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All smiles: Najib sharing a light moment with (from left) Liow, Mukhriz and Fernandes during the welcoming ceremony of AirAsia's inaugural flight from Guangzhou to Langkawi at the Langkawi International Airport.



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New flights set to make Langkawi soar

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LANGKAWI: AirAsia launched its maiden flight from Guangzhou to Langkawi by flying in an entourage from the China province.

They landed on the historical island to be greeted by VIPs, including Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai and Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir.

Najib pointed out that China was a major source of tourists for Malaysia, and it was important to capture this market segment.

"There are 400 million Chinese having the capacity to travel. If you can capture 10%, imagine the huge impact it would have on this nation," he said.

Najib thanked AirAsia Group CEO Tan Sri Tony Fernandes for opening the flight route.

"Your leadership in AirAsia is

well documented, far more than running QPR, definitely," he quipped, referring to the English football club which Fernandes heads.

Liow pointed out that AirAsia managed to increase its passengers to Langkawi by 70% between 2010 and 2015.

"Just last year, the number rose 15%. It is very encouraging.

"Langkawi is a favourite destination for tourists. We hope the connectivity via more of such direct flights will be able to increase tourism here," he said.

Liow also said flight routes, especially international ones, should be strengthened to boost the aviation sector.

"Malaysia's flight routes have steadily risen over the years and I am pleased to note that passenger movements within Malaysia through our airports have grown," he said in a statement.

He pointed out that passenger

movements for Langkawi had jumped from 1.4 million in 2011 to 2.3 million last year, proving that domestic travel was thriving.

Liow praised AirAsia's efforts, saying that the Guangzhou-Langkawi trip will strengthen Malaysia's friendship with China.

Fernandes said the event marked a significant milestone in Malaysia by establishing Langkawi as another international hub in Malaysia.

"For years, we've looked at Phuket. Today, thanks to our Prime Minister, our long quest has ended to realise the full potential this wonderful island can offer," he said.

Fernandes pointed out that the airline carried 1.6 million passengers into Langkawi in 2015 and this target would increase to five million in the next five years.

Flown at 92% capacity, the flight from Guangzhou yesterday carried representatives from the Guangdong Tourism Authority and pressmen from the state.

To mark the occasion, AirAsia offered all-in fares from as low as RM199 for a one-way trip between Jan 25 and Feb 7.

Travellers can choose a travel date between Jan 25 and May 2 and tickets can be bought via www.airasia.com.

AirAsia currently operates direct flights from Langkawi to Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Singapore, apart from Guangzhou.

Watch the video
thestartv.com

