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State to boost 'health tourism'

JOHOR BARU, Thurs. - Johor plans to promote "health tourism" in a big way to woo foreigners to take advantage of the top-notch medical facilities and services in the State at relatively low rates.

State Tourism Committee chairman Datuk Jimmy Low said the Johor Government planned to rope in the various private specialists hospitals in the State to make this a reality.

He said the State's relatively untapped tourism sector held tremendous potential for development because of the high cost of medical care and treatment in other countries.

"Health tourism has the potential to be a major crowd puller for neighbouring countries and we want to tap this market aggressively," he said after presenting "Johor Shopping Carnival" stickers to several taxi companies today.

Also present were Johor Road Transport Department director Nasir Mat Dam and Johor Tourism Department director Salleh Ahmad.

Low was commenting on a statement by Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik, who quoted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as saying that Malaysia should promote health tourism.

Dr Mahathir had noted that although health facilities in the country were relatively cheaper than elsewhere around the world, this was not being promoted abroad.

Low said health care costs in Johor Baru were far cheaper than in Singapore, for instance, with the lower value of the ringgit vis-a-vis the US dollar making it all the more attractive.

He said another significant point was that the standard of medical treatment and care found locally was on par or even better than those found in other countries.

Citing an example, he said the cost of medical scanning for brain and heart diseases here was at least 2.5 times cheaper than in Singapore.

"Many come here to shop. It is time we also promoted our excellent medical facilities and services to them. I understand many Singaporeans are already availing themselves of our medical facilities."

He said the State Tourism Department would come out with brochures and pamphlets on health tourism for distribution to travel agents in neighbouring countries.

"Foreigners can now come to Johor for medical diagnosis and treatment as we have the expertise and equipment to provide high-quality personalised medical care and service.

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