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Tourism (News Focus)
SELLING MALAYSIA TO MALAYSIANS

By: Sobrey Jaafar/rn

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 29 (Bernama) -- Last year 7.43 million tourists visited Malaysia and spent almost RM10 billion in the country.

The statistics place the tourism on the third rung as the major foreign exchange earner, after manufacturing and the petroleum industry.

In the same year a total of 6.3 million Malaysians, or about 30 per cent of the population went overseas, and hence the cash outflow.

In fact the 122,000 Malaysians who visited London last year alone spent RM376 million there.

It could thus be inferred that the hard earned foreign exchange from the Malaysian hospitality industry could not be retained in the country, as a permanent saving.

The concern shown by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, for the continuing trend of Malaysians touring abroad, has presented a challenge to the Malaysian Tourism Promotion Board (Tourism Malaysia) chairman Datuk Hanafi Ramli to make amends.

Hanafi admitted that the outward tours by Malaysians could not be curtailed completely, since Malaysians would continue to leave the country for business trips, performing the Haj or Umrah or study abroad.

However, the trend still presents a challenge to Malaysian Tourism to work on a new strategy that will create among Malaysians the "tourism culture" to travel more within the country.

Towards this, Tourism Malaysia feels that it has taken on the aggressive approach to promote the Malaysia Fest, the Shopping Carnival, the Floral Fest and Domestic Tourism Exposition as annual events to expose the public to local tourist destinations and the varied local tourist products.

It also feels that sufficient exposure has been given to the tourism industry on the local products available for the rakyat.

So, what's the problem to get the local tourists interested in touring the country?

Hanafi said one of the obstacles seemed to be the concept of a planned holiday was apparently new and had not caught on with the Malaysian public.

"Many Malaysians do not use the tourist agencies and are unaware of the available domestic holiday packages," he said.

But many of the country's 1,200 travel and tour agencies only function as ticketing agents.

Among those providing the holiday packages, many apparently focus on selling the outbound packages because of the bigger profits to be derived.

Hanafi said the Tourism Malaysia realised the situation and was reviewing domestic packages offered by the agencies as well as their role in introducing domestic tourism.

But what of efforts by the Tourism Malaysia itself?

Hanafi said forging of the travelling culture within the country would depend on Tourism Malaysia's Domestic Tourism Division, one of the nine divisions with a defined role.

The other eight divisions are international marketing (Europe) international marketing (Asia), research, management, special events, conventions and incentives, promotion support and information technology.

Hanafi said the important divisions like the domestic tourism division would be strengthened so that it could "contribute more effectively in

creating a culture for domestic tourism".

There is a strong possibility for some of the divisions to be merged with the domestic division, but Hanafi said such a move was still in the study stage. -- BERNAMA

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