

Ng: Tourism promotion for Asean as a package

STAR 12 DEC 2002

By SIM LEOI LEOI

PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia wants to promote Asean destinations as a whole package, rather than have member countries compete against each other for tourism revenue.

Deputy Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen said Malaysia hoped to promote Asean in the manner tourists expect of Europe.

"When one travels to Europe, one does not just visit England or France, but a series of countries in a packaged tour. That is how we want to project Asean in our future tourism promotion drives.

"Not only will there be greater ease for people in Asean countries to travel in the region under a move to do away with visa requirements soon, but Asean members will also carry out joint promotion drives and joint tour packages.

"For example, we found our "double gold" tour package to be extremely popular with Chinese tourists in Guangzhao, which offers visits to Sabah via Kota Kinabalu, and Sarawak, with a stopover in Brunei," she said in an interview here yesterday.

Dr Ng was elaborating on the tourism agreement signed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad with other heads of government at the eighth Asean Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, last month.

The agreement aimed to standardise travel and immigra-

tion procedures, including eliminating visa requirements, so that people can travel within the region with minimal fuss.

She represented the ministry at the signing.

Tourism is a major revenue earner for Asean members, bringing in an estimated US\$26bil (RM78bil) annually for businesses in the region. Some 41 million tourists visited Asean last year.

Dr Ng said such a measure under the agreement was necessary as many countries, especially those outside Asia, tend to lump Malaysia with other Asean members.

"During the Bali bombings in October, countries like the United States and Australia lumped Malaysia together with Indonesia even though Malaysia was safe.

"Under this agreement, Malaysia will extend more co-operation to other Asean countries, especially in sharing information on tourism statistics and ensuring greater security in the region," she said.

Asked whether Asean had set any target date for the removal of visa requirements, especially for countries like Vietnam and Myanmar, Dr Ng said: "We have not set any target, but member countries are aware that this will be one of the areas to work on.

"We will soon set up a committee comprising tourism ministries' representatives from Asean countries to work out the details under the agreement."