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Feature-PATA

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, PATA!

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KUALA LUMPUR: Today is the 50th birthday of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA). Congratulations, PATA, on your historic golden anniversary!

And Kuala Lumpur, the vibrant capital city of Malaysia and the pulse of the nation's political, economic and social life, welcomes industry leaders and delegates from over 40 countries who are here to discuss the challenges facing the travel and tour industry and share experiences on PATA's proud past.

Fifty years ago when the founders of the organisation met in Hawaii to form PATA, the Asia Pacific region was a very different place. Malaysia was then known as Malaya in 1951.

At that time, most international travel was by sea. It was time consuming and expensive, and there was little in the way of facilities and infrastructure to accommodate tourists in the Pacific or in Asia.

The founders of PATA had a vision to build a vibrant commercial tourism sector in the Pacific region in the turbulent years after World War II.

In spite of political and social upheaval in the region in the late 1940s and early 1950s, PATA looked to a new dawn of travel and trade in the Pacific and it was founded on a vision of peace and cooperation among the various member countries.

#### COMFORT IS THE NORM

Today, half a century later, tourists and business people from all parts of the globe are enjoying the fruits of the vision and toil of the founders.

Member countries too are reaping the benefits of the tourist dollar, excellent facilities, consistent safety and comfort that is provided today by the travel and tourism industry across the diverse region.

This success is testament to fifty years of cooperation and development.

And this is not the first time that Malaysia had been cast in the role of PATA host; she had welcomed the PATA Annual Conference and Travel Mart delegates in 1972 and 1986.

When PATA first entered the scene in Malaysia, the country was aiming for a hundred thousand visitors a year. Last year, 10.2 million tourists visited the country, compared with just over 700,000 in 1972.

In the fifteen years since KL last hosted the PATA Annual Conference, this vibrant of Asian city has undergone a remarkable transformation. Among them is the world's tallest building, the tallest flagpole and the tallest communications tower.

Incoming tourists now have more choices of places and things to see, in different parts of the country.

#### WHAT'S COOKING FOR THE DELEGATES

The theme chosen for the conference, "Proud Past - Promising Future", sets the mood for the golden celebration as PATA reflects on its past achievements and future challenges in the ever-changing world of the travel and tour industry.

Presiding over the official conference opening is Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Following his address, more than 100 live performers will present a spectacular multimedia cultural show, welcoming

all delegates to "Malaysia - Truly Asia".

Last night, Minister of Culture, Arts and Tourism, Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir had hosted the "Welcome to Malaysia" reception/dinner at Esplanade KLCC Park, here.

The conference programme features a powerful line-up of 23 high-profile speakers from seven countries. Ambassador L.W. "Bill" Lane, Jr., a founding member of PATA, will deliver an anniversary address on the association's 'Proud Past.'

Educational opportunities abound during the opening and closing keynotes, two plenary sessions and eight breakout sessions, where delegates will hear from representatives of companies and organisations, among others, Boeing Commercial Airplanes, Marriot International, Megatrends Asia and TIME Asia.

In addition to these educational sessions, the golden jubilee event will feature a full slate of anniversary activities and social functions.

For example, Ms Fathmath Elysha, the nine-year-old winner of PATA's 50th Anniversary Children's Poster contest, will travel from the Maldives via Malaysia Airlines to accept her award during the opening session.

Travelmedia.com will premiere a retrospective 50th anniversary video presentation, while the editors of "The Story of PATA" will unveil the second edition of the book where all delegates will receive a free copy.

Mr Ed Fuller, president of Marriot International, will present PATA with the Marriott International Tourism Leadership award, to recognise the association's 50 years of leadership in the areas of sustainable tourism, fostering sound environmental policies and practices, and cultural preservation.

PATA is the first association of its kind to receive this award; Prince Charles, Costa Rica and King Abdullah of Jordan are among the past recipients of the award.

PATA's past leaders will be recognised as members of the 50th Anniversary Roll of Honour.

PATA's Gold Awards, sponsored by the Macau Government Tourist office, recognise exceptional achievement in the areas of marketing and promotion, heritage and culture, education, journalism and environmental tourism.

Delegates can dance the night away during the PATA Annual Industry Dinner (PAID), a social highlight of every PATA Annual Conference, at the Istana Hotel, tonight.

Under the theme "50 Golden Years", Tunku Iskandar Tunku Abdullah, chairman of the organising committee, promises a great evening for all who attend.

On Wednesday, delegates are invited to the National Geographic traveler magazine's luncheon and screening of an acclaimed multimedia presentation entitled "Passages: A Journey Through Asia and the Pacific", by Mr Ian Lloyd.

And all delegates will receive a commemorative CD recording of the Peoples of the Pacific song, performed by the Honolulu Boys Choir.

Then, there is a special auction for the industry leaders and delegates to practise what they preach - protect endangered sea turtles, conserve ancient heritage site or teach sustainable land practices to aboriginal communities.

They would have the chance to participate in PATA's Foundation Silent Auction, which raises funds for the development of these and other cultural heritage, educational and environmental programmes in the Pacific Asia region.

They are invited to take a break from business, stop by the auction and bid against their colleagues where they will end up with treasures to take home, along with the satisfaction of having contributed to a charitable

cause.

Donated items include accomodations, advertising, airline tickets, artwork, car rentals, cruises, handicraft, merchandise and tour packages.

A limited number of travel related dot-com companies can gain extraordinary visibility within the Pacific Asia travel industry by participating in PATA's E-Marketplace at the 50th Annual Conference.

The E-Marketplace aims to help PATA members to learn how to use the latest technology to enhance their businesses.

Finally, the delegates are also offered the chance to discover more of their hosts through the pre- and post-conference tours that will showcase a fascinating kaleidoscope of interesting and colourful places, peoples, customs, art and delightful cuisine in Malaysia! -- Bernama

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