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Feature-Tenom (with pix)

COFFEE TO BREW A "BORNEO PARADISE GARDEN" IN REMOTE TENOM

By: Jackson Sawatan

TENOM (Sabah): It was the aroma or rather the talk of the coffee of Tenom that led a top tourism official to visit this remote district of Sabah.

While savouring the excellent brew, the official also saw the tourism potential of the remote area.

Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Paduka Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir had heard about the excellent quality of Tenom coffee and recently found time to visit Yit Foh Coffee Factory in this little town.

Factory manager Alex Yong, in his briefing, told the minister and his entourage that the factory has been in operation since 1960, only it is now housed in a new and bigger premise.

And the factory continues to maintain the traditional method of roasting the beans over wood fire to bring out the full aroma of the Robusta coffee which has for years brought fame to Tenom as a "coffee capital" of Sabah.

"Tenom coffee is undoubtedly famous because it tastes good and very aromatic...I come here after hearing about its speciality," said Abdul Kadir.

Tenom is about three hours' drive from Kota Kinablu and visitors need to pass through the Crocker Mountain range and this is where Abdul Kadir saw the tourism potential of the district.

TENOM IS MORE THAN COFFEE

Abdul Kadir said besides coffee, the district has indeed plenty of attractions, either in the beauty of its natural environment or the culture of its people.

Visitors would have stay longer to take in the interesting sights and Tenom can boldly promote itself as a "Borneo paradise park".

According to Tenom's District Officer, Amat Mohd Yusof, a consultant firm from Ireland had done studies on Tenom and Kudat last year to specifically look at the suitability of these two districts so that they can be developed under the rural tourism sector.

"After the studies, the consultant firm had recommended that the tourism sector in Tenom takes the theme 'Borneo Paradise Park' since the Sabah Agricultural Park which is in the district is considered the best of such parks in Southeast Asia," he said.

The park's concept will be extended to the nearby areas so that it covers the whole of Tenom district to create the best corridor of rural tourism in Sabah, Amat said.

Besides the Sabah Agricultural Park, other tourist attractions in the district are Tenom town, itself a nutshell of rural economic life, the Kalang Waterfall with its 14 "steps", rafting along Sungai Padas, the Murut Cultural Centre, the mysterious stone carvings of Batu Berukir Ulu Tomani, the fort of Antenom, a Murut warrior.

For those who wish to enjoy the beauty of the tropical rainforest, they can board a vintage train from Tenom to Beaufort which travels along the bank of Sungai Padas and in between the hills and slopes.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the train ride would transport one back in time, evoking images of ancient greenery, stone axes and spears.

AGRICULTURAL PARK

Those with limited time, can just visit the Sabah Agricultural Park in Lagud Seberang, about 12 km from this town.

Prime Minister Datuk Dr Mahathir Mohamad had inaugurated the park in March 2001 in conjunction with his two-day visit to Sabah that year. At a press conference at the end of his visit, the Prime Minister patiently fielded questions, mostly on politics and a new Chief Minister for Sabah.

After responding to all the questions, the prime minister chided the reporters present for none had asked him about the Sabah Agricultural Park which he had just officially opened.

"All of you ask about is politics....do you know that here in Sabah there is an agricultural park which is the most beautiful in the world?" asked Dr Mahathir.

Obviously the park is not merely about agriculture. In it is a local orchid centre with a huge collection of the plants which are on the verge of extinction, a honey centre, exotic plants such as the giant water lily whose leaves can withstand the weight of a 20kg child.

THE SWALLOWS TOWN

If a visitor reaches Tenom close at dusk, they should not feel despair and instead take a stroll through the town to see swallows by the thousands seeking a place to roost among the trees, electric and telephone lines and wherever they can perch for the night.

After two days surveying the town and its surrounding areas, Abdul Kadir was happy to see that Tenom has plenty of attractions which can make the district a leader in the creation of an eco-tourism zone in Sabah's interior covering Tenom, Keningau and Tambunan.

"This is a beautiful place and has all it takes to make the area a tourism centre of international quality," he enthused.

He said efforts to upgrade the infrastructure must be speeded up, to unlock the doors of tourism in that zone.

An obvious drawback, he said, is the fact that the town is too far from the state capital, hence tourists might be less interested to come all the way for a day-long visit.

The 193-km journey by car from Kota Kinabalu to here takes almost three hours while a train ride takes about four hours for a 173-km journey.

But all these will soon change.

"I was told that efforts to upgrade the Kimanis-Keningau road, which is a short cut to Keningau and Tenom district, had already been approved. Once the road is completed, the journey will only take less than two hours," he said.

With Tenom being created as another popular tourist destination in Sabah, it will certainly endorsed this "Land Below The Wind" as a state with plenty of natural wealth, from the peak of Mount Kinabalu to the bottom of the sea which is a haven for scuba divers. --Bernama

JS RT KGO