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Marriott Acquires CitizenM to Expand Lifestyle Hotel Portfolio Globally

Marriott International will acquire CitizenM for US\ \$355 million, adding 36 hotels across 20 major cities to its global portfolio. Founded in 2008, CitizenM is known for prefabricated construction and appeals to value-conscious travelers with tech-savvy rooms, artistic public spaces, and social-friendly amenities.

The deal supports Marriott's push to grow its select-service segment and diversify offerings for Bonvoy loyalty members. Expected to close in 2025, the acquisition could raise Marriott's net room growth to nearly 5%. The 8,544-room brand will enter Marriott's system under new long-term franchise agreements, with the company projecting RM142 million (US\ \$30 million) in annual stabilized fees from open and upcoming properties.

CitizenM's shareholders, APG and GIC, may also receive up to RM528 million (US\ \$110 million) in earn-out payments based on future performance. Founder Rattan Chadha views the deal as a boost for global reach while preserving CitizenM's brand identity.



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Hard Rock Cafe Genting Highlands Opens With Food, Music and Fun

Hard Rock Cafe Genting Highlands has officially opened at Grand Ion Majestic, blending signature rock 'n' roll vibes with renowned dining and entertainment. Starting 30 April, guests can enjoy classics like the Legendary® Burger, hickory-smoked beef ribs, and shop exclusive merchandise at the Rock Shop.

The venue promises a dynamic calendar of DJs, live performances, and themed nights. Guests can also enjoy exclusive poolside packages at Southeast Asia's highest heated pool, making it a unique destination for food and music lovers.

Tom Perez, Vice President of Franchise Operations, said this is Hard Rock's seventh location in Malaysia and its first "in the clouds." With the grand opening scheduled for July, the cafe is already buzzing with energy, offering unforgettable experiences that combine great food, music, and vibrant atmosphere. Whether you're dining or dancing, Hard Rock Genting Highlands delivers something for every guest.



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MICE Industry to Strengthen Malaysia's Tourism and International Appeal

Malaysia's MICE industry is expected to draw over 25 million visitors and generate RM76.8 billion, driven by its ASEAN chairmanship in 2025 and Visit Malaysia Year in 2026. These initiatives are set to boost local employment, support businesses, and strengthen community-based economic activities.

WTCKL Managing Director Datuk Seri Dr Irmohizam Ibrahim highlighted the key role of convention centres like WTCKL in supporting sectors such as transport, hospitality, F&B, and tourism. He also emphasized that business events position Malaysia as a growing hub for international talent and global delegates.

Before the pandemic, the MICE industry contributed RM86.14 billion to the economy and attracted 26 million tourists in 2019. With global economic shifts underway, Irmohizam stressed the need to expand this sector. Events like concerts, conferences, and book fairs raise Malaysia's global image and attract investment. The upcoming Kuala Lumpur International Book Fair, for example, is expected to boost spending on travel, accommodation, and tourism.



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Visa-Free Entry to Boost Malaysia-Kosovo Tourism and Ties

Malaysia's move to grant visa-free entry for Kosovo citizens for up to 30 days marks a step forward in strengthening bilateral ties, trade, and tourism. Kosovo had already lifted visa restrictions for Malaysians, allowing 90-day stays, and the recent reciprocity is expected to spark increased travel and cultural exchange.

Kosovo President Dr Vjosa Osmani praised Malaysia's continued support—from aiding post-war reconstruction to recognizing Kosovo's independence early. She hopes this decision will encourage more Kosovars to visit Malaysia, especially as tourism grows in both countries. Direct flights in the future could further boost travel and connectivity.

During her visit, Osmani highlighted growing people-to-people bonds through tourism and education. She also expressed interest in working with Malaysia on cybersecurity, disaster response, and counterterrorism. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim received Kosovo's highest civilian award for Malaysia's long-standing support and commitment to strong relations.



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Tourism Malaysia and Emirates Collaborate to Boost Global Tourist Arrivals

Tourism Malaysia has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Emirates to enhance global tourist arrivals and boost Malaysia's international recognition. The agreement focuses on joint marketing and promotional efforts, highlighting Malaysia's natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and diverse cuisine.

Emirates will also organize familiarization trips for media partners and professional travelers from key markets to increase exposure. This partnership leverages Emirates' extensive network, contributing to the momentum for Visit Malaysia Year 2026 (VMY2026) and reinforcing Malaysia's "Truly Asia" brand.

With an ambitious target of 45 million tourists for 2025, Tourism Malaysia aims to attract global visitors and showcase the country's unique cultural and natural offerings.



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Melaka to Host Global Tourism Events Promoting Sustainability and Growth

Over 3,000 delegates from 159 countries will gather in Melaka for World Tourism Day (WTD) and the World Tourism Conference (WTC) from September 27 to 29. With the theme "Tourism and Sustainable Transformation," both events aim to strengthen Malaysia's position as a global tourism destination.

Tourism Malaysia deputy director-general Shahrin Mokhtar said the international exposure will boost the country's tourism industry. He highlighted that Malaysia previously hosted the ASEAN Tourism Forum 2025 in Johor, setting the stage for these upcoming events in Melaka.

World Tourism Day, introduced by the United Nations World Tourism Organization in 1980, is celebrated every September 27 to honour tourism's impact on global development. This year's events will not only promote Malaysia but also highlight tourism's vital role in sustainable energy and economic transformation.



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Langkawi to Lead Sustainable Tourism Push for Visit Malaysia 2026

Tourism Malaysia held a key engagement session in Langkawi to boost preparations for Visit Malaysia Year 2026 (VMY2026). The session brought together tourism stakeholders to align efforts in promotion, product development, and public-private collaboration under the theme "Malaysia: Sustainable and Culturally Rich Destination."

Deputy director-general Shahrin Mokhtar highlighted Langkawi's global status as a UNESCO Geopark and its reputation for natural beauty and biodiversity. He praised Kedah's green tourism efforts, which have made Langkawi a model for sustainable tourism.

The meeting included officials from government, airlines, hotels, and travel sectors. Key initiatives discussed included environmental conservation and promoting eco-friendly experiences. With stakeholder support, Langkawi is expected to play a vital role in positioning Malaysia as a resilient, sustainable tourism leader during VMY2026.



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AirAsia Partnership to Boost Selangor Tourism Across ASEAN and China

Tourism Selangor and Selangor Menteri Besar Incorporated (MBI) have teamed up with AirAsia to promote Selangor as a top destination, aiming to attract eight million tourists this year. The campaign transforms 15 AirAsia aircraft into flying billboards, featuring visuals of Selangor's culture and attractions throughout the cabin.

Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Amirudin Shari said the initiative will enhance the state's visibility both regionally and internationally. The campaign, themed "Surprising Selangor," targets travellers across major ASEAN cities and eight destinations in China, including Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

By showcasing Selangor on popular flight routes, the state hopes to attract tourists, build investor confidence, and expand global networks. This strategic collaboration is expected to elevate Selangor's economic profile while strengthening its presence in the international tourism market.



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Malaysia Leads Muslim-Friendly Tourism at ATM Dubai 2025, Setting Global Standards

At the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2025 in Dubai, Malaysia showcased its commitment to inclusive, culturally respectful tourism for Muslim travelers. The Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) launched new Muslim-friendly travel packages and emphasized Malaysia's vision of diversity, faith, and cultural harmony, with a focus on women, youth, and families.

Malaysia's participation also included outreach initiatives to key Middle Eastern markets, particularly Saudi Arabia, and introduced the Malaysia Umrah International Exhibition, positioning the country as a major transit hub for Umrah travel. ITC's approach has garnered global recognition, with Malaysia ranking highly in the Mastercard-CrescentRating Global Muslim Travel Index.

With initiatives like Islamic Tourism Month and a robust operational assurance program, Malaysia is solidifying its leadership in Muslim-friendly tourism. The country's efforts highlight the potential for inclusive tourism to drive economic growth and global tourism trends.



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Sabah Strengthens Agro-Tourism with Taiwanese Collaboration for Sustainable Development

Sabah has strengthened its agro- and community-based tourism initiatives with a new partnership between state associations and Taiwanese universities. The agreement involves Dayeh University, National Chi Nan University, Nan Kai University of Technology, Lee-Ming Institute of Technology, and the Taiwan Agro and Rural Tourism Association.

The collaboration, witnessed by Assistant Minister Datuk Joniston Bangkuai, aims to promote sustainable and inclusive tourism in line with the Sabah Maju Jaya development plan. The partnership focuses on agro-tourism, which supports rural communities and offers meaningful visitor experiences.

Sabah Tourism Board (STB) has identified 51 agro-tourism products and is piloting a digital platform in Kiulu to enhance rural tourism. The partnership with Taiwanese universities will build local capacity, promote knowledge exchange, and develop tourism projects grounded in local values.



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Sabah to Expand Kinabalu UNESCO Geopark and Crocker Range Reserve

The Sabah government reaffirmed its commitment to expanding the Kinabalu UNESCO Global Geopark (KUGGP) and the Crocker Range Biosphere Reserve as part of its Sabah Maju Jaya (SMJ) roadmap. Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor emphasized the importance of strengthening scientific foundations, enhancing public awareness, and ensuring sustainable resource preservation.

The proposed expansion into Tuaran district is supported by the state government due to its rich biodiversity and eco-tourism potential. Plans include establishing an information gallery in Tuaran to meet UNESCO criteria and educate local communities.

Hajiji also highlighted that the expansion aims to combine science, conservation, and economic empowerment through geoheritage-based tourism. The state will conduct additional scientific expeditions to prepare for the biosphere reserve's growth, supported by data from the recently completed Geo-Sulaman Scientific Expedition.



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Nippon Paint and MAH Partner to Elevate Hotel Standards Nationwide

Nippon Paint Malaysia has partnered with the Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) to uplift hotel refurbishment standards in preparation for 31.4 million tourist arrivals under Visit Malaysia 2026. This collaboration aligns with Nippon Paint's Total Coating & Construction Solutions (TCCS), offering practical and tailored upgrades for hotel aesthetics and durability.

At the “Elevating Hotel Maintenance” workshop, hotel professionals explored solutions for issues like water seepage and surface cracks. MAH CEO Isaac Mohan Raj emphasized the emotional value of hotels and the importance of first impressions, while Nippon Paint reaffirmed its commitment to enhancing comfort, safety, and visual appeal through a streamlined 5-step refurbishment service.

Industry voices from Mövenpick, Legoland Malaysia, and others praised the initiative's relevance. With proven results across Malaysia, the partnership aims to equip hotels with the tools and knowledge needed to deliver quality experiences for future guests.



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Malaysia Airlines Expands Global Reach with Strategic Partnerships Across Key Sectors

Malaysia Airlines has signed three key Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with APG, StudentUniverse, and ATPI to enhance its global distribution, market reach, and customer value. These partnerships will help strengthen the airline's presence across diverse customer segments and geographies.

The partnership with APG will improve the airline's global distribution, especially in offline markets, while expanding its presence through the APG Platform and NDC portal. With StudentUniverse, Malaysia Airlines aims to boost its visibility and offerings for the student travel segment, offering exclusive discounts and packages.

Through its collaboration with ATPI, Malaysia Airlines will target the marine and energy sectors, improving accessibility to key marine hubs and routes. These MoUs reflect Malaysia Airlines' strategic ambition to expand and deliver greater value to its customers worldwide.



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AirAsia X Suspends Nairobi Flights to Refocus Network Strategy

AirAsia X will suspend its direct flights from Kuala Lumpur to Nairobi beginning September 1, 2025, as part of its ongoing network optimisation strategy in response to lower-than-expected demand. The airline has proactively informed affected passengers and is offering service recovery options (SROs), including full refunds, credit accounts, or complimentary flight changes for travel before August 31, 2025.

The Kuala Lumpur–Nairobi route was launched on November 15, 2024, and operates four times weekly. It is currently the only direct air link between Malaysia and Africa, marking a milestone in regional connectivity. Despite the suspension, AirAsia X remains committed to offering competitive fares and value-driven service across its global network.

The airline continues to monitor consumer trends and demand to ensure commercial viability. It plans to reallocate resources to stronger-performing routes, reflecting its long-term goal of sustainable growth and network resilience while delivering enhanced experiences for travellers.



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AirAsia and Hausboom Unveil Travel-Inspired Drinks to Spark Exploration

AirAsia has joined forces with local sparkling juice brand Hausboom to launch a limited-edition beverage series inspired by the airline's diverse flight destinations. The campaign aims to engage younger travellers aged 21 to 35, who make up over 42% of AirAsia's customer base, while promoting homegrown innovation and entrepreneurship. Each of the nine Hausboom bottles features unique flavours tied to destinations such as Seoul, Kuala Lumpur, Xi'an, Nairobi, and Melbourne.

The collaboration runs until December 2025 and offers consumers a chance to win a year of unlimited flights and exclusive prizes from AirAsia's ecosystem, including SNAP, Hotels, RIDE, and Ikhlas. The drinks are available at over 6,800 retail locations nationwide, including 7-Eleven, KK Mart, and stores in Sabah and Sarawak.

This partnership positions AirAsia as more than just an airline—it's a lifestyle brand celebrating local talent, deepening emotional connections, and inspiring Malaysians to travel further and dream bigger.



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