

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **NEW SHANGHAI–KOTA KINABALU DIRECT FLIGHT BOOSTS CHINA-SABAH CONNECTIVITY FOR VISIT MALAYSIA 2026 (VM2026)**

**KOTA KINABALU, SABAH** — Tourism Malaysia welcomed the resumption of Spring Airlines' (9C) direct daily service from Shanghai, China, to Kota Kinabalu on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2026, a move that significantly strengthens air connectivity between Malaysia and one of China's key economic hubs.

The inaugural flight, 9C8593, arrived at Kota Kinabalu International Airport at 1.30 a.m. and was welcomed by Ms Haryanty Abu Bakar, representing Tourism Malaysia, alongside representatives from Spring Airlines, the Sabah Tourism Board, and Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad.

The launch of this daily direct service marks an important milestone in enhancing international access to Sabah and is expected to further stimulate visitor arrivals from China to the *Land Below the Wind*.

"This new air link serves as a direct bridge for discovery between Malaysia and one of China's most vital economic zones. This expansion aligns strongly with Malaysia's strategic efforts to attract more Chinese visitors, particularly following the implementation of visa-free entry for Chinese citizens," said Mr Mohd Amirul Rizal Abdul Rahim, Director General of Tourism Malaysia.

Kota Kinabalu continues to strengthen its position as a premier tropical destination for the Chinese market. Supported by direct flights from major cities such as Shanghai, the city offers an accessible and time-efficient option for short holidays and family travel. As the gateway to Mount Kinabalu and several UNESCO-recognised sites, Sabah presents immersive nature-based experiences ranging from lush rainforests to vibrant coral reefs, appealing strongly to China's growing eco-tourism and adventure travel segments. The nearby Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park further enhances this appeal, offering snorkelling and diving experiences that are particularly popular among younger, social-media-savvy travellers.

This accessibility is reinforced by Sabah's expanding network of direct international air services, which play a crucial role not only in facilitating leisure travel but also in strengthening tourism promotion and people-to-people exchanges between Sabah and China. At present, Sabah enjoys direct scheduled flights from a wide range of Chinese cities, including Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Hangzhou, Wuhan, Beijing, Kunming, Ningbo, Fuzhou and Shantou. Operated by leading carriers such as AirAsia and

Xiamen Airlines, these routes offer frequencies ranging from several weekly services to daily operations, ensuring seamless connectivity for travellers.

China remains one of Malaysia's key source markets, with visitor arrivals reaching 4.7 million in 2025, representing a 25.1 per cent year-on-year increase. Recognising that enhanced air connectivity is a primary driver of this growth, Tourism Malaysia continues to work closely with airlines and trade partners in China to promote curated itineraries showcasing Malaysia's diverse attractions, rich culinary heritage and renowned hospitality.

Aligned with the objectives of Visit Malaysia 2026 (VM2026), the resumption of this route represents a strategic step in boosting inbound arrivals and reinforcing Malaysia's position as a preferred destination for Chinese travellers. Through continued cooperation with industry partners such as Spring Airlines, Malaysia is well positioned to increase international visitor numbers and achieve the ambitious targets set under VM2026.

Tourism Malaysia remains committed to collaborating with international carriers to expand flight networks and ensure Malaysia remains as a top-of-mind destination for global travellers. The organisation extends its full support to Spring Airlines for this service and looks forward to working together on promotional initiatives highlighting Malaysia's unique attractions and gastronomy to the Shanghai market.

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### **About Tourism Malaysia**

Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board, also known as Tourism Malaysia, is an agency under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC). It focuses on promoting Malaysia as a preferred tourism destination and has, since its establishment, played a significant role in strengthening the country's presence and competitiveness in the global tourism landscape.

**Visit Malaysia 2026 (VM2026)** underscores Malaysia's commitment to sustainable tourism development, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). The campaign aims to showcase the nation's diverse natural attractions, rich cultural heritage, and vibrant tourism offerings, while driving inclusive growth and long-term value for local communities and industry stakeholders.

For more information, visit Tourism Malaysia's website [www.tourism.gov.my](http://www.tourism.gov.my) and social media accounts on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#), [YouTube](#), and [TikTok](#).

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