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It should be fun for even grandmas, says Siti Hasmah

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The diving industry in Malaysia should not only strive harder to attract youths but also women and even grandmothers, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali said today.

The industry must attempt to interest the older generation in the sport and dispel the many myths in their minds. This could be done by first letting them observe youths in the sport.

"I am not a swimmer or scuba-diver but I am amazed with the underwater world," she said when opening the Dema Asia '97 Diving Equipment and Travel Exposition at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Dr Siti Hasmah, wife of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said magazines and diving stories from family and friends had sparked her interest in the underwater world.

"Non-divers are missing half of God's blessings because it is so beautiful underwater.

"It might not be a magic carpet ride but it is still fascinating with fins, masks and tanks," she said.

Dive tourism is gaining popularity and industrialised Asian nations bounded by the Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean and South China Sea are marketing their marine resources as the attraction for travel.

"As in any other industry, beneficial spin-offs from organised diving sports activities are seen in the good financial returns for operators along the coastal region, such as the boat operators, chalet-owners, home-stay and beach resorts and even the fishermen," Dr Siti Hasmah said.

It was very important that Malaysia stay committed to the conservation of its marine environment and the divers, new and old, have to inculcate the love for it.

Dr Siti Hasmah hoped Dema Asia '97 will be able to expand industry promotion, cooperation and education of scuba diving sports into the Asia Pacific market.

The exhibition would be a good opportunity for tour operators and dive shop operators selling diving packages to meet and exchange ideas.

This is the second time Dema Asia is held here. The exhibition showcasing about 250 exhibitors is expected to attract more than 6,000 visitors.

Free scuba diving and snorkelling sessions are offered at the Pan Pacific and Dynasty Hotel poolside tomorrow from 2 to 7pm.

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