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Peru records rise in tourist arrivals

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TOURISM industry in Peru is still very much alive despite the uncertainty over the security and stability of the country following the two-month-old hostage crisis and the natural disasters which have struck the country.

The country, which receives some 700,000 tourists a year, did not see a decrease in the number of arrivals, Promperu representative Victor Tamashiro said. Promperu is the agency entrusted by the Peru Government to promote the country.

He said Peru recorded some 62,000 tourists in January this year, up from 55,000 tourists registered in December 1996.

"The incidences do not have any effect on tourism," he told Business Times in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

On December 17, the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement rebels seized the Japanese Embassy in Lima and took hostage more than 500 people, including the Malaysian envoy to Peru, Encik Ahmad Mokhtar Selat.

Hostages were released in batches. At present, the rebels are still holding 72 captives.

Peru ambassador to Malaysia Jorge Bayona described the hostage incident as "an isolated case".

"There is no political tension. You can still see people out of the streets at night. The rebels do not have the support of anyone in Peru or even abroad," he said.

Bayona said a securities firm, Merrill Lynch, has also come out with a favourable report on the stability of the country's economy despite the terrorism incident.

Tamashiro also said natural disasters, such as the earthquake in southern Peru in November last year and the recent mudslide in the southeast of the country, have no effect on tourism as they occurred in the most remote areas.

Last year, Peru received an estimated 600,000 visitors, registering a 23.66 per cent increase over 1995's arrivals of 485,169 visitors.

Tourism receipts last year were recorded at US\$673 million compared with US\$520 million in 1995.

Peru received 232 Malaysians to its shores last year but both Tamashiro and Bayona are confident that the figure will rise.

"Peru is very far from Malaysia ... it took me 28 hours by flight to get here but I believe this can be reduced if we can have the Malaysian national carrier to fly to Lima," Tamashiro said.

Bayona said Peru is receptive to any plans Malaysia Airlines may have to mount services into Lima, adding that the national carrier's operations would not only benefit the tourism industry but also the business community as well.

Both governments signed an air service agreement in 1995 during Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's visit to Peru.

To further support his statement, Tamashiro said more hotels are also opening in Peru, indicating the investors' confidence in the country's stability.

Hyatt is already operating in Lima and will soon be joined by the Hilton Group and Holiday Inn.

Malaysian tourists do not require immigrant and/or tourist visa when visiting Peru.

This is the fourth time Promperu is participating in the Malaysian

Association of Tours and Travel Agents (Matta) International Travel Fair.
Known for its Machu Picchu citadels in Cusco, its main tourist circuits
include Puno (Lake Titicaca) and, Nasca (Nasca Lines).

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