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Cable Car (EMBARGO: Wednesday/Oct 23 - with pix)  
LANGKAWI CABLE CAR TO TAKE TOURISM TO NEW HEIGHTS

A Special Report By: Hammad Wariman

LANGKAWI: Langkawi's aquamarine waters and sandy beaches will have an additional allure come November when visitors can have a bird's eye view of the island and the greenery of its Machinchang range.

This is because the long-awaited cable car service will operate on Nov 1.

A brainchild of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the cable car will take visitors to the top of Gunung Machinchang where they can also see the Thai island of Tarutao and Satun coastline.

The Prime Minister himself had mooted the idea for the project when he flew over Gunung Machinchang in a helicopter during his visit in 1999.

The RM46-million cable car project connecting an integrated shopping complex, Oriental Village in Burau Bay with Gunung Machinchang is a joint venture project by Dopple-Mayer of Austria and a local company.

Visitors will not only get to hear the tale of Gunung Machinchang but will also see the beauty of its geological park which has the potential to be classified as a world heritage park.

#### VIEW FROM THE TOP

The 15-minute journey up the mountain is definitely not for the faint-hearted but the scenery of the 4,167 hectares of virgin jungle of the Machinchang forest reserve and waterfalls of the legendary Seven Wells (Telaga Tujuh) is a feast for the eyes.

An interesting and rare feature of the cable car is the "angle station" half way up the mountain where the gondolas make a 45-degree turn to reach the top for more viewing platforms and walkways.

Visitors will be given the option of getting down at both stations to walk about and enjoy the scenery.

"Such natural beauty and monuments are seldom seen anywhere else in this combination," said Langkawi Cable Car Sdn Bhd general manager Teoh Cheng Kung.

A return ride costs RM15 for an adult and RM10 per child.

#### ENGINEERING FEAT

Teoh said the selected gondola cable car system, allowing for long span of over 900 metres and the "angle station" were the only realistic alternative to fulfil the stringent conditions of Machinchang. The other options were either environmentally or technically incompatible.

During the early stage of the project, construction materials had to be lifted to the mountain work sites by helicopters in combination with an auxiliary working cable as both methods were the least intrusive and most environment-friendly, he added.

Teoh said the master plan for Gunung Machinchang united all the attractive features together with the cable car system into one coherent concept where it allows visitors discreet and controlled access to:

- \* several 360-degree panorama platforms;
- \* viewing galleries at dramatic rock features;
- \* a science museum with multimedia and interactive exhibits;
- \* nurseries, and
- \* wildlife observation towers and "animal showcases".

The second phase of development will include restaurants, recreational facilities, suspended bridges across Panther Valley and at the edge of the

Funnel, two natural features of the park.

Project consultant Dr Peter A. Wyss said the system used state-of-the-art technology with emphasis on safety which included four back-up systems to ensure the gondolas could be brought back to the base station at any time.

"Visitors are assured of a safe, fun and unforgettable ride in the cable cars," he said.

He said the distance between the base station and the top of Gunung Machinchang is 2.2 km and visitors would be some 70 meters above the rainforest of the Machinchang Range.

There are three stations for the cable car, one at the top and the other on the eastern bridge beside the ground station at the Oriental Village.

There are three points for passengers to catch the cable car - at the ground, middle and peak stations.

#### THE GONDOLAS

All in, the 35 gondolas have a maximum capacity to ferry 700 passengers per hour.

Dr Wyss said the suspension towers placed between the middle and the top station are 905 metres high.

The project has a certified EIA report.

He said Gunung Machinchang has no foot access due to its steepness, therefore it is largely preserved in its natural state and the best approach up is through the cable car.

Proposed to be named the "Machinchang Nature Park", Dr Wyss said it has high educational value for geological studies and an even higher botany value with a sprout of untouched wild orchids growing through every facet of the mountain.

He expects 70 percent of the visitors to Langkawi to patronise the cable car.

Dr Wyss who led a consultant team to survey the mountain in May 2000, said they had uncovered its potential by 10 folds and the project can become a major addition to the existing list of tourism products in the legendary island.

Gunung Machinchang which has the rock fossils called sandstones, is one of the oldest in the country and it has a crater and two position peaks with an awesome view of the island resort and its surrounding 99 sister islands.

Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir during his visit to the project recently said the cable car service is poised to become Langkawi's premier attraction and is a "must visit" destination.

He said a mini rock museum showcasing a variety of rocks found on the mountain that are about 500 million years old, among the oldest in the region, will be built to tell its history.

#### DUTY-FREE SHOPPING FACILITIES

The cable car ground station connected to the Oriental Village integrated shopping complex or the "retail theatre" complex will provide a high quality retail environment to make Langkawi a premier tourist destination.

Oriental Village was specially designed and crafted to provide a new concept in resort duty-free shopping in line with the government aims to attract more tourists here and establish the island with a reputation of being the most best duty-free shopping area in the region.

More than 30 speciality outlets will also offer a diverse variety and

range of brands and products.

Each outlets has been themed and designed to provide a unique and stimulating shopping experience, complemented with fine to moderate dining restaurants selling Chinese, Thai and Malay specialities.

The soft launch of the cable car project which was held for six days beginning last Thursday, was well received with the official opening by Dr Mahathir planned for a later date. -- Bernama

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