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Johor Bahru City Square to Add Hotel Apartments and Boost Cross-Border Appeal

Johor Bahru City Square is set for a major transformation to reinforce its role as a key cross-border retail and lifestyle hub. The asset enhancement works began in November and will complete by late 2027 while the mall remains operational. New features include a 15,000 sq ft children's adventure park, a 41,300 sq ft health and wellness hub, and hotel apartments scheduled for completion by mid-2028. The redevelopment aims to revitalise the mall, built in the 1990s, and attract a broader visitor base.

Linked directly to the Sultan Iskandar checkpoint, the mall is often the first and last stop for cross-border travellers. Facing competition from newer malls, management seeks to leverage its prime location and new hospitality offerings. Analysts say the hotel apartments and wellness hub will appeal to Singaporean and regional visitors seeking convenience and value.

Owned by Allgreen Properties of the Kuok Group, the expanded mall will span 568,927 sq ft and benefit from the RTS Link's completion in 2026.



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RM130 Million “Ship Hotel” to Anchor Sabah’s Tourism Expansion

A RM130 million agreement between D’Heritage Sdn Bhd and Nomad Hospitality Group Sdn Bhd will bring Sabah’s first “Ship Hotel” to the Kota Kinabalu waterfront, marking growing investor confidence in the state’s tourism and convention sectors. The project, located beside the Sabah International Convention Centre (SICC), will feature 216 rooms with international-standard facilities. The development will transform the waterfront into a world-class marina and lifestyle destination, symbolising Sabah’s tourism excellence.

She added that the project, the first of its kind in East Asia, reflects strong private-sector confidence in Sabah’s expanding tourism and MICE industries. With its prime location and unique design, the Ship Hotel is expected to strengthen Kota Kinabalu’s position as a key regional destination for leisure and business travel.

The signing ceremony took place during the opening of BigSabah Sale 2025, officiated by Finance Minister Datuk Seri Panglima Masidi Manjun, who represented Chief Minister Datuk Seri Panglima Hajiji Noor.



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Average Chinese Tourist Spending RM7,000 Boosts Malaysia's Tourism Outlook

Malaysia's tourism sector is showing strong growth ahead of Visit Malaysia 2026, supported by rising Chinese arrivals and high spending levels. Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming said Chinese tourists spend an average of RM7,000 each during their stay, according to data from the Chinese Embassy in Malaysia. The country targets 47 million international visitors and RM160 billion in revenue for the upcoming tourism campaign.

Nga noted that even a portion of this spending could bring substantial benefits to hotels, restaurants, retailers, handicraft traders and media industries. He also emphasised that Malaysians play a key role in sustaining tourism growth by keeping the country clean and continuing to display warmth and hospitality toward visitors.

From January to April this year, Malaysia recorded 1.4 million tourist arrivals from China, making them the third-largest group after Singapore and Indonesia. In 2024, Chinese arrivals rose sharply to about four million — a 160 per cent jump from 2023 — supported by the extended 30-day visa-free policy until 2026.



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Malaysia Records 28.2 Million Arrivals, RM186.4 Billion Revenue January–August

Malaysia recorded 28.2 million foreign visitor arrivals between January and August this year, generating RM186.4 billion in tourism revenue, said Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing. This represents a 14.5% increase in arrivals and an 84.9% jump in revenue compared with the same period last year, reflecting a strong recovery in the tourism sector.

To sustain this growth, the ministry is implementing initiatives to improve service quality and readiness. These include refresher programmes for homestay operators, safety and language training, and craft-making workshops. The measures aim to enhance visitor experiences, strengthen Malaysia's competitiveness, and ensure consistent world-class hospitality standards.

Tiong added that tour guides will be required to master at least three languages to better serve international tourists. Combined with these efforts, the initiatives are designed to maximise economic benefits from tourism, support long-term sector growth, and reinforce Malaysia's position as a leading destination in Southeast Asia.



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ETS3 Expansion to Johor Bahru Set to Boost Tourism and Connectivity

The Electric Train Service 3 (ETS3) expansion to Johor Bahru, now in its final phase, is expected to begin operations by mid-December, said Transport Minister Anthony Loke. The new route will enhance public transport accessibility and stimulate Johor's tourism sector ahead of Visit Malaysia 2026 and Visit Johor 2026. Final preparations are underway, including technical checks before ticket prices are announced.

The extension marks a significant milestone, as the ETS route—previously ending in Gemas, Negeri Sembilan—will now stretch to Johor Bahru, covering key towns such as Segamat, Labis, Kluang and Kulai before reaching Johor Bahru Sentral Station. This expansion completes the west coast railway line of Peninsular Malaysia, creating a continuous link from the north to the southern border.

Anthony Loke said the new service will not only improve mobility for local residents but also attract more visitors to Johor's secondary towns, supporting tourism growth and regional development through better connectivity and accessibility.



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Kedah Strengthens Tourism Drive Ahead of Visit Malaysia 2026

Kedah is stepping up its tourism preparations ahead of Visit Malaysia 2026, supported by the government's RM700 million allocation and renewed national focus on the sector. The campaign aims to attract 47 million international visitors and generate RM329 billion in receipts, with Kedah playing a pivotal role through its strategic planning and strong tourism base.

Kedah Tourism general manager Mohd Zaidi Omar said the early announcement of VM2026 gave states time to align their efforts, with Visit Kedah 2025 serving as a key springboard. The state is not only promoting Langkawi but also expanding attention to mainland destinations to diversify its appeal. He added that the RM1,000 special tax relief for entry to local attractions and cultural events is helping stimulate domestic spending and support operators.

Industry leaders echoed this optimism, noting improved occupancy rates, stronger forward bookings, and rising inbound demand. With continued collaboration and targeted incentives, Kedah is poised to strengthen its position as one of Malaysia's top tourism drivers for 2026.



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Kuala Lumpur Targets 30 Million Tourists Ahead of Visit Malaysia 2026

Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) targets 30 million tourists during Visit Malaysia 2026, said Mayor Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif. To reach this goal, DBKL has planned 35 events highlighting Malaysia's arts, culture and heritage. She said attracting more than half of the national target of 46 million tourists would be a major success. The early launch of the 2026 event calendar reflects DBKL's commitment with the Tourism Ministry, private sector and community under the 4P concept — public, private and people partnership.

Key highlights include the Kuala Lumpur Orchestra Festival from May 30 to June 6, the preservation launch of Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad in January, and the I Lite U @ Bukit Bintang initiative to light up the city. Maimunah said these initiatives will strengthen Kuala Lumpur's position as a leading tourism hub in the region.

DBKL also introduced the "Ronda-Ronda Kuala Lumpur" Hop-On Hop-Off bus, equipped with AI-based multi-language narration and 5G connectivity. Operated by Elang Wah Sdn Bhd, the fleet will expand to 24 buses by 2026.



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Batik Air Launches Kota Kinabalu-Kuching Route to Boost Connectivity

The Ministry of Transport Sarawak (MOTS) welcomed Batik Air's new route connecting Kota Kinabalu and Kuching, set to begin operations on December 15. The daily Kota Kinabalu-Kuching-Kota Kinabalu service is expected to enhance convenience and strengthen air connectivity between the capitals of Sabah and Sarawak, facilitating smoother travel for both business and tourism purposes.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Lee Kim Shin praised Batik Air's CEO, Datuk Chandran Rama Muthy, and the team for their commitment to improving flight access within Borneo and to Peninsular Malaysia. He highlighted that the new route complements Sarawak's Post COVID-19 Development Strategy (PCDS) 2030, supporting economic growth, tourism expansion, and regional integration.

MOTS continues to work closely with airlines, airport operators, and tourism agencies to introduce more direct routes and increase flight frequencies to Sarawak. These collaborative efforts aim to ensure the state remains well-connected both regionally and internationally,



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TransNusa Launches Jakarta–Penang Flights Expected to Strengthen Healthcare Travel

Penang's healthcare travel sector is set for a lift with Indonesian carrier TransNusa launching its first direct flight between Jakarta and Penang on November 24. The service marks TransNusa's debut in Penang and will operate three times weekly on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, before expanding to daily flights in December. Flight 8B633 will depart Jakarta at 5.30am and arrive in Penang at 9am, while the return flight 8B632 leaves Penang at 9.30am and lands in Jakarta at 10.55am.

Penang tourism and creative economy committee chairman Wong Hon Wai said the new connection comes at a timely moment as Malaysia prepares for Visit Malaysia 2026 and Malaysia Year of Medical Tourism 2026. He noted that the route will enhance air connectivity, strengthen cultural and business ties, and support the state's medical tourism industry.

Indonesia remains Malaysia's largest healthcare travel market, contributing 65.8% of national receipts. Penang alone accounts for 45% of Malaysia's healthcare travel revenue, with 90% of visitors coming from Indonesia, underscoring the route's strategic importance.



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Capital A Plans Bahrain-Based Airline to Strengthen Middle East Expansion

Capital A Bhd plans to establish a Bahrain-based airline operating narrowbody aircraft to destinations across the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa and Europe. The plan follows a Letter of Intent (LOI) signed with Bahrain's Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunications to develop Bahrain as AirAsia's Middle East hub and strengthen regional connectivity.

The LOI includes cooperation in airline operations, logistics, aircraft maintenance and talent development. Over the next five years, AirAsia will explore flights from Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia to Bahrain, with onward connections to Europe and the US. By 2030, the group targets 25 daily flights through Bahrain, carrying 20 million passengers and contributing BHD3 billion (US\$8 billion) to Bahrain's economy, creating over 100,000 jobs.

Capital A's other units will also expand. Asia Digital Engineering will build a maintenance facility in Bahrain, while Teleport will use it as a logistics hub for the Middle East, Europe and Africa. CEO Tan Sri Tony Fernandes said the partnership will form a new bridge to Middle East.



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