

18 MAR 2000

Flights

MORE FLIGHTS TO KL FROM HOLLAND

By: Wan A.Hulaimi

AMSTERDAM, March 18 (Bernama) -- Malaysia Airlines (MAS) and its code-sharing partner KLM, the Royal Dutch carrier, hope to increase flights to Malaysia from the present 10 flights a week to 21 within the next three years, said Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir.

"There are also plans to increase these flights to include new destinations such as Sabah and Sarawak and also directly to Kuala Lumpur," he told Bernama after attending the second Malaysian tourism seminar, here, Friday.

It is being attended by some 150 local tour operators and Malaysian promoters.

The minister said the additional flights were to cater to the increasing number of tourists wanting to visit Malaysia.

"Tour operators here are now actually reducing the number of packages to Malaysia because the airlines do not have enough capacity," Kadir said.

Kadir, who arrived here Thursday, will travel from here to London, Manchester, Glasgow and Paris to promote Malaysia as a travel destination.

Kadir said apart from the MAS and KLM flights, there were also at present two weekly charter flights from here to Penang and Langkawi by the charter operator Martin Air working with six leading Dutch tour operators selling Malaysia.

"Malaysia's efforts to increase the number of tourists means that we must look at every effort to increase the incoming flight capacity from here including the possibility of asking MAS to give them special fares, and getting other domestic charter operators to work with Martin Air to provide further destinations in Malaysia," he said.

According to statistics given by the minister, the number of tourists to Malaysia from here increased from 21,564 in 1998 to 25,000 last year, a 15.9 per cent gain.

The surprising aspect of this increase was that whilst the two biggest contributors from Western Europe had been Britain and Germany, the interest shown by the Netherlands market had been self-generating, "a case of them discovering us," as the minister put it.

He said the tourists-to-Malaysia traffic from the Netherlands consists not only of Dutch holidaymakers, but also from France and Eastern European states from where weekly flights to Malaysia were fewer.

Kadir also said France was still considering requests from MAS for extra landing rights, a point brought up by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during his recent meeting with President Chirac, while Lufthansa has stopped its flight to Kuala Lumpur altogether.

In his speech, Kadir emphasised the aspect of Malaysian society as encapsulated by the latest Malaysian tourism slogan "Malaysia, truly Asia".

"It is a value for money destination and an Asian melting pot. The people there are friendly, it's a safe place to be in, and the best ethnic cuisines of Asia are found there. It is little wonder that the UK Sunday Times reader voted Malaysia as the number one destination for its variety of food," he said.

Also speaking at the seminar, MAS vice president for passenger sales Datuk Rashid Khan said that MAS was working towards "a capacity injection" in Amsterdam in the short term by switching from 777s to 747s, to push the number of seats by 700 more every week.

Besides an increase in the number of flights in the long term, there was also a possibility of MAS and KLM entering a code-sharing arrangement even in the domestic sector, he said.

A representative from Amsterdam's Schipol airport, Wilco Sweijen, told participants that the 29.3 per cent average growth of traffic from Amsterdam to Malaysia was the highest for outflow to East Asia, and that Kuala Lumpur was the seventh destination from here to East Asia.

Of the long-haul destinations from Schipol, Malaysia was placed 10th, a four point jump from its number 14 place in 1995.

He said that there were more men going out to Malaysia than women, at 61 per cent and 39 per cent respectively, and from the total, more than half (64 per cent) were holidaymakers.

He said the number of passengers flying out to Malaysia soared last year, with more than 80 per cent load factor in six of the 12 months.

"KLIA has a very promising future. It is developing as a gateway and a hub to South East Asia. It has a very good potential for beyond traffic especially to Australia and Indonesia," he added.

-- BERNAMA

WAH RM