

Eco-tourism calls for conservation

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Sustainable development is imperative, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon: Malaysia will continue to ensure that the tourism industry is managed on the concept of sustainable development, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said the growing popularity and demand for nature tourism or eco-tourism had made sustainable development imperative for the tourism industry.

"In Malaysia, the government has advised those intending to develop eco-tourism projects to adopt a responsible attitude and be sensitive towards environmental conservation," he said.

Mahathir was speaking at the opening of the 50th Pacific Asia Travel Association (Pata) annual conference here.

The prime minister said tourism represents an important force for peace, by foster-



ing friendship between peoples and communities.

Therefore, tourism should be conducted in harmony with the attributes and traditions of the host communities, with due respect for their laws and customs.

Mahathir said governments in host countries should ensure the safety of tourists, maintain political stability and facilitate tourist movements by minimising regulations for visitors.

On the tourism sector in Malaysia, he said it is a major foreign exchange earner,

ranking second after manufacturing.

In 1999, the country registered a total of 7.93 million arrivals and earned RM12.3 billion (US\$3.24 billion) in receipts.

Last year, he said, Malaysia achieved a record of 10.22 million tourist arrivals, ranking third after China and Hongkong and earning RM18.8 billion (US\$4.95 billion) in revenue.

Earlier, Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said the domestic and regional tourism industry will benefit if the people change their mindset and see that taking a vacation is a necessity.

There is great potential for tourism in the Asia Pacific and the challenge is to persuade the region's 3.8 billion people to go for holidays, he said.