

PRESS RELEASE

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NEW NANJING–TAWAU CHARTER FLIGHT STRENGTHENS CHINA–SABAH CONNECTIVITY

TAWAU, SABAH — Tourism Malaysia welcomed the launch of Firefly Airlines' inaugural charter flight from Nanjing, China to Tawau, Sabah on 3rd February 2026, marking a significant milestone in strengthening air connectivity between China and Malaysia while supporting the promotion of Visit Malaysia 2026 (VM2026).

The charter service operates twice weekly with a seat capacity of 176 passengers per flight and will run until the end of February 2026. This initiative is expected to meet growing travel demand from the Chinese market while enhancing direct access to Tawau as a key gateway to Sabah's east coast.

The inaugural flight was received by representatives from Tourism Malaysia, Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad (MAHB) and Shanghai Eagle Aviation Service Co. Ltd., the appointed charter operator for the route.

China remains as one of Malaysia's most important source markets. In 2025, Malaysia recorded 4.6 million visitor arrivals from China, reflecting strong outbound travel demand. During the same period, total international visitor arrivals reached 42.2 million, underscoring the sustained recovery and positive growth trajectory of the nation's tourism sector.

Commenting on the launch, Director General of Tourism Malaysia, Mr. Mohd Amirul Rizal Abdul Rahim, said, "The introduction of the Nanjing–Tawau charter service highlights the strategic importance of expanding international air connectivity to key destinations across Malaysia. Improved direct access from major Chinese cities such as Nanjing enhances travel convenience while strengthening Malaysia's positioning as a diverse and compelling destination in conjunction with Visit Malaysia 2026. Initiatives like this play a vital role in sustaining tourism growth, increasing visitor arrivals and contributing to local economic development."

Tawau serves as an important gateway to Sabah's east coast, offering access to world-renowned marine tourism destinations, eco-adventure experiences and a rich cultural heritage. Enhanced connectivity is anticipated to generate positive impacts on visitor arrivals, tourism receipts, and the achievement of Malaysia's broader tourism objectives.



The launch reflects strong collaboration between Tourism Malaysia and airline industry partners with the support of Firefly Airlines, Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad (MAHB), and Shanghai Eagle Aviation Service Co. Ltd., further strengthening joint promotional efforts to showcase Malaysia's diverse tourism offerings to travellers from Nanjing and the wider China market in support of VM2026.

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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 and social media accounts on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#), [YouTube](#), and [TikTok](#).

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