AIRASIA BOSS URGES JAPAN TO FIND SOLUTION FOR CONGESTED AIRPORTS, INCREASE ACCESS

News / Airlines

The head of Malaysian airline AirAsia told an aviation congress Tuesday that Japan needs to find a solution for congestion at its airports amid the country's rising number of tourists.

AirAsia Group Chief Executive Officer Tony Fernandes stressed the importance of Japan's airport expansion for budget airlines at the Low-Cost Carrier Airport Congress Asia at Bangkok's Shangri-La hotel, where more than 200 delegates from the aviation industry met to discuss challenges and **solutions** for the low-cost carrier industry.

Affected by an increasing numbers of passengers who are benefiting from a rising number of budget flights and Japanese visa exemptions, the CEO urged Japan to untangle the issue of congestion at Tokyo's airports.

"Japan has got to have solutions for Tokyo. Low-cost carriers don't really have a strong home there. Haneda airport is too full," he said.

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He also complimented Narita airport's proactive moves to build a low-cost carrier terminal and to reduce charges.

According to Narita International Airport Corp., the number of passengers using the airport jumped from 32.8 million in 2012 to 35.4 million in 2013. The number rose again to 35.6 million passengers in 2014. The rise in visitor numbers is expected to continue.

Fernandes is in talks with airports serving three major Japanese cities -- Narita, Osaka and Nagoya -- and has had meetings aiming for business cooperation. "That (represents) a big change," he said.

"They see the potential. They understand low-cost carriers. All of them are building low-cost terminals," said Fernandes.

Additionally, he also proposed a "win-win business model" by stimulating the market and reducing fares to increase the number of passengers who will bring in revenue for small city airports and create an aviation hub for the region.

"Airports should cooperate with low-cost carriers to create a new win-win business model," suggested Fernandes. "I appeal to the airport industry to change your mindsets - not to see us as an enemy, and see us as partners."

AirAsia is the largest low-cost carrier in Asia. The budget airline has been named "World's Best Low-Cost Airline" for seven consecutive years. It carried about 50 million passengers in 2014.

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