

Soon, direct flights to Philippines

Much to cheer about for Filipinos as service likely to begin from February

By Mrudu Naik
Times News Service

MUSCAT — The news of direct flights to different parts of their country has brought much cheer to the over 45,000 Filipinos in the Sultanate of Oman. The Sultanate will now be connected to the Republic of Philippines by direct flights.

"These flights will connect to every part of the Philippines," said Acmad D. Omar, the Philippine ambassador to Oman, speaking to *Times of Oman*.

As per the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the civil aviation authorities of the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Philippines on December 14, at least 19 direct flights will operate between Oman and Philippines starting next year.

Acmad D. Omar said, "As per the agreement, there will be four weekly flights from Muscat to Manila, seven per week to Clark, four per week to Cebu and four per week to Davao. Of the four flights between Muscat and Manila, the fourth will link the cities of Manila and Clark".

Airlines

Acmad said the aeronautical authorities of the government of the Sultanate of Oman had designated Oman Air as the airline of the Sultanate to operate services on these routes and the Philippines authorities had designated Philippines Airlines.

Oman Air flights from Muscat to Manila will become operational first, and may start services early next year.

"We have requested Oman Air to start operations in February 2010," he said.



Philippines Ambassador Acmad D. Omar.

— Photo by Shameer Mohammed/Times of Oman

The city of Manila is the capital of the Philippines and one of the 17 cities and municipalities that make up Metro Manila.

As per the agreement, Oman Air and Philippines Airlines will operate flights to Clark in Pampanga, which is a province of the Philippines located in the Central Luzon region; to Cebu, which is one of the most developed provinces in the Philippines in the Visayas, and Davao, which is one of the regions of the Philippines located on the southeastern portion of Mindanao.

The Philippines Airlines will also operate four weekly flights to Muscat and Salalah.

Expressing happiness over the development, Acmad said, "the starting of direct flights

means a lot to the 45,000 Filipinos living in Oman. Until now they have been taking connecting flights from Manama, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Doha or Bangkok to reach their destination. At times it also meant overnight stays in one of these places."

The Philippines's ambassador said a direct flight from Muscat to Manila would take only seven hours.

Muscat as GCC hub

"The Muscat International Airport can be used as a hub for other GCC travellers to the Philippines," he said.

He said signing of this pact would strengthen the bilateral relations. Acmad also believes that it will boost the tourism sector of both the countries.

MORE THE MERRIER

- At least 19 direct flights will operate between Oman and Philippines starting next year
- Four weekly flights from Muscat to Manila, seven per week to Clark, four per week to Cebu and four per week to Davao
- Of the four flights between Muscat and Manila, the fourth will link the cities of Manila and Clark
- Oman Air flights from Muscat to Manila will become operational first, and may start by February next year

"The citizens of both the countries can discover the tourism potential of each other. The Philippines consists of 7,107 islands. Many of these small islands as well as the bigger islands have a lot to offer tourists. There are many possibilities for all kinds of holidays," he said.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed amends a 1992 aviation transport services agreement.

The agreement was signed by Abdulrahim bin Salim Al Haremi, director-general of Meteorology and Aviation at the Civil Aviation Affairs, Ministry of Transport and Communications representing Oman, and Doroteo Reyes, representing the aeronautical authorities of the Philippines.