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## Efforts to woo foreign tourists get boost

EFFORTS to woo foreign tourists to holiday destinations in the country received a shot in the arm yesterday with an agreement between Emkay Group and Golden Life Resort Bhd, which is partially owned by Koreans.

Aside from buying 220 residential units of Emkay's Langkawi Lagoon on the legendary island, Golden Life will also market the RM300 million development overseas, especially in South Korea, Japan and Singapore.

A memorandum of understanding for the purpose was signed by Emkay executive chairman Tan Sri Mustapha Kamal Abu Bakar and Golden Life managing director Yoon Chan-soo.

The event was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and South Korean Ambassador to Malaysia Lee Byoung-ho.

Dr Mahathir later went to Berjaya Langkawi Beach and Spa Resort in Teluk Burau to moderate the first closed-door session with heads of state and government.

He then participated in a dialogue between the heads of state and government and the media.

Yoon said Golden Life would promote the resort island and Langkawi Lagoon in particular, to "selected people from Japan and Korea who have achieved a lot of things in their life".

Golden Life is partly owned by Yoon. The majority stake in the company is held by local parties.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said the Government might consider relaxing visa requirements for tourists from Korea and other countries to allow them to spend their vacation longer.

"We are keen to help people stay a longer time in Malaysia. For that, we are prepared to relax on visa requirement, et cetera. We will try to accommodate as much as possible the needs of our visitors, including our Korean visitors.

"So, if they have any problem, please inform us directly or through their ambassadors and we will take the necessary measures to overcome the problems."

Saying that Malaysia was a "very hospitable country", Dr Mahathir said the country's lower per capita income of US\$5,000 (RM19,000) annually prior to the economic crisis compared to Korea's US\$16,000, made it attractive.

"This is one country where you can actually save money by visiting Malaysia ... The cost of living in Korea is probably higher than in Malaysia. So, if you come here to stay for one month, you don't have to spend the same amount of money in Korea.

"You can spend half or one third of your income in Malaysia and therefore save two thirds of it.

"So, you come to Malaysia to enjoy yourself and at the same time save money. And then when you go back, you can take that money and spend it in Korea. So, Korea won't lose anything and we gain something."

Dr Mahathir also said that there were many plans outlined to boost tourist arrivals to Langkawi. These include building a sophisticated village resort, and upgrading a palace built by a Hollywood film company in making Anna and the King movie.

At a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir said the Government was considering having a direct flight from Seoul to Langkawi.

"Maybe initially we may have to have a charter flight but as the number

of visitors increases, both ways, we think that we should have regular flights between Seoul and Langkawi."

Meanwhile, the Korean Ambassador said the Government's efforts to make Langkawi one of the most beautiful and popular resorts in Asia would be "more than successful".

Lee said a survey carried out by Korean tourist agents last year indicated that Langkawi was the most desired honeymoon destination by newly-wed couples in the country.

"Despite the economic downturn, some 1,500 Korean honeymooners visited this island last year ... I am confident that the Langkawi Development Authority's plan to make Langkawi one of the most beautiful and popular resorts in Asia will be more than successful."

He pointed out that co-operation between Korea and Malaysia in tourism was making a great leap, reflecting from the increase in the number of Korean visitors to the country to 70,000 annually.

In turn, more Malaysians are visiting Korea every year, he said, noting that the figure from the Malaysian side stood at 40,000 a year.

"Just as Malaysia places a growing priority in the tourism industry, Korea's efforts to promote its industry are also gaining momentum," he said.

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