



Asian airlines eye off Coast

by Daniel Meers

AIRASIA X has sold more than 60,000 tickets to the Gold Coast since the budget airline launched in November, fuelling speculation more Asian airlines could soon be flying to the tourist strip.

Figures released by the airline yesterday also revealed 45 per cent of passengers were destined for the Gold Coast, 35 per cent for Brisbane and the remainder used the city as the gateway for other places in Australia.

It comes after the airline took a roadshow to South-East Asia aimed at selling flights to Australia's tourism capital.

AirAsia X chief executive officer Azran Osman-Rani said he was more than pleased with how the Gold Coast route had started.

The move has vindicated Gold Coast Tourism's five-year plan – implemented by then chief executive officer Pavan Bhatia – who

looked to Asia instead of the traditional European markets.

Gold Coast Tourism spokesman Ben Pole said the figures would make the city more enticing to other international airlines.

AirAsia X has been credited with increasing tourism to the city.

"That's exactly why we worked so hard with the Gold Coast Airport and State Government to land the deal with AirAsia X," said Mr Pole.

"This is just the first step for us. "Based on this kind of success we believe more Asian airlines will come to the Gold Coast."

Mr Pole said he was confident other international airlines in the Asia Pacific region would take note of AirAsia's success.

"We can demonstrate it makes business sense to fly to the Gold Coast," he said.

"It will be able to stand up and raise interest of other airlines in the Asia Pacific region."

AirAsia X has heavily promoted the city with Gold

Coast footage broadcast during many of its international flights.

Early flight statistics show 60 per cent of passengers were from Asia with the remainder from Australia.

In recent months a war between the major domestic and international airlines has been fought for passengers to and from the Gold Coast.

AirAsia X was joined by Tiger Airways, prompting Jetstar to increase the number of flights in and out of the city – and also look at beginning flights to Europe in a bid to get the jump on other airlines.

Last year the Gold Coast welcomed record tourism figures for the city.

International visitors went on a whopping \$938 million Gold Coast spending spree during the 12 months to September last year.

Visitor numbers increased by 9 per cent, visitor nights jumped 10 per cent, while visitor expenditure rose 7 per cent.