

11 DEC 2000

Feature-Labuan

LANDSCAPING LABUAN INTO AN ALLURING PARK

By: Haryati Abdul Karim

LABUAN: Despite its rapid developments as an international offshore financial centre, the Federal Territory of Labuan are taking great pain to prevent the duty-free island from becoming another concrete jungle.

The planners are instead concentrating their efforts to re-invent Labuan into a garden city that promises a fresh, brighter and comfortable way of life to the residents and visitors, in tune to its billing as a top tourist destination in the Sabah waters.

These moves entail the planting of more trees, flowering plants and landscaping work -- all to change the face of the island by the Labuan Development Authority (LDA) in a span of three years.

LDA general manager Datuk Mohd Noor Mokhtar said efforts to make Labuan a very attractive island through unique landscaping is one of the ways to draw more tourists here.

He said the island has huge potential in terms of tourism as it has a lot to offer, such as a relaxed and secure lifestyle, good infrastructure and beautiful natural environment.

Labuan also is known for its World War II relics, which include a sunken warship. The island is also a haven for anglers because of the teeming fish found in many fishing spots.

"With all these many attractions available, the island's beauty will be further enhanced if it is synergised with good landscaping," he said.

PM SPARKS LABUAN BEAUTIFICATION PROJECT

On the encouragement of the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during a visit to Labuan in 1998, LDA is beautifying the island in a big way to make it the most beautiful island in the world.

A working committee had been formed to implement the work plans and landscaping in stages. The committee is chaired by the Director General of the National Landscape Department, Datuk Ismail Ngah, while other members include officers from the Town and Rural Planning Department and several other government agencies.

The landscaping of the island is mapped out in in the Labuan Landscape Master Plan, which covers all landscape projects.

"The Landscape Master Plan contains detailed planning right from the type of plants and where they should be planted," he said.

Mohd Noor said so far, several landscape schemes have been built while some others were expected to be completed soon.

In the first phase, the landscaping work was done in strategic places like the approach road from the Labuan Airport to the town centre.

MARLIN MADE THE SYMBOL

The much-sought-after gamefish marlin was chosen as a symbol in a fountain at the airport entrance to project Labuan's identity as an island.

At the same time, more gazebos and fountains will be built around the town while walkways would be laid with tiles and lighted by antic street lamps.

Car parks which usually are tarred would instead be laid with coloured tiles to give a brighter admosphere to Labuan town.

Mohd Noor said the second phase of the beautification works will involve the landscaping of the approach road to the branch campus of Universiti Malaysia Sabah.

Overall, Labuan Island's landscape concept will be marine-based, to reflect the six surrounding islands in the South China Sea.

Even the street lights would bear the shape of some marine life such as fish, he added.

On plant species, he said they would be chosen to project the image of the island.

"It is important the trees and plants chosen in the Labuan Master Plan are done carefully to take into consideration several factors besides beautification of the environment," he explained.

MORE THAN 100 SPECIES TO BE PLANTED

Of the more than 100 species to be planted, the "Tecoma" specie or commonly known as the "Orchid of Hong Kong" has been proposed by the Landscape Department as the tree to identify Labuan with. Excluded are poisonous plants.

Small herbs will however be given priority because many of them have medicinal value, said Mohd Noor.

Almost all the plants chosen, including the "trumpet tree" could be found in the country, while the "Ironwood tree" were brought from Indonesia.

He is confident that the landscaping and beautification of the town with timber trees and flowering plants will have a positive effect on the surroundings of the Labuan Island because they will fill up idle land, while the trees would have a cooling effect on the island.

He is also confident that these efforts would be successful because enforcement officers of the Labuan Town Council are patrolling the island regularly to prevent vandalism.

"Life in Labuan Island will be similar to living in a park filled with aromatic, colourful flowering plants and a green and fresh environment," said Mohd Noor, of the three-year project. -- Bernama

HAK AM DSR KGO