

19 FEB 1999

MALAYSIA-BOOK VILLAGE

MALAYSIA'S BOOK VILLAGE IN LANGKAWI GAINS POPULARITY

By: Leslean Arshad

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 19 (Bernama) -- Kampung Buku Malaysia, Malaysia's book village, in Lubuk Semilang, Langkawi is gaining popularity as an attractive tourist destination with an estimate of more 150,000 people having visited it, of which 25 percent were foreigners.

That number, however, is insignificant compared to the estimate of more than 10 million book lovers who travel every year to visit book villages worldwide.

In view of its good prospects, there are plans for Kampung Buku Malaysia, which currently comprises six houses of different Malay architecture, to expand by 10-fold, said its director Hashim Ismail.

So far, only 12 hectares had been used for Kampung Buku and there are about 300-ha which are yet to be developed. Hashim disclosed that the eventual target is to have 60 houses under its stable.

Kampung Buku, which was opened on Dec 3, 1997 by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is situated in the middle of Langkawi amidst verdant surroundings at the foot of Gunung Raya. A clean, rock-strewn stream runs through the book village to provide book lovers a tranquil environment.

The Malaysia Book Village is included as part of the International Book Villages and Book Towns Movement.

Other book villages and book towns include Hay-on-Wye in Wales, Redu Village du Livre in Belgium, Bredevoort Boekenstad in The Netherlands and Fjaerland in Norway, to name a few.

Hashim said with more houses to be built in stages, a greater selection of books are likely to be stocked and offered in the future for book lovers.

"We need to attract book lovers here," he said, adding that book lovers should not miss Kampung Buku during a visit to Langkawi as it offers a wide selection of books.

"The more we read, the more knowledge we gain and that is useful for us," Hashim said, emphasising the importance of having such a book village in Malaysia.

The six houses, he explained, were filled with local books as well as those from abroad covering a wide range of subjects and languages - Bahasa Melayu, European languages and East Asian languages.

The "Pok Rafeah" house is dedicated to Tun Daim Zainuddin's mother who had contributed to the project. This house offers books on travel and sports as well as novels in English and the European languages. There is also an internet and multimedia centre.

The "Noel Anselot" house is named after the founder of Redu Village du Livre. This house sells a selection of local and international magazines as well as children and religious books.

The "Richard Booth" house is named in honour of "King" Richard Booth, the founder of the first book village in Hay-on-Wye in Wales. It sells old and antiquarian books in English and offers the one-village-one-product scheme from Japan, Taiwan, China, the Philippines, South Korea and Malaysia.

The "Henk Ruessink" house is named after the founder of the Bredevoort Boekenstad in the Netherlands. It houses the Popular Book Co which specialises in East Asian books.

Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka occupies one of the houses and sells books on

Malaysia and in the Malay language while Darulfikir occupies the remaining unit. It specialises in second-hand and antiquarian books in Arabic covering Arabic literature, Islam and the Al-Quran.

The book village, which adopts a "buy and sell" approach, offers a good range of second-hand, rare and antiquarian books and some are tagged at reasonable prices, said Hashim.

Hashim, however, did not rule out the fact that book sales were affected by the economic downturn.

"When the economic crisis started to hit us... people shied away. Suddenly, it became very quiet," he said, adding that each house sometimes had difficulty making sales of even RM20 a day.

However, things had improved of late, he enthused, adding that sales had picked up and each house was sometimes able to achieve about RM500 in daily book sales.

Kampung Buku is one of the many brainchildren of Kedah Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid.

Sanusi, who is often vocal in promoting the reading habit, was quoted as saying "if possible, every Malaysian should read a book, anywhere... and use their free time to read".

He feels Kampung Buku is an excellent tourist attraction. "We want book lovers, near and far, to realise that there is a book village in Langkawi," said Sanusi.

"When they come here, they will see a totally different book village. Its natural and unique ambience is enhanced by the lush and beautiful surroundings," Sanusi added. -- BERNAMA

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