

# MAHB HELPS DRIVE INBOUND TOURISM

**F**or the first five months of 2019, Malaysia welcomed a total of 10.59 million tourists, 4.8% more compared with the same period last year. While the growth was healthy, there is still room for improvement as the country aims to attract 30 million tourists under the upcoming Visit Malaysia 2020 campaign.

In playing a vital role in supporting this goal, Malaysia Airports Holdings Bhd (MAHB) has joined hands with the Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board (Tourism Malaysia) to launch a new matching fund aimed at attracting more tourists to Malaysia. Called the Joint International Tourism Development Programme (JITDP), it is designed to support airlines and travel trade professionals including travel agents, tour operators and charterers with funding when they roll out promotional activities about Malaysia in their markets overseas.

The collaboration is another example of smart partnerships that MAHB forges with its industry partners to maintain its competitive edge, says MAHB general manager of airline marketing Mohamed Sallauddin Mohamed Shah.

"For an airport to flourish, it needs to have good international connectivity and a high volume of passenger traffic. We realised that what better way to do that than a collaboration among Tourism Malaysia, the airlines and the airports," he tells The Edge.

The programme is a dollar-to-dollar investment where the combined contribution of MAHB and Tourism Malaysia will be met with that from airlines and their travel trade partners.

Even though the JITDP is a joint initiative, Mohamed Sallauddin says its implementation or execution will be dependent on Tourism Malay-



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sia as the latter has the reach through its vast network of overseas offices to help airlines and travel trade professionals in the promotional activities in their respective markets.

"While we provide half of the funding for JITDP, we use the machinery of Tourism Malaysia overseas. This means that Tourism Malaysia's overseas directors or marketing managers will be developing the campaigns or tactical plans for the overseas markets together with the airlines and tour operators to bring in more tourists into Malaysia," says Mohamed Sallauddin.

He adds that the programme has set three objectives known as 3Rs: recover, retain or rev up the market.



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"The first entails (supporting) markets that face stiff competition or those that were impacted by some major incidents, which had affected inbound traffic to Malaysia," he says, citing MAHB's total contribution of RM10 million for two years from 2016 to airlines and tour operators through Sabah Tourism Board.

"The second (objective of the JITDP) is to retain the market. Malaysia's tourism sector faces plenty of competition from other countries such as Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand. If we don't do it (tourism promotions) and if Malaysia is not visible, we might totally lose the market.

"The third refers to tourist markets where Malaysia is already strong. We may have already a strong tourism demand from these markets

and so, the next level is to rev it up," explains Mohamed Sallauddin.

The ultimate aim of JITDP is to increase the number of inbound international tourists into Malaysia. According to Mohamed Sallauddin, the take-up was low last year as not many airlines and travel trade professionals were aware of it.

"Out of the total fund allocated for 2018, only RM6.9 million was disbursed, with the early beneficiaries being Malaysia Airlines Bhd, AirAsia Group Bhd and Malindo Airways Sdn Bhd. There were also two charter operators, namely Jumbo Tour (Japan) and Kompas Tour (Kazakhstan)," he says.

The majority of the fund was utilised for promotional activities in China amounting to RM1.2 million, followed by India (RM980,000) and Taiwan (RM986,000).

The allocation for JITDP is RM20 million this year. Mohamed Sallauddin says up to the first half of this year, RM6.8 million had been utilised by eight airlines, namely Malaysia Airlines, MalindoAir, AirAsia, Royal Brunei Airlines, China Airlines, Condor Airlines, Air Busan and Air Arabia. "The funds were for use of promotional activities in six regions including the Middle East, Asean, Europe and Northeast Asia," he adds.

Plans to further increase the allocation for JITDP next year is being discussed in view of Visit Malaysia Year 2020 but Mohamed Sallauddin declines to reveal the figure as it has not been approved.

He notes that the programme is still in its infancy, but MAHB and Tourism Malaysia are encouraged by the growing response from airlines and travel trade professionals.