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Sukom preparation at full swing to meet deadline

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Preparations for the Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games 1998 are moving at top speed; be it infrastructural development, completion of hotels, upgrading of vehicles and transportation systems or optional holiday packages.

The deadline is Sept 11. Stadiums, in fact, have to be completed by July 17 for the trial runs as suggested by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The tourism industry is attempting a new strategy to pull tourists in using the theme of sports and recreation - thus explaining why 1998 has been termed "Sports and Recreation Year" - with 244 such events lined up, where the Commonwealth Games is the anchor.

The games will showcase Malaysia to the world as the country that can accomplish such a feat in times of economic problems. It will attract foreigners and help achieve the target of 8.7 million visitors this year, raking in a revenue of RM13.2 billion. It will tell the world that Malaysia is free of calamities like Cocksackie or the haze.

Malaysia has historical buildings, resort islands, white beaches and sun, mountains, safari parks, skyscrapers, the tallest building, multi-ethnic cultures, art, good food, shopping destinations and most of all hospitality.

A total of RM294.5 million was allocated for the tourism sector, including the provision of budget hotels, upgrading the facilities or rest-houses and promotion of tourist activities.

Promotions for the games began as early as 1995 where the game's official logo had been printed in various languages.

From 1995 to 1997, the Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board had distributed 15.3 million leaflets with the Commonwealth logo, to its main tourism markets. In 1997 alone, 40,000 special games brochures, videos, posters, folders and hats were distributed.

Also busy with preparations for the games are the hotel industry. As at July 31, 1997, there were 113,346 hotel rooms and 1,411 hotels nationwide. This is an increase from the previous year's 1,289 hotels and 85,514 rooms for the same period. Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik had said the games itself, to be held over 11 days, was not enough to draw millions of people: "A more realistic figure is between 70,000 and 80,000 people."

"Its real significance to the industry is the extra mileage Malaysia will get in terms of exposure and promotion, which we will continue to do even after the Games," he said.

The Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents, since early 1995 had been busy distributing its brochures titled "Welcome to the Kuala Lumpur '98 Games and Exciting Holiday Packages" among potential clients.

Matta offers seven packages, ranging from five days and four nights to seven days and six nights, with either the opening or closing as the anchor. Two packages include Langkawi, where the shooting event will take place.

Its president, A. Kamil, said local travel agencies, with their international partner, had been busy selling the packages, and at the same time promoting Malaysia's 12 destinations as optional choices.

The 12 destinations are Malacca, Pangkor, Penang, Langkawi, Sarawak, Kota Kinabalu, the National Park in Pahang, Terengganu, Kelantan, Johor

Baru, Danum Valley, Bera and Kenyir Lake as optional destinations.

"Sales for the tailored Commonwealth packages and for optional destinations have been very encouraging," Kamil said, adding that the packages were designed to allow flexibility to the customers.

In addition to this, Matta, the Ministry and the game's mascot, Wira, have been aggressively promoting the Commonwealth Games at all travel marts they were involved in.

The Ministry has nine sales missions lined up targeted at wholesalers, 11 consumer promotion trips with food and cultural shows, 25 exhibitions and fairs and four seminars and workshops.

In addition, it will bring seven foreign groups to Malaysia made up of travel agents and journalists.

In 1997, the Ministry took part in 52 overseas promotions where the Commonwealth Games was publicised extensively.

On the domestic front, the board has organised 15 activities such as the Malaysia Destinasi roadshow where it will visit six different places over a certain period in 1998. In 1997, it had 27 such activities.

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