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## Crowne Plaza Penang Straits City opens, kicks off RM4.3b master development in Butterworth

Crowne Plaza Penang Straits City officially opened on 18 February, marking the first completed phase of the 40-acre Straits City waterfront development in Butterworth, Penang. Co-developed by Singapore-listed Straits Trading Company Ltd and its 51.96%-owned Malaysia Smelting Corp Bhd (KL:MSC), the RM4.3 billion project aims to transform Butterworth into a dynamic urban hub.

Straits Trading executive chairman Chew Gek Khim highlighted the hotel as the gateway to Straits City, which will integrate commercial, retail, and residential components. The 23-storey, five-star Crowne Plaza features 343 rooms, the Straits Ballroom for 800 guests, and the Straits Galleria retail podium. Managed by InterContinental Hotels Group, it caters to rising business travel and investment.

Straits City's 10-phase development, spanning two land plots, is set for completion by 2038. Positioned as a long-term urban renewal initiative, it aims to enhance Butterworth's appeal as a business and lifestyle hub. Straits Trading and MSC are key players in property, resources, and tin smelting.



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## Medical tourism: Who else is in the race with Malaysia?

The healthcare tourism market is a key economic driver in Southeast Asia, with the global market valued at US\$13.1 billion in 2023. Asean accounted for a third of global medical tourists, with Malaysia among the top destinations, generating over RM2 billion in revenue.

Over 60% of Malaysia's healthcare tourists are Indonesians, followed by visitors from China, India, Singapore, and the UK, drawn by its affordability, high-quality care, and proximity. Visa-free travel for Chinese and Indian tourists has further boosted demand. Malaysia is renowned for specialised treatments in IVF, gastroenterology, orthopaedics, and cardiology, with the National Heart Institute receiving regional recognition for excellence.

Thailand led Asean's medical tourism in 2023, earning US\$850 million from 2.86 million international patients, mainly from the Middle East and CLMV countries. The country's 10-year plan (2017-2026) aims to position it as a top medical hub, supported by extended medical visas and partnerships with Saudi Arabia. Singapore ranked third, earning an estimated US\$270 million. While its strong currency and high costs may deter budget-conscious tourists, Singapore remains a preferred destination for complex and specialised medical treatments.



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## Visit Malaysia Year 2026" Campaign Launched In India As Top Tourism Fair Begins

Malaysia has launched a major tourism campaign in India, aiming to boost Indian tourist arrivals by 25% in 2025 compared to 1.13 million in 2024.

The initiative, part of "Visit Malaysia Year 2026" (VM2026), was unveiled at a travel fair in New Delhi, with Tourism Malaysia emphasizing India as a key market. The country targets 35.6 million foreign tourists in 2026, surpassing the 25.3 million expected in 2024. Malaysian High Commissioner Datuk Muzafar Shah Mustafa highlighted the campaign's goal of offering unforgettable experiences for Indian travelers. Tourism Malaysia Delhi director Ahmad Johanif Mohd Ali stressed sustainable tourism tailored to Indian visitors.

Promotional efforts include mascots "Wira and Manja," symbolizing conservation of the Bornean Sun Bear, and cultural performances by Malaysian dancers. Over 60 Malaysian exhibitors participated in the South Asia Travel and Tourism Exchange (SATTE). Malaysia is also focusing on niche tourism segments, such as destination weddings, golf tourism, and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions).



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## Singaporean travel agents connect with Sarawak operators, head to SibU on familiarisation trip

Tourism Malaysia hosted a business-to-business (B2B) session and seminar in Sarawak under the 'Meet-The-Experts' programme, connecting 18 Singaporean travel agents with 25 local industry players. Held in collaboration with Sarawak Tourism Board (STB), Business Events Sarawak (BESarawak), and Sarawak Trade and Tourism Office Singapore (Statos), the initiative aimed to foster partnerships and develop attractive travel packages for the Singaporean market.

Tourism Malaysia Sarawak director Rubiah Tul Adwiyah Md Yusof highlighted the programme's role in promoting Sarawak as a premier destination, leveraging 26 weekly Singapore-Sarawak flights. The agents are now on a four-day, three-night familiarisation trip to SibU, experiencing the Borneo Rainforest, Rajang River, Iban culture, Melanau Heritage Trail, and local cuisine.

Since its 2022 launch, 'Meet-The-Experts' has facilitated 268 unique travel packages across Malaysia. Singapore remains Malaysia's top tourist source, contributing to 18.9 million visitors in 2024. The programme also supports Visit Malaysia 2026 (VM2026) by encouraging sustainable tourism experiences.



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