AIRASIA SETS U-TAPAO RECORD

News / Airlines

AirAsia on Friday introduced four new routes out of U-tapao airport, setting a record in the Thai aviation industry for simultaneous launches.

The launch of scheduled flights to Chiang Mai, Udon Thani, Singapore and Macau demonstrates the low-cost carrier's confidence in new traffic catchments which the sleepy navy-operated airfield in Rayong could create.

Friday's launches brought the number of routes AirAsia operates through U-tapao to eight and it is on course to introduce the ninth route on Dec. 3 with the connection to Hat Yai.

Altogether, AirAsia will offer 46 flights a week through U-tapao, the largest number of connections by a single airline group in the 39-year history of the airport which served as a major staging and refuelling base during the Vietnam War.

The airline is largely enthusiastic about the market response to U-tapao as an air gateway to the Eastern Seaboard, particularly Pattaya.

Tassapon Bijleveld, chief executive of Thai AirAsia, on Friday declared the intention to "gradually"

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introduce more routes through the airport.

A few more domestic routes such as Ubon Ratchathani, Khon Kaen and Chiang Rai are on the radar screen, he said.

Internationally, the airline will be studying the viability of linking U-tapao with India, since many Indians are flocking to Pattaya for holidays, said Mr Tassapon.

AirAsia, through Thai AirAsia's sister airline AirAsia Bhd of Malaysia, began to descend to the largely empty U-tapao airport from Kuala Lumpur on July 15, triggering traffic flow unseen at the airfield since it was handed over by the U.S. in August 1966.

The airline has already stationed two A320-200s at U-tapao, which is now Thai AirAsia's fifth base to support its burgeoning flight activities.

Mr Tassapon said the load factors for the four routes launched yesterday achieved an average of 80%, which is satisfactory.

He credited Pattaya City and the Tourism Authority of Thailand for supporting Air-Asia's bid to make U-tapao a new gateway to the east coast.

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