

27/09/1999

Langkawi turning into a haven for blue water sailors

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LANGKAWI, Sun. - Langkawi has not only become a popular holiday destination but is also gaining a reputation as a paradise for the yachtsman.

The island, once commonly referred to as the resting place of spirits, has become a favourite destination of luxury boat and yacht owners, Langkawi Yacht Club general manager Michael Panter-Brick said.

Besides locals, boat and yacht owners from Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand and even Europe now made more frequent and longer stopovers in Langkawi en route to islands in south Thailand, especially Phuket.

They found Langkawi interesting for a variety of reasons.

"Here they can put to test their navigational skills because of the many scattered islands in the area.

"Added attractions include the duty-free goods they can buy and marina facilities like we have at this club," he said. It was also cheaper to sail in Langkawi than elsewhere.

Speaking to the New Straits Times, Panter-Brick said the club marina could accommodate 60 boats, including deep-hull boats with large anchorage bays and mega yachts up to 60 metres in length.

Services include a refuelling station, power outlets, fresh water ducts and 24-hour security.

To be officially opened by the Sultan of Kedah on Wednesday, the club is owned and developed jointly by Nilam Timur Sdn Bhd - a member of the Melewar Group of Companies - and Langkawi Development Authority.

Panter-Brick said boat owners would no longer have to sail to Singapore or Phuket for major repairs and maintenance once such a dockyard is to be built here next year.

To be managed by the club, the dockyard will be constructed at the Tanjong Lembong jetty near the southern tip of Langkawi.

Land for the dockyard has been acquired and work is expected to begin soon.

Once completed, the dockyard will provide service to boat and yacht owners who need to carry out major repairs.

Normally, the costs involved in sailing and repairing boats and yachts are high in places like Singapore, Phuket or even Port Klang and Lumut.

The incentive announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the 1999 Budget makes it attractive.

Dr Mahathir had said the Government wanted to make Langkawi a prominent centre for the repair and maintenance of leisure boats and yachts in this region.

The Government would grant a five-year tax exemption for such activities on the island.

Dr Mahathir said Langkawi was well known as a tourist destination and could attract leisure boat and yacht owners. They would find it even more attractive if there was a modern centre to repair and service their craft.

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