

RM8b from tourism certain

Ricardo Unto

KOTA KINABALU: Sabah is on track to achieve RM8 billion in revenue from tourism by the end of the year, said Deputy Chief Minister Christina Liew.

Liew who is also State Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister said up to August, Sabah Tourism Board (STB) estimated that the total tourism receipts have reached RM5.55 billion or 7.5 per cent more compared to the same period last year.

"As of August this year, total tourist arrivals to Sabah increased 5.4 per cent or 2.56 million compared to the same period last year," she told a press conference on the Xiamen Airlines' inaugural Xiamen-Kota Kinabalu flight, here, Friday.

"At least 417,574 or 45.2 per cent of these international arrivals came from China, making it the largest market source for international arrivals to Sabah.

"We are still on target to achieve 500,000 China arrivals by the end of the year.

"We will work closely with the office of the Chinese Consul-General to strengthen



Liew receives a memento from Guo while others look on.

the Malaysia-China relations."

She said, the ministry's aims is to re-emphasise tourism in the East Coast, especially in Tawau and Sandakan.

"The Ministry is working on upgrading the airports in the East Coast to international status so that all the foreign airlines

can establish a direct flight here.

"Sabah's attractions vary from the West Coast to the East," she said.

On the inaugural Xiamen-Kota Kinabalu flight on Oct. 28, Liew said it is the third direct flight by Xiamen Airlines to the city, after Fuzhou and Beijing.

"With this additional connectivity, there will now be a total of 100 weekly direct flights from 12 major and secondary cities in China to Kota Kinabalu International Airport (KKIA).

"I was told that Xiamen Airlines' network expands to over 55 Chinese cities with around 160 million population.

"The airlines have both Xiamen and Fuzhou as transfer hubs of these 55 Chinese cities."

She said, she was also informed that 80 per cent of passengers from the Fuzhou-Kota Kinabalu route are from Beijing and Northern Asia.

"Therefore, the airlines' winter schedule may include daily flights from Beijing to Kota Kinabalu.

"Xiamen Airlines is currently providing connections to 11 cities in South East Asia.

"The airline's long haul connection to Europe, US and Australia, once strategically tapped, could be beneficial for Sabah.

"All these potential arrivals, now have many options flying in," she said.

Also present were Deputy Consul-General of China in Kota Kinabalu, Zhang He, and Xiamen Airlines (Kuala Lumpur Office) general manager Guo Yuan.