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Balok, Pahang

WE are fortunate to be rich in many potential tourist sites as tourism is a very important economic activity in the country. The environment, both natural and man-made, constitutes the basic assets of the tourist industry. But if the environment is not maintained, it will suffer from deterioration and even irreversible damage. One clear example of a potential eco-tourism site that has been marred by pollution is in the State of Pahang.

Midway between Kuantan and Cherating lies an innocuous and often overlooked village called Balok.

While there is nothing particularly outstanding about the village, the same cannot be said of its surroundings.

Balok is situated in an enviable geographical location - between a never-ending stretch of beach and the gurgling waters of the Pahang river. On a clear sunny day, the backdrop of the hamlet is painted in brilliant hues of blue and green, fulfilling its promise as a beach lover's haven. Balok is a world of tranquility where the only sounds heard are waves crashing onto the beach and the occasional laughter of children passing through.

Unfortunately, this promise has been tarnished by the incessant flow of garbage that comes in all shapes and sizes - from drinking bottles to slippers, engine oil containers, food that picnickers leave behind, broken plastic containers and even motorcycle helmets.

It is not unusual to see children throw ice-cream or sweet wrappers on a nice clean stretch of beach before walking off nonchalantly. Obviously, lessons in school did not extend to environmental care or even general cleanliness.

But then look at the poor role models they have - irresponsible adults with an attitude that says "if other people can throw rubbish, so can I" and "this is not my house, just some public area".

The fact that many Malaysians have cultivated a bad and disgusting habit as litterbugs is stale news. In August this year, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad expressed shame and anger when he said: "If you want to dirty a place, do it at home. We do not care if you just want to sit around and have a good time, but you should not throw rubbish anywhere you like."

Well, those words can be repeated for the next 10 years and it still won't make a difference. Despite the many cleanliness campaigns carried out in the past (not to forget the anti-littering campaign launched after the PM's outcry this year and the proposed anti-litter law), litterbugs remain at large.

Understanding Malaysia's tourism potentials, the Government spends huge sums of money to develop the industry. But its success depends on the condition of the environment.

The people's irresponsible attitudes need to be changed to ensure the preservation of our natural environment which is also an asset to the country's economy.

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