

People-in-Travel

Tracking Travel's Leaders



From Travel Business Analyst

Aireen Omar

Air Asia (AA) has promoted Aireen Omar, 38, to CEO of AA Malaysia, the first AA airline, starting this month.

Her background is entirely financial. Before this appointment, she was AA's regional head of finance, having joined the group in 2006 as corporate finance director. Before that she was nine years in finance in companies in New York and Kuala Lumpur, after graduating from the London School of Economics.



At AA, her role involved her in financing AA's fleet, raising funds for group expansion, and setting up joint-venture for various AA JV airlines – see below.

She takes over from Tony Fernandes, who performed the role in his job as CEO of the AA group.

Fernandes will now concentrate on expansion of the group. He says he is looking for more joint ventures in Asean countries (AA already has operating airlines in four of the 10 markets - Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand). And "beyond Asean", including Northeast Asia - where AA Japan is due to start this year - and South Asia.

Related to this, the group has opened a regional office in Jakarta, called Air Asia Asean, where Fernandes will have an office.

But Jakarta seems the wrong location and Air Asia Asean the wrong name. Fernandes says the office is located

"far enough, physically as well as psychologically, from AA's airline offices in each of the countries it operates in". *That too is questionable given – not least that AA Indonesia is based in Jakarta!*

And why AA 'Asean' if the group is expanding into non-Asean parts of Asia?

For Asean expansion, Fernandes is counting a lot on the implementation of Open Skies (OS). Asean's interpretation of OS has not been defined but it is not expected to be as comprehensive as aviation liberalisation in the European Union, and perhaps not even as much as the so-called Open Skies practised by the US.

Interview: Jennifer Fox

This interview with the head of Fairmont Hotels is an extract of that published in Hotel News Now last month. May be paraphrased.

What is your biggest challenge? Growing the Fairmont brand. Fairmont has established itself as a leading luxury brand in North America, and we are now looking to replicate this success globally. My focus is on



introducing the Fairmont brand in top destinations in Europe, China, India, and the Middle East.

How has the working environment changed in the industry? The biggest changes that have had such a tremendous impact on the way we work today are advances in technology. Ten years ago who would have thought that we would be able to work remotely the way we do today. I travel with a BlackBerry, iPhone, iPad and a laptop - and I use them all. Who would have thought that we could run our business from anywhere – that we could be productive no matter where we are - and as I have a global role, this makes my life so much easier.

What advice do you have for women in the hotel business? Do what you're passionate about and do not shy away from taking chances. The hotel business is global, so being open to transfers and relocation is an asset. Many of the opportunities through my career have been a result of a willingness to take on new challenges around the world.

How would you like to see the industry evolve in 10 years for women in the hotel business? Our industry has come a long way over the last few decades and women can now be found in influential and important roles from general managers to executive chefs. That said I personally don't put much stock in to the gender topic, as it's never held me back from reaching my goals or career ambitions.

I firmly believe individuals should be judged on their merits alone, and given the current and future demand for global talent in the hotel industry, I don't really see any limitations on women hoping to pursue a career in the hotel business.

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For more information, contact Raymonde Perpignani at Travel Business Analyst, TBAoffice@gmail.com

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