SURIAGROUP

**PRESS RELEASE**

## SURIAGROUP PLAYS KEY ROLE IN POSITIONING SABAH AS EMERGING CRUISE GATEWAY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Kota Kinabalu, 30 January 2026 — Sabah's potential as a new and distinctive cruise destination took centre stage with the successful hosting of the SATS-Creuers / Singapore Tourism Board / Cruise Liners – East Malaysia Cruise Port Familiarisation Trip (Sabah), jointly hosted by Sabah Tourism Board (STB) and Suria Capital Holdings Berhad (SuriaGroup).

Building on an earlier introductory visit last year, the return visit marked a significant progression with the participation of major international cruise liners including StarDream Cruises, Marella Cruises, and Norwegian Cruise Line, signalling strong commercial interest and rising confidence in Sabah's potential as an emerging cruise gateway. The high-level visit brought together senior representatives from SATS-Creuers Cruise Services and the Singapore Tourism Board, reflecting growing industry momentum to expand regional cruise itineraries beyond traditional ports.

The familiarisation programme aimed to explore the feasibility of new cruise routes linking Singapore with Sabah and Sarawak, positioning East Malaysia as a compelling addition to Southeast Asia's cruise network. Discussions also focused on assessing the readiness, capacity, and future development potential of cruise ports in Kota Kinabalu and Sandakan, alongside operational considerations such as berthing windows, transport connectivity, and shore excursion planning.

During the engagement, SuriaGroup presented its strategic vision for cruise port development, outlining existing facilities at Kota Kinabalu Port and Sandakan Port, and long-term plans under the Jesselton Waterfront City (JWC) master development, which includes future-ready, world-class cruise terminal planning. SuriaGroup also highlighted Kudat Port and Lahad Datu Port as potential new port-of-calls, particularly attractive for small-sized and expedition cruise vessels seeking unique and less-crowded destinations.

Discussions with cruise operators revealed a strong shift in passenger preferences towards authentic, experience-driven destinations, with growing demand for itineraries that offer access to nature, wildlife, and local communities beyond city centres. In this context, Sabah's rich eco-tourism assets, cultural diversity, and world-class attractions, including Sepilok in Sandakan, were identified as strong differentiators for international cruise passengers, particularly within the ultra-luxury segment.

The importance of efficient coordination within an average eight-hour berthing window was also highlighted, reinforcing the need for close collaboration between port

operators, tour providers, and government agencies to deliver seamless and memorable shore experiences.

Looking ahead, the delegates identified strategic opportunities for medium-term growth, including leveraging peak outbound travel periods from key source markets such as Korea and China, aligning cruise schedules with Golden Week and major international holidays, and positioning Sabah within long-term global cruise deployment cycles. The potential of Sandakan as a future cruise destination was noted, alongside ongoing government-led initiatives to address navigational constraints at the port.

The Singapore delegation will continue its familiarisation programme with engagements in Sarawak, with discussions already underway to explore coordinated regional cruise itineraries, strengthening the overall Borneo cruise proposition.

SuriaGroup reaffirmed its strong commitment to supporting the growth of Sabah's cruise tourism ecosystem, through continuous port development, stakeholder collaboration, and sustainable planning. By working closely with Sabah Tourism Board, cruise operators and regional partners, SuriaGroup aims to play a catalytic role in unlocking new tourism opportunities, driving economic impact, and positioning Sabah as an emerging cruise gateway in the region.

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