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Country Heights aims to make its mark in Sarawak tourism

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LAND and property developer Country Heights Holdings Bhd has identified Sarawak as the state where it aims to become a leading player in the tourism sector.

Country Heights founder and managing director Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew said the company will develop Sarawak's tourism sector slowly and turn the state into a tourist destination, similar to its property venture in Peninsular Malaysia.

"We believe Sarawak's tourism and property sector holds much potential with plenty of room to grow in the near future," he told Business Times in Sarawak recently.

Lee said the company aims to contribute to Malaysia's tourism sector by bringing in tourists from all over the world.

Earlier, Lee announced details of the second Malaysia Flower Show which will be held at the company's Borneo Highlands Resort from August 30 to September 30.

The event will be launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Last year, the event attracted 12,000 domestic and overseas visitors. Lee is optimistic that the figures will double this year.

"We want to promote Malaysia, particularly Sarawak and perhaps one day Sabah, to international levels and emulate world-class flower shows such as Chelsea Flower Show, Melbourne Flower Show and the Buchard Garden in Vancouver."

He also noted that the world's golf tourism industry is worth US\$10 billion (US\$1 = RM3.80).

"It will be a great opportunity for Malaysia if we can tap that market," said Lee, who is an ardent golfer and also responsible for organising and bringing the World Cup Golf to Malaysia for the first time in 1999.

He said Borneo Highlands Resort, a golfers' haven, can play a role in promoting Malaysia's tourism industry.

In 1994 the Sarawak Land Custody and Development Authority (LCDA) offered Lee the opportunity to develop the RM500 million resort, in which Country Heights holds a 70 per cent stake.

The 5,000ha resort is expected to be fully completed by 2015.

"I have developed this resort to promote Sarawak, Malaysia and also as a long-term income generator for the company. It was never meant to make immediate profits.

"It is normal for a business to lose for the first 10 years, but profits will return in the time after that," Lee said.

He added that this was his way of contributing to the country, similar to the transformation of an abandoned and once the world's biggest open cast tin mining facility in Sungai Besi, near Kuala Lumpur.

"I'm not developing and selling property per se; I'm also selling a lifestyle which emphasises healthy living without damaging the environment," he added.

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