

AirAsia X to spread wings in Central Asia after foray to Almaty

By **BILQIS BAHARI** - March 15, 2024 @ 8:08pm



From left: Ambassador of Malaysia to Kazakhstan Mohd Adli Abdullah, AirAsia X Bhd CEO Benyamin Ismail, chairman of Kazakh Tourism Kairat Sadvakassov and executive chairman of Capital A Bhd Datuk Kamarudin Meranun

ALMATY, Kazakhstan: AirAsia X Bhd is planning to spread its wings in Central Asia following its inaugural flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan on March 14 as the airline aims to connect more destinations from Southeast Asia to the region.

Capital A Bhd executive chairman Datuk Kamarudin Meranun said Central Asia is the last jigsaw puzzle for AirAsia X to create a seamless connectivity throughout Asia.

Other destinations in the region that the airline is interested to fly to includes Samarkand in Uzbekistan, Baku in Azerbaijan and Turkey.

"We've already gotten the approval to fly to Turkey. That's just a matter of time. What we have done in Southeast Asia, we would like to replicate that in Central Asia. We can connect Kazakhstan to other Central Asian countries and to Southeast Asia and Greater Asia," he said.

Kamarudin was speaking at the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signing ceremony between AirAsia X and Kazakh Tourism National Company JSC here today.

Kazakh Tourism chairman Kairat Sadvakassov said Kazakhstan is expecting higher outbound tourism numbers to Kuala Lumpur this year with the direct flight operated by AirAsia X.

"The number of outbound to Malaysia is very significant. We expect it to double this year," he said, adding that Kazakhstan also expects a number of new international airlines to fly to the country.

These airlines include those from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and India, in time with the construction of Almaty International Airport's new passenger terminal building that will increase the passenger handling capacity up to 40 million a year.

Kazakh Tourism and AirAsia X had partnered to promote tourism between Malaysia and Kazakhstan and strengthen the business relationship between the two countries.

AirAsia X chief executive officer Benyamin Ismail said the strategic collaboration would see the two companies create joint sales and marketing campaigns as well as boosting the countries' economies through tourism.

"The high load factor on both legs of our inaugural flight indicates strong demand for the route and reflects positively on our capability to penetrate new markets."

"This bodes well for future growth and expansion opportunities in the region, boosting not only our opportunities in various sectors between Malaysia and Kazakhstan but also the Southeast Asia region," he said.

The MoU was signed between Benyamin and Sadvakassov and witnessed by the ambassador of Malaysia to Kazakhstan Mohd Adli Abdullah and Kamarudin.

Also present were the representatives from Almaty Airport, Civil Aviation Authority of Kazakhstan and other key industry players.

AirAsia X made its foray into Central Asia with its inaugural flight from Kuala Lumpur to Almaty on March 14.

The airline is flying four times weekly between the capital city of Malaysia and former capital of Kazakhstan on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Sadvakassov said the agency is looking forward to cooperate with AirAsia X and contribute to trade, commercial, culture and educational exchanges between Kazakhstan and Malaysia.

"Additionally, we believe that cooperation between our countries will create new job opportunities and play a significant role in the economic growth of our nations," he said.

