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Homestay for tourists only when hosts ready

KUCHING, Fri. - The Tourism Ministry will launch the homestay programme for tourists when the host communities are ready, the minister Datuk Dr James Masing said today.

"The response from the host communities is good, but we will check them when they are ready to welcome the tourists," he told reporters after launching a compact disc on the ethnic music of Sarawak.

He said the ministry wanted to check how the host communities would welcome the tourists.

"We don't want the homestay programme to start on a wrong step," he said.

Masing said rural communities in Santubong and Bau in Kuching Division had been chosen to be hosts under the programme.

The tourists would live in the way the hosts do and participate in their daily activities, he said.

Masing said the hosts must be trained to receive the tourists "in order to make the homestay programme a success".

On a statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that adverse reports on the foreign media about Malaysia had resulted in the decline of tourist arrivals, Masing said Sarawak was not affected.

"In fact, an increase in the arrivals is reported. I will not be surprised if the increase is between 12 and 15 per cent by the end of the year.

He also said that the hotel industry, on the whole, was not doing too badly in occupancy rate.

Masing also urged the private sector to consult the Ministry before building hotels.

"If they have problems later, when the hotels are completed, they will blame us for not doing anything to attract tourists.

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