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KLIA a landmark of excellence in the air travel world

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THE KL International Airport (KLIA) at Sepang is not only a showcase of outstanding architecture. The RM10 billion airport is a testimony of Malaysia's infrastructure excellence.

KLIA won its first accolade after only six months in operation when the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Global Airport Monitor listed it top ten in its class for overall business passenger satisfaction.

And more recently, in a survey by Skytrax Research - a British air travel industry research company - KLIA ranked second among top airports in the world, after Hong Kong's Chek Lap Kok Airport and ahead of Singapore's Changi International Airport. The survey was based on a poll of 40,000 travellers which ranked airports for ease of use, passenger comfort and facilities, sign-posting, accessibility and ease of transfer.

KLIA was also just voted the third best airport in Asia at the 15th Asian Freight Industry Awards organised by Hong Kong-based Cargonews Asia. After the Singapore and Hong Kong airports, KLIA was ahead of Tokyo's Narita Airport (in fourth place), Taipeh's Chiang Kai Shek Airport and Japan's Kansai International Airport (tied at fifth).

KLIA was also voted among Asia's top five in the Best Air Cargo Terminal Operator Category.

Malaysia Airports (Sepang) Sdn Bhd general manager Abdul Hamid Mohd Ali said the buoyant economy of the early and mid-1990s compelled the need for a new international airport in the country.

"Despite the extensions, Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport at Subang was bursting at its seams and could no longer be expanded. Plans for KLIA were drawn up with a view to develop it into an aviation hub in the Asia-Pacific region," he said.

Malaysia Airports (Sepang) oversees KLIA. The company is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd.

KLIA has a current capacity of 25 million passengers per year and 40 flights per hour. Planned expansion of the airport will enable it to handle up to 45 million passengers per year and 80 flights per hour by 2020.

"KLIA is built with features that allow flexibility for future expansion well into the next century. Its development will be implemented in three phases," Abdul Hamid said.

He added that once all three phases are developed, the airport's surroundings will include hiking trails for jet-lagged travellers, golf courses, a theme park, a shopping centre, hotels and a track to host the Formula 1 Grand Prix racing championship.

KLIA currently has more than 80 direct links to major international destinations through 41 international carriers that operate here. It is the first totally integrated airport in the world using the computerised Total Airport Management System (TAMS).

Within the airport, there are almost 80 retail outlets offering products ranging from international branded items to local souvenirs. KLIA's exclusive outlets offer, among others, tobacco and cigars, mouth-watering chocolates and a designer row showcasing the latest haute couture from fashion capitals around the world.

To tempt the taste buds, an array of local and international cuisines ranging from fast food to fine exotic signature dishes are served at the

food and beverage outlets. The IATA Global Airport Monitor ranked the airport among the top six in the world and second in Asia in the shopping category.

KLIA is well connected to the city via a network of expressways. A dedicated express rail link will be ready in April 2002, linking the airport directly to the city centre.

KLIA's free commercial zone is located within the surroundings of the airport. It handles more than 500,000 tonnes of cargo with capacity and capability to handle more throughputs in the future.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad recently presented the country's Best Landscape Award to five recipients, including KLIA, in conjunction with the National Landscape Day at Putrajaya.

Indeed, its concept of an "Airport-in-the-Forest" and a "Forest-in-the-Airport" that is the driving force behind KLIA's motif and its environment has gained recognition and awards.

To date, KLIA has received ISO 9002 certification for its security, fire and rescue services, and electrical power system. Other immediate targets for ISO 9002 certification are for TAMS.COM Sdn Bhd, airside operations, terminal operations and engineering.

On May 1 this year, Malaysia Airports launched an incentive programme which provides full waiver of all parking and landing charges of qualified foreign airlines, specifically new scheduled passenger or new scheduled charter flights, that operates services to KLIA for the first time.

On the international front, a marketing and promotional blitz is in progress and more airlines are expected to commence flights to KLIA.

"Response to the new incentive programme has been encouraging, as it has attracted a West Asian airline," Abdul Hamid said. Qatar Airways will launch its inaugural flight to the KLIA in December this year on an Airbus 320-200.

Another carrier, All Nippon Airways, which ceased its passenger flights to KLIA on March 24 this year, will resume services to the airport on July 23.

"With renewed efforts and the new incentive programme thrown in to attract more carriers, there should not be any reason why KLIA cannot double its present figures in the next few years," Abdul Hamid said.

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