

15 March 2008

KUALA LUMPUR, March 14(Bernama) -- "The air fare is RM230.99 and you can pay by credit card. Can I have your credit card number please ♦," teacher Masnan Ahmat was temporarily stunned by the voice on the other end of the telephone line.

Earlier, he had called up a low-cost airline office and enquired about making a booking for a seat on a flight from Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang near here to the Bayan Lepas International Airport in Penang.

"People have told me that advertisements on cheap air travel are merely gimmicks. But I do not expect that the air fare on a low-cost airline is RM230.99 for a seat", said the exasperated Masnan who had no choice but to book the seat for his teenage son who had to return to college after this years Chinese New Year celebration.

"If not for the rush, I would have booked a ticket on a normal commercial airline and be pampered with better service. I thought a frills-free flight would be relatively cheaper, but it turns out to be the otherwise".

**NOTHING IS CHEAP**

Watch out for the word 'from' said consumer and social activist Gurmukh Singh.

He said consumers cannot really blame the expensive ticket as the word 'from' actually means the base cost of the ticket.

"When you factor in the fuel surcharge, airport tax, insurance, administrative, service and miscellaneous fees, the final amount for a low-cost air carrier ticket is not that cheap," he told Bernama here.

Gurmukh said consumers could not really lay the blame on the airline.

He said the air tickets are really cheap when a consumer makes a booking much early than the flight date.

"If you make an on-line booking via the Internet some three months earlier than the date that you wish to fly, then you can get an air ticket for a mere RM40. Much cheaper than the ticket for the train or bus, if you are going to destinations like Penang and Kota Baharu," he said.

**TIME FACTOR**

Another consumer activist, Fatimah Mansur, agrees with Gurmukh's views.

"Just imagine, about half a decade ago, not many people can fly. Previously, flights are only for the corporate and business guys as well as senior government servants.

"Now almost everybody can fly, even students going and returning from their boarding schools located far away".

She said Malaysians owe the domestic airlines for providing cheap travel fares.

Malaysia has two low-cost airlines in AirAsia and Firefly.

AirAsia operates out of the Low Cost Carrier Terminal (LCCT) located near the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang.

AirAsia is the first airline in the region to implement fully ticketless travel and unassigned seats. The airline has been expanding rapidly and is very popular among the travelling public thanks to its frequent low fare deals.

Its affiliate airlines Thai AirAsia and Indonesia AirAsia fly from Suvarnabhumi Airport, Bangkok and Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, Jakarta respectively.

Firefly, also known as the 'community airline', flies from two hubs, Bayan lepas International Airport in Penang, and Sultan Abdul Aziz Airport in Subang near here.

**SUPPLY AND DEMAND**

Air travel is like other consumer goods, said Fatimah.

"It works out to be the same. For example when you are in a rush and your flight date is near, the ticket is more expensive. But if your flight date is months away, then the ticket price is actually very cheap.

"Hence this system is very good for university undergraduates and school students as they can make bookings early since they know beforehand the date when their vacation starts," she said.

Fatimah said the cheap air fare is also good for families going on vacation.

"If you have plans for a vacation, then go ahead make your bookings early," she added.

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