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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TM. 151/2026

16 JUNE 2026

VM2026 STRENGTHENS REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY: AS INAUGURAL AIRASIA SERVICE CONNECTS JAKARTA DIRECTLY TO KELANTAN

KOTA BHARU – Tourism Malaysia, in collaboration with AirAsia, Tourism Kelantan, the State Government of Kelantan, and Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad (MAHB), today welcomed the inaugural direct flight connecting Jakarta, Indonesia (CGK) and Kota Bharu, Kelantan (KBR), marking a significant milestone in enhancing regional connectivity and supporting the Visit Malaysia 2026 (VM2026) campaign.

The inaugural AirAsia service, flight AK2354, arrived at Sultan Ismail Petra Airport (LTSIP), Kota Bharu, at 15:50 local time. Operated using an Airbus A320 aircraft with a capacity of 180 seats, the new route provides greater accessibility between Indonesia and Malaysia's East Coast, while opening new opportunities for tourism, trade and economic cooperation.

The welcoming ceremony was attended by YB Datuk Kamarudin Md Nor, Chairman of the Kelantan Tourism, Culture, Arts and Heritage Committee; YBrs. Mrs. Baizuri Baharum, Director of International Promotional Division Southeast Asia Tourism Malaysia; Dato' Mohd Izani Ghani, Managing Director of Malaysia Airports Holdings Berhad (MAHB); and Mr. Zamani Rafique, Director of Global & Government Affairs, AirAsia.

Upon arrival, passengers were accorded a warm welcome featuring traditional cultural performances that reflected Malaysia's rich cultural heritage and renowned hospitality. The inaugural flight recorded 117 passengers, representing a load factor of approximately 63 per cent on the 180-seat, reflecting encouraging demand and strong growth potential for the route. The passenger mix comprised predominantly Indonesian and Singaporean visitors, alongside returning Malaysian travellers.

Mr. Mohd Amirul Rizal Abdul Rahim, Director General of Tourism Malaysia, said: "The launch of this direct service between Jakarta and Kota Bharu marks another important milestone in strengthening Malaysia's regional connectivity under Visit Malaysia 2026. Indonesia remains one of our key source markets, and this new route provides greater

accessibility for travellers seeking authentic cultural, heritage and nature-based experiences.

Beyond leisure travel, the service is also expected to support the growth of medical tourism and facilitate greater people-to-people exchanges between our two countries. We are confident that the service will contribute positively to visitor arrivals while generating wider economic benefits for local communities and tourism stakeholders in Kelantan and across the East Coast region."

In addition, Kelantan Tourism Director, Encik Azwan bin Ab Rahman, stated that the opening of the direct Jakarta–Kota Bharu route is expected to catalyze an increase in tourist arrivals from Indonesia to Kelantan, thereby strengthening the state's position as a premier cultural and heritage tourism destination in Malaysia.

"Through this direct flight, tourists from Jakarta can not only enjoy the various unique tourism products Kelantan has to offer—such as Pasar Siti Khadijah, Masjid Kampung Laut, Kampung Kraftangan, and Stong Geopark—but Kota Bharu also has the potential to become a strategic gateway or transit hub to other famous tourism destinations in the region. Kelantan's geographical proximity to the border makes it an easy gateway for travelers to continue their journey to major cities in southern Thailand, such as Hat Yai, Narathiwat, and Pattani. At the same time, tourists can use Kelantan as a transit point to popular East Coast islands like Pulau Perhentian, Pulau Redang, and Pulau Kapas, which are major attractions for international tourists."

Dato' Captain Fareh Mazputra, General Manager of AirAsia Malaysia said: "We are proud to launch this new direct service between Jakarta and Kota Bharu, further strengthening regional connectivity and supporting Malaysia's tourism growth ambitions ahead of Visit Malaysia 2026. This route provides greater access for travellers from one of our key markets while showcasing Kelantan's rich culture, heritage and unique attractions to a wider international audience.

As the leading Asean airline, AirAsia remains committed to connecting underserved destinations with key regional hubs, creating more opportunities for tourism, trade and economic growth. We look forward to welcoming more visitors to Kelantan and contributing to the state's development through increased connectivity and visitor arrivals."

The Managing Director of Malaysia Airports, Dato' Mohd Izani Ghani said, "The launch of the direct Jakarta-Kota Bharu service demonstrates how strategic airport infrastructure investment can create new opportunities for connectivity and growth. Following the completion of the terminal expansion of Sultan Ismail Petra Airport to cater to 4 million passengers per annum (mppa) compared to 1.5mppa previously, KBR is now better positioned to support international services and future traffic growth. This new route is an important step in strengthening Kelantan's connectivity with the



region while expanding access to the state's tourism, trade and investment opportunities."

Indonesia remains one of Malaysia's key source markets, underpinned by strong air connectivity between the two countries. As of April 2026, Malaysia and Indonesia are connected by 634 weekly flights, offering more than 114,806 seats per week and facilitating greater travel flows between both destinations.

The introduction of this direct service is expected to further strengthen tourism flows between Indonesia and Malaysia while supporting cultural exchange, business travel and the growing medical tourism segment. The route also enhances connectivity to Kelantan, which serves as a key gateway to Malaysia's East Coast and a strategic transit point for travellers from Southern Thailand through major border crossings such as Rantau Panjang and Pengkalan Kubor.

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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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