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Ecotourism

FOCUS ON INBOUND TOURISTS, CHONG TELLS TOUR OPERATORS

KOTA KINABALU, May 10 (Bernama) -- Local tour operators have been reminded to refocus their business toward inbound tourists in line with efforts to reduce foreign exchange and enable domestic tourists from peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak sample various attractions in Sabah.

State Tourism, Environment, Science and Technology Development Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, who made the call, said the tradition has been that tour operators only brought people from overseas, forgetting the large number of domestic tourists.

"Sabah has multi-attractions like mountain, forest and beautiful islands... but we have not really exploited our potential, not to the fullest," he said.

Chong was speaking to reporters here today after meeting a delegation from the Sabah chapter of the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (Matta) ed by its chairman Albert Teo.

In this respect, Chong expressed hope that the state government and the private sector could work hand in hand to achieve the desired results.

"It is a question of networking and how we can work together. We must take advantage our closeness and try to reposition our industry by looking inwards," he said.

On the state government's request for cheaper Malaysia Airlines (MAS) airfare from Sabah to the peninsula, Chong said he was glad that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had taken note of the matter.

"In fact the Minister of Transport Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik had already instructed MAS to review seriously the airfare structures.

"MAS have a lot of packages but there are a lot of conditions attached and this neutralized the effect," he said.

Chong also described Borneo Eco Tours' success in winning the Travelasia Breakthrough Eco-Awards 1999 as an honour for Sabah and a boost for eco-tourism promotion.

Borneo Eco Tours was selected the best tour operator in one of four categories by Venture Publishing Pte Ltd during last month's PATA Travel Mart in Singapore.

He said Sabah was also chosen to host the week-long World Ecotourism Conference and field seminars here beginning Oct 17.

Some 300 participants world-wide, including 19 tourism experts, are expected to attend the conference.

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