journeys to its network of over 60 destinations.

This campaign saw Malaysia's national carrier having activations such as tram wraps in Melbourne, Australia as well as taxi and bus branding in the United Kingdom. These efforts are aligned with Visit Malaysia 2026, showcasing the country's vibrant appeal to international audiences.

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





### Soaring Success for oneworld and Its Members

Celebrating oneworld's 25th anniversary in 2024, the alliance's winning streak at the end of the year saw it amassing a number of accolades, with its latest win being Best Airline Alliance for the 15th consecutive year based solely on Global Traveler (GT) readers' votes.

Reinforcing further oneworld's position as the most preferred alliance among frequent flyers, this accolade was announced at the 21st annual GT Tested Reader Survey Awards, which honour airlines, hotels, loyalty programmes and travel-related products.

oneworld member airlines received a combined total of eight awards. British Airways (BA), won the Best Trans-Atlantic Airline title while fellow oneworld founding member, Cathay Pacific (CX), clinched the Best Airline for International First Class and Best Airline for Business Class Seat Design trophies.

Additionally, CX was named the Best Trans-Pacific Airline for the second consecutive year while Japan Airlines (JL) bagged the award for Best Airline to Japan for the fourth year running besides being crowned the Fastest Growing Airline, Trans-Pacific.

Doha-based Qatar Airways (QR) was also awarded Best Airline Cabin Cleanliness while Royal Air Maroc took the Best Airline in Africa title for the second year in a row.

Maria McKinnon, oneworld's Head of Global Brand, Marketing and Loyalty said, "I would like to take this opportunity to thank the over 500 million customers who

choose to fly with oneworld member airlines annually as we owe our success to them."

Other leading travel magazines - Business Traveler United States of America and Business Traveller United Kingdom (UK) - also recognised oneworld as the Best Airline Alliance for the ninth year and 12th consecutive year respectively.

The 35th Business Traveler North America Award saw several oneworld members receiving a combined five awards across four airlines.

They include BA's Executive Club, which was named as the Best Frequent Flyer Programme while QR's Qsuite clinched the Best Business Class award.

These two alliance members also took home seven top awards at the Business Traveller UK's ceremony in London, with QR securing four wins for Best Long-Haul Airline, Best Business Class, Best Middle Eastern Airline and Best Inflight Food and Beverage.

UK-based flag carrier, BA, was recognised as the Best Short-Haul Carrier, Best Frequent Flyer Programme while its iconic first-class lounge, The Concorde Room in Heathrow Terminal 5, was named the Best Airport Lounge.

oneworld brings together 13 world-class airlines and more than 20 affiliates.

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



### Largest International New Lounge by Emirates at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport

Emirates' (EK) newly relocated and refurbished lounge located on the fourth floor of Suvarnabhumi Airport's (BKK) Satellite 1 Terminal in Bangkok, Thailand sets a new standard for premium travel, offering its customers an enhanced ground experience that matches the sophistication of their journey.

Covering 1,454 square metres, the US\$5 million expanded the lounge can hold 250 guests, comfortably accommodating all premium passengers travelling on two simultaneous Airbus A380 departures.

As the largest international lounge beyond EK's Dubai hub, the airline's first and business class passengers as well as Skywards members with paid access to the lounge can enjoy pre-flight rest and relaxation amidst upscale furnishings, international cuisine and a serene ambience.

With amenities that include shower spas and complimentary Wifi, the new lounge is a five-minute walk to the boarding gates, conveniently located for customers flying on EK's six daily flights from BKK.

The airline, which operates 41 airport lounges worldwide, including seven at Dubai International Airport, also offers eligible customers access to partner lounges in select destinations.

Celebrating 35 years of service to Thailand this year, EK remains committed to growing tourism and business to its key Southeast Asian travel hub in Bangkok, which is the airline's second largest destination with over 870 daily first and business class seats.



EK's extensive premium seat capacity reinforces its position as the leading foreign airline for luxury travel to and from Bangkok. Its first and business class passengers enjoy door-to-door complimentary chauffeur-driven service within a 60-km radius from BKK, along with exclusive check-in counters.

On EK's Airbus A380 aircraft, the premium experience includes the its signature onboard lounge, private first class suites and shower spa.

Travellers flying on its A380 and Boeing 777 also enjoy the airline's award-winning entertainment system, ice, featuring over 6,500 channels of on-demand entertainment.

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





## Airlines' United Front in Promoting Visit Malaysia 2026

Malaysia's highly anticipated Visit Malaysia 2026 (VM2026) campaign launch at Hangar 6 of the MAB Engineering Complex in Sepang, Selangor on 6 January 2025 saw the unveiling of the campaign's logo on the aircraft of Malaysia Airlines (MH), Batik Air Malaysia (OD) and AirAsia (AK).

This marks a united front in promoting the sustainability of the country's tourism industry in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals besides building up the excitement for the VM2026 campaign.

The four themes identified in the campaign are ecotourism and sustainability, modern attractions and innovations, cultural heritage and diversity, and the strength of collaborations and partnerships.

Prime Minister Dato' Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who officiated the event, described the VM2026 logo as a symbol of Malaysia's renewed commitment to becoming a premier global tourism destination.

The creatively designed logo highlights the stylised hibiscus national flower and embraces the endearing Malaysia, Truly Asia tagline that captures the country's diverse ethnicities and vibrant cultures.

The VM2026 campaign launch also showcased the different aircraft livery, premiered the official theme song and introduced the endangered Malayan Sun Bear as

its mascots, with the male gender known as Wira and the female called Manja.

Both wear an appealing batik-themed attire. Also known as honey bears, they not only draw attention to Malaysia's culturally rich artistry but also its wildlife conservation efforts.

A key component of the VM2026 campaign, the evocative theme song, entitled Surreal Experiences, captures the essence of Malaysia's enchanting offerings.

The launch event also named its 10 key strategic partners: AirAsia, Batik Air Malaysia Huawei, Malaysia Airports, Malaysia Aviation Group Berhad, Malaysian Association of Hotels, Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents, Marriott International, Mastercard and Shangri-La Kuala Lumpur.

These partnerships aim to enhance connectivity, expand marketing campaigns and deliver exceptional visitor experiences via innovative technologies as well as seamless travel experiences and exclusive promotions.

VM2026 targets to welcome 35.6 million international tourists and generate RM147.1 billion in tourism receipts, up from its 2025 targets of 31.4 million tourist arrivals and RM125.5 billion in receipts.

Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Dato Sri Tiong King Sing said Malaysia received 25 million international



tourists in 2024, representing a 24.2% increase from the 20.1 million tourists received in 2023.

Malaysia's top source market in 2024 was Singapore with 9.1 million tourist arrivals, followed by Indonesia (3.65 million), China (3.29 million), Thailand (1.64 million) and Brunei (1.14 million).

### Realignment of Tourism Malaysia's Strategic Directions

Shahrin Mokhtar, Tourism Malaysia Senior Director of Strategic Planning, in an Engagement Session with tourism industry players from the Central Region held on 9 January 2025 said the agency's strategies have been realigned. Under Strategy 1, it would be revisiting the markets' prioritisation.

“ We will reevaluate and restructure Vietnam, South Korea and the Gulf Cooperation Council markets as priorities for 2025 and 2026 due to the current unfavourable trends.

Additionally, we will consider growing Central Asia in view of direct flight accessibility from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as top source markets besides looking at Russia and France.

### SHAHRIK MOKHTAR

Senior Director of Strategic Planning of Tourism Malaysia

Turkmenistan Airlines (T5) operates twice-weekly flights from Kuala Lumpur (KUL) to Ashgabat (ASB), providing connections to destinations such as Milan, Frankfurt, London Gatwick, Istanbul, Moscow and Jeddah.

Uzbekistan Airways (HY), which codeshares with MH operates direct flights to Tashkent (TAS) while AirAsia X (D7) has four times a week direct flights to Almaty (ALA) in Kazakhstan.

MH, on the other hand, is mounting four-weekly direct flights from KUL to Paris (CDG) from 22 March 2025, marking a key milestone in the airline's European expansion.

Under Strategy 2, Shahrin said Tourism Malaysia would reconsider the neighbouring countries, namely Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and Brunei as main source markets where major advertising and promotion are required to be invested to rejuvenate these markets as their arrivals are not back to pre-pandemic levels.

Furthermore, the excursionist arrivals from these four countries are growing by leaps and bounds to Malaysia.

Under Strategy 3, in maximising arrivals via land and sea, he said plans are afoot to convert Singapore excursionists to tourists by promoting events such as concerts, midnight and year-end sales besides working with hotels to offer 10 pm to 10 am weekday stays.

“Strategy 4 will focus on increasing air connectivity and doing lean period promotions to fill up capacity in markets such as Indonesia, China, India and Australia. international flights and charters (GSPC) with airlines to

boost air connectivity's capacity and growth,” he added.

Currently, there are a total of 246 weekly flights from Northern (68), Central (27) and Southern (151) India to Malaysia with combined 45,741 seats. Of the over one million Indian tourist arrivals to Malaysia in 2024, Southern India accounted for more than 50% of the numbers.

As part of its VM2026 roadshow, Tourism Malaysia launched a sales mission in India, covering Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Kochi from 3 to 7 February 2025. The agency is targeting 1.6 million Indian tourist arrivals this year.

During the Engagement Session, Mohd Amirul Rizal Abdul Rahim, Head of the VM2026 Secretariat and Senior Director of Advertising & Digital Division, in his Unveiling Surreal Experiences: Inspiring Journeys Towards VM2026 presentation highlighted the three pillars of VM2026.

They include increasing tourist arrivals by converting short visits into extended length of stays and encouraging higher spending by promoting niche tourism segments.

Nuwal Fadhilah Ku Azmi, Director of International Promotion Division (Asia/Africa), who spoke on GSPC, said the objectives of this matching grant for airlines and charter flights aim to promote Malaysia as the top-of-mind tourist destination, meet the targets set for tourist arrivals and receipts, and sustain the continuity of existing routes to the country, among other things.

Through its collaboration with both local and foreign airlines as well as travel agencies, Nawal Fadhilah hopes to create more charter flights to Malaysia, promote the country as a choice destination through the new routes besides increasing accessibility and flight frequencies.

The Engagement Session also saw certificates of collaboration presented to 39 strategic partners from tourism associations, transportation companies to local media organisations.







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