

Royal Brunei Airlines operates 85-minute flight to nowhere

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: During the slowdown in air travel caused by the coronavirus pandemic, several airlines are getting creative. Following that Royal Brunei Airlines has launched sightseeing flights to nowhere.

Called “Dine and Fly,” the airline uses one of its seven Airbus A320neos to take passengers on an 85-minute sightseeing tour of Borneo while being served a gourmet meal.

During the flight, the captain points out exciting landmarks that include Kota Kinabalu and Labuan. Before returning to Brunei International Airport (BWN), the captain circles around the 30-kilometer (19-mile) long Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddien Bridge. The bridge was opened on March 17, costing Brunei USD 1.2 billion, and is now the longest bridge in Southeast Asia.

Food for the flight is provided by Royal Brunei Catering and featured a typical Bruneian’ menu of Nasi Lemak with Ayam Goreng or Ayam Masak Kunyit Kedayan

with Rice. Dessert was Gula Sago Melaka and fresh fruits.

Nasi Lemak is fragrant rice cooked in coconut milk while Ayam Goreng is spicy deep-fried chicken. Kunyit Kedayan is another chicken dish cooked with red chilies in a spicy sauce.

Kedayan is chicken cooked with turmeric, lemongrass, and coconut. Gula Sago Melaka is a sago pudding made from palm sugar.

Onboard the first flight were several dignitaries, including Dato Seri Setia, Minister of Finance and Economy, Brunei. He said, "During the COVID-19 pandemic, all businesses have to be creative to attract revenue. For Royal Brunei, the airplanes are not flying to destinations as usual. This new concept will give the opportunity for the pilot to continue flying and also for the public who miss flying to be onboard a plane."

"We are giving passengers the opportunity to see some of the interesting sites in Brunei Darussalam and its surrounding region. It is a short flight. You are having lunch in the air and enjoying sightseeing at the same time."

"Most importantly, the passengers are supporting RB during this extraordinary time. As we know, Royal Brunei is only flying five % of its usual activities. We hope this Dine and Fly concept will create more interest among the public to fly, and we may be looking at a few other concepts in the future. People can also have special events on the flight."

Nurbahriah Eliza Binti Abdullah, Chief Financial Officer, Royal Brunei Airlines, wanted to reassure the public that the airline is doing everything it can to make flying safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, saying, "We have social distancing measures where the middle seats are left empty, while family members can sit together. Our aircraft are also equipped with High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters, which work well to eradicate germs. Brunei currently contains the spread of COVID-19, and we are not landing in another country."

"For individuals who want to have special moments or celebrate birthdays, I think this is a memorable experience. You can have many birthdays and anniversaries, but you will only have one that has sightseeing Brunei from the air."

According to reports, 300 people are on the waiting list for future "Dine and Fly" flights. The flights start at USD 106 in economy class and rise to USD 145 in business class.

According to Royal Brunei's website, the next scheduled "Dine and Fly" flight is on September 20, 2020, and there are still eight economy seats available.