

# Ties with China can boost our tourism

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**D**EPUTY Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen is fond of telling Chinese tourism promoters that she has her roots in Beijing.

Both her parents came from Beijing and she still has relatives in the Chinese capital. This introduction always helps to break the ice.

Then she tells them about the Malaysian climate which is warm the whole year around, unlike most parts of China which can be very cold.

"The key to doing business in China is contacts and relations. With its people getting richer, the tourism market in China is today the biggest.

"China has a population of one billion and last year, 10 million Chinese went overseas," she said.

These days, Dr Ng has another anecdote to tell her listeners when she goes on her promotion tours to China.

Dr Ng said the Chinese believed that this year, the Year of the Water Horse, would bring many obstacles and difficulties as the horse must sometimes ride against the current.

Singapore, Dr Sun and his delegation from the Shenyang Tourism Bureau visited Sabah and Sarawak to study the new eco-tourism packages for their people.

"The government is involved directly in tourism and it is our job to see if the places are suitable for our people," said Dr Sun, adding that the efforts made by Dr Ng to promote Malaysia was the turning point for their decision to choose the country as their people's tourist destination.

"For a population of our size, it would not be a problem to bring at least three million people to visit Malaysia annually," he added.

Dr Ng said the bureau had promised to increase their charter flight from Shenyang in May, October and December, but she hoped that eventually there will be direct flights from Shenyang weekly.

The ministry had been trying to get airlines, including Malaysia Airlines, Air China and China Southern Airlines, to increase flights in a bid to attract half a million tourists from China this year and one million by 2006.

There are now direct flights to

She said it is, however, a good year to travel as the horse is expected to be spirited, and promises to rear and give a kick to tourism.

Thus, Dr Ng said Malaysia has the advantage because many Chinese would like to visit a "horse country."

"Horse in Chinese is 'Ma' and therefore 'Ma-lay-sia' is known as the 'Horse country'," she said.

She added that Malaysia had another advantage since the leader of the country was also a "Ma," referring to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"The Chinese will want to visit the 'Horse Country,' which is led by 'Mr Horse' - it will definitely bring good luck," said Dr Ng.

During the recent Chinese New Year celebrations, at least 3,000 tourists from various destinations in China and Hong Kong arrived through the KL International Airport.

On Chinese New Year eve, Dr Ng greeted the inaugural flight from Shenyang, which carried a group of 290 tourists included a delegation lead by Shenyang deputy mayor Dr Xianjian Sun.

While the rest of the group spent 10 days visiting Malacca, Penang, Genting Highlands and

Malaysia from four cities - Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Xiamen.

She said most Chinese tourists would also like to visit Singapore or Thailand while they were here but would return to Malaysia to take their flights home.

"This is also why multiple entry visas are important in order for them to leave and come back to continue their vacation here," she said.

The ministry had also looked into the problems of obtaining visas to ensure smooth sailing for the arrival of the tourists into the country.

The major problem, however, is still the lack of flights from major cities in China. She said that last year, the total number of seats in direct flights from China to Singapore was 1.3 million, and from China to Thailand one million. In comparison, total seats in China-Malaysia flights were only 400,000.

Statistics show a steady rise in the number of tourists from China to Malaysia over the years from 170,000 in 1998 to 450,000 last year.

"We have to solve this problem, otherwise, we are going to lose out to our neighbours," she said.