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## Good tourism business prospects in Mongolia

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THERE is good prospect for Malaysian business leaders to invest in tourism-related activities in Mongolia, Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said yesterday.

"When talking about tourism in Mongolia, it is more towards getting Malaysians to invest in tourism facilities in Mongolia rather than promoting Malaysia's destinations to the people there," he told reporters in Kuala Lumpur, after announcing the Shopping Carnival '97 event to be held from October 4 to November 2 this year.

Sabbaruddin said Mongolia will not be a tourist market for Malaysia for quite some time due to several reasons.

"Firstly, it has a population of only 2.5 million.

"And after meeting with a few tour operators in Mongolia, I found out that each of them handles not more than 300 tourists per year," he said.

He was commenting on his recent trip to Mongolia and Kyrgystan, accompanying Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, from September 8 to 14.

Sabbaruddin said Mongolia receives only about 12,000 tourists per year.

"So what we can do is to encourage Malaysians to invest in Mongolia as well as Chinese and Japanese tourists to visit Mongolia for their holidays," he added.

On the ringgit depreciation, Sabbaruddin said: "The situation is more of a plus point from the point of view of tourism. In theory, we (Malaysia) should have more ringgit returns in terms of tourist earnings because with the same amount of US dollar, a foreign tourist can now purchase more services or products - thus this encourages them to spend more.

"However, in tourism, it is not just the value of money that influences a tourist's spending pattern, his or her spending power also plays an important factor," he said.

Nevertheless, Sabbaruddin said, the currency crisis is not unique to Malaysia and is happening in other South-East Asian countries.

Sabbaruddin also said the number of tourist arrivals to Malaysia will certainly fall if any of the governments in the respective countries discourages its people from travelling abroad.

Malaysia's top 10 tourist markets last year comprised Singapore, Thailand, Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia, Brunei, the UK, Australia, Hong Kong and China.

"Likewise, we (Malaysia) also discourages our people from travelling abroad although we have not taken any drastic steps yet such as imposing an exit tax. That's not in our plans," he said.

Sabbaruddin said what the Government tries to do is to promote domestic tourism through annual events such as Malaysia Fest as well as encourage students to take up twinning programmes.

Last year, the number of Malaysians travelling abroad for all purposes of visit reached 6.2 million, spending some RM6.8 billion.

This year, Sabbaruddin said, Malaysia's tourist arrivals is expected to reach 7.8 million in a bid to attain the 12.5 million mark by the year 2000.

"Based on this projection, it means a 10 per cent growth in tourist arrivals compared with last year's total of 7.1 million," he added.

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