

# China tourists to surge with Shenzhen Airlines

KOTA KINABALU: The new Shenzhen-Kota Kinabalu route by Shenzhen Airlines is expected to bring in more China tourists to Sabah and contribute to achieving the State's target of 1.2 million international tourists this year.

Sabah Tourism Malaysia Director Mohd Roslan Abdullah said Sabah had recorded an annual growth in tourist arrivals from China, from 61,567 tourists in 2006 to 77,475 tourist arrivals in 2007 and 87,175 in 2008.

"This shows there is a healthy growth in terms of tourist arrivals from that country. With the recent addition of China's carrier Shenzhen Airlines making its way to Sabah, we hope for more tourists from China," he said at a welcoming dinner after Shenzhen Airlines' inaugural flight to Sabah.

The airline launched the new route Friday night, with the inaugural flight leaving Shenzhen at 11.50pm with 163 passengers, including invited guests and members of the media, arriving at 2.30am Saturday. A batch of Sabah media members flew out to Shenzhen at 4.30am as part of its familiarisation programme.

Shenzhen Airlines sales department General Manager Liu Zhen said it will fly to Kota Kinabalu twice a week on Tuesdays and Fridays with a capacity of 164 seats and although it is currently operating chartered flights the airline hoped to operate scheduled flights soon.

"Despite the current economic climate and global health scare, Shenzhen Airlines chose to continue its plan to fly to KK, as we have been working on it for a year in our efforts to enter the market.

"Our aim is to make Shenzhen as a hub; passengers from Malaysia especially from Sabah will fly to other cities in China via Shenzhen, and vice versa those from China will go to Sabah through Shenzhen," he said, adding that Shenzhen also connected to a network of 24 other cities in China.

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## Sabah second destination

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He added that only this year they introduced flights to Bangkok in April and will start flying to Phnom Penh in September, so Sabah was the second international destination launched so far.

Shenzhen Airlines is already flying to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). At present Malaysia's low cost carrier, AirAsia, is also servicing the Shenzhen-KK route.

Liu said also in the pipeline were plans to introduce four new routes to Japan and other cities in South East Asia.

Shenzhen Airlines is a Shenzhen-based airline founded in November 1992 and started service in September 1993 as an airline specialised in passengers, cargo and mail transportation.

Its total assets at present are worth 20 billion yuan (RM10.45 billion), it has over 15,000 employees, owns over 130 passenger and cargo planes, does over 280 domestic and international flight routes, and is among the five largest airlines in China.