

PM: TOURISM WON'T ERODE OUR CULTURE

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that tourism does not necessarily lead to the progressive erosion of cultures, values and the way of life.

The Prime Minister said that although "tourism is not 100 per cent good" the benefits it brings to poor countries far outweighs the negative aspects of the trade.

"We agree that nothing is more beautiful than to see a full-moon shining on an attap hut with swaying coconut trees.

"But for the man who at that very moment is sweating and swatting mosquitoes and trying to sleep, the beauty of the scene is lost," he said when opening the Pata '86 conference here.

Dr Mahathir said the man would rather have a brick and mortar terrace house, electricity and piped water and other modern conveniences.

"He will have a chance to have these if he can earn something from tourism or at least when the country is enriched by tourism," he added.

He said culture could be preserved, and so could the hut, the moonlight and the swaying palm trees if the tourists wanted to see them.

"But the whole nation cannot be expected to be exposed to mosquito bites and be deprived of a decent life merely because someone is concerned that we should not spoil their way of life," he added.

Dr Mahathir said that preserving the Stone Age would no doubt make parts of this world picturesque and interesting, but that would be a heavy price for the people to pay simply because people wanted to see the picturesque and interesting.

"Let us stop worrying too much about the loss of cultures and values. Malaysia, for example, knows fully well that once it loses its special character, the tourists will cease to come.

"We also know we can retain our character without the need to suffer mosquito bites and rickety huts," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the tourism industry generated about US\$100 billion in business and that in 1984, 300 million people travelled worldwide.

"If the people in the industry and Governments make travel really hassle free, there will be such a tremendous boost that the peoples of the world will literally be next-door neighbours," he added.