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Indonesia airline brings live music to the skies

Indonesian national flag carrier Garuda is bringing music to the skies with a series of live acoustic concerts on domestic flights, the airline said. Passengers will be serenaded at 35,000 feet in a scheme aimed at wooing millennials “who want a different flight experience”, airline spokesman M. Ikhsan Rosan told AFP. The carrier held its first in-flight concert on Wednesday, when two musicians performed for a captive audience aboard a flight between the capital, Jakarta, and the holiday island of Bali.

Garuda said sets would last 10 to 15 minutes on select flights, and there would be a focus on promoting upcoming talent. While it may prove an unforgettable flying experience for some, it may

not be everyone’s idea of a good time. In 2017, US airline Southwest introduced live shows on some flights to a mixed reaction from passengers. Some travellers said they preferred minimum human interaction while flying and said music would distract them from sleeping or reading.

Indonesia is one of the world’s fastest-growing aviation markets, but it has come under fresh scrutiny since a fatal Lion Air crash in October last year that killed all 189 people on board. Garuda said it had embarked on extensive consultation to ensure the concerts posed no threat to safety or security. “If there is the potential of turbulence, the singer will be directed back to sit in his chair,” Rosan said. — AFP



This handout from Garuda Indonesia shows musicians performing on a flight from Jakarta to Bali. — AFP photos

Colombia-themed bar in Paris accused of glamourizing drug trade

A new Colombia-themed bar in Paris that features waiters in bullet-proof vests, cocktails named after famous cocaine traffickers and a portrait of drug lord Pablo Escobar has been accused by activists of glamorizing the trade. “Medellin” opened last November near the Champs-Elysees, hiding itself behind a fake shopfront for a tacos restaurant with a red neon sign—“Chez Pablo”—indicating what was inside. The bar-nightclub has since become a hit with its young and wealthy clientele, not all of whom appear to understand all the references found on the menus and walls.

“Medellin” is Escobar’s home town in Colombia, as well as the name of his cartel, while a vegetarian tacos dish called “Pacho Herrera” refers to the one of the heads of the deadly Cali cartel. The “Maria Victoria” cocktail is named after Escobar’s widow. “Whether you want it or not, when you think about Medellin, you think of Pablo, but it’s not the main theme of the bar,” owner Andren Dimitris told AFP, denying that he was “idolizing” him.

The Franco-Greek businessman, 37, admits that he removed a fake tomb for Escobar where clients could light a candle for him “because it offended the Colombian population.” The entrance hall to the bar, which features full-length mirrors, features the song “Tuyo” by Rodrigo Amarante, the music from the Netflix series “Narcos” which recounts the life of the late drug lord. —AFP



A ‘Medellin’ sign is seen for the bar that opened in November 2018 near the Champs-Elysees. —AFP

Arctic art house: Russian region nurtures local film boom



Yakutian filmmaker Lyubov Borisova works on her film in Sakhafilm production studio office in Yakutsk. — AFP photos

In Russia’s remote Yakutia region the film industry is booming, despite shooting schedules being restricted by some of the coldest winters on Earth and directors blaming “spirits” for disturbing the production crew. Six time zones away from the country’s film schools and without central state funding for its filmmakers, the region nonetheless produces half of all Russian movies made outside Moscow and Saint Petersburg. “Everybody wants to make movies,” said Alexei Romanov, who turned his back on a promising career as a filmmaker in Saint Petersburg three decades ago to return to his native Siberia.

“We have films with minuscule budgets and hilariously small fees but they make more in the cinemas here than Hollywood blockbusters,” he said. When the director came back to Yakutia, a vast territory that is home to fewer than a million people, the local industry consisted of just two cameramen. Now, thanks in part to his efforts, people are “fighting for cameras” to finish their projects before equipment starts failing in winter temperatures that regularly drop to minus 50 degrees Celsius (minus 58 degrees Fahrenheit).

Romanov estimated an average local movie budget to be between \$40,000 and \$80,000 (35,000 and 70,000 euros). Most actors basically work for free on skeleton budgets, hoping to eventually get paid from box office revenues. But domestic and foreign audiences are starting to notice the region’s output. Last year, a Yakutian film “The Lord Eagle” about an elderly couple living with an eagle in the forest, received the top prize at the Moscow Film Festival. South Korea’s Busan Film Festival, one of the most important in Asia, in 2017 showed a dozen Yakutia productions in a special retrospective, praising their unique cinematic style.



The office of Sakhafilm, Yakutia’s main film production company in Yakutsk.

Permafrost Zombies

Locals jokingly call Yakutia’s movie industry “Sakhawood”, derived from the region’s other name, the Republic of Sakha. Yakutia’s unexplored wildernesses steeped in folk legends and shamanic traditions have piqued festival interest, but Sakhawood’s genres are surprisingly varied. Recent premieres have included “Republic Z”, a zombie apocalypse sparked by a virus buried in permafrost. Another new release was “Cheeke,” a crime comedy about disco dance-offs, with a green-moustached hero.

Romanov—one of the founders of Sakhafilm, Yakutia’s main production company—said global art-house interest could be explained by Yakutia’s mixed culture. “We’re Asians on the one hand, and Northerners on the other,” combining themes of survival with Turkic heritage, he said.

“Sakha cinema combines regional legends and folk religions with contemporary values,” Jin Park, a programmer for the Busan festival’s selection committee, wrote to AFP. Productions show “authentic charm that is rarely found in other regional films,” he said.

Hungry flames

The region’s remoteness not only adds to its allure, it has helped keep its independent cinemas alive. “We are lucky that we are so far away from everything and big distributors never took over our theatres,” said filmmaker Lyubov Borisova, as she worked on sound editing of her directorial debut, filmed last summer. “Our isolation makes us unattractive” to large chains, which favour Hollywood blockbusters and shut out locally made films across other Russian regions, she said. —AFP