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Feature-Tioman

#### DUTY FREE PULAU TIOMAN DIVERSIFIES ITS TOURISM ACTIVITIES

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PULAU TIOMAN; -- Since being declared a duty free island last September, Pulau Tioman acknowledged as one of the 10 most beautiful islands in the world, continues to earn a name for itself in the international tourist map.

Apart from its natural beauty, several other initiatives have also been taken to enhance its new status -- new facilities have been provided and a diverse tourism package involving both the island's authorities and the local folks had been arranged.

General Manager of the Tioman Development Authority (TDA) Hashim Mat Tahir said these measures were being taken so that Tioman could compete successfully with other duty-free islands or tourist destinations both in Malaysia and overseas.

He said the TDA had built 14 shophouses at Kampung Salang to enable the islanders to carry out business activities.

The government was also studying a proposal to build a marina at Kampung Tekek for the convenience of boats and yachts which made a stopover at the island.

#### AN ATTRACTION TO YACHTSMEN

He said yachtsmen had been long attracted by Tioman's natural beauty. However in the absence of a place to berth, their desire to stop over went unrealised.

Only a small number of these seafarers made an attempt to land while others just passed by because of the lack of berthing facilities.

Hashim felt that the building of the marina would spur economic activities among the local folks most of whom were focused on the tourist industry.

The TDA was working towards implementing facilities for sports such as mountain climbing, camping and jungle trekking.

"The National Parks and Wildlife Department put forward an eco-tourism plan in 2000 and based on that various projects had been implemented on the island," he said.

This had enabled the people who previously concentrated on the sea to move up to the land and become retail store and souvenir shop operators and tourist guides, he said.

#### TOUR GUIDES

The TDA has so far managed to train five local islanders as tourist guides and obtained the necessary licences for them.

They were now certified as tourist guides and could work both on land and the sea.

The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad declared Tioman, covering 13,360 hectares (134 square kilometres) and 36 nautical miles off Tanjung Gemok, Rompin, as a duty free island in January last year.

Pulau Tioman has 3,201 people residing in villages such as Kampung Salang, Air Batang, Tekek, Mukut, Lanting, Nipah and Juara.

Most of the local folks are involved in the tourism industry in one way or the other -- run chalets and resorts or work in them, sell food or operate tourist boats.

Tourists can fly to Tioman on Berjaya Air which operates chartered flights or take the ferry boat from the Tanjung Gemok Jetty at Mersing,

Johor.

#### FREE OF POLLUTION

In line with its aspiration to turn Tioman into an ever clean duty free island, free of air and water pollution, the TDA had set up an incinerator at Kampung Tekek.

However the facility which has a capacity to burn 6,000 tonnes of garbage daily is unable to cope with the 11,000 tonnes collected daily from all the villages on the island.

"To overcome this problem at this early stage, we handle only 5,000 tonnes at the incinerator while the rest is disposed off on the mainland at Endau," he said.

As this operation involved a lot of expenditure and inconvenienced Endau folks, TDA would apply to have another incinerator at Kampung Tekek, he said.

The TDA was cleaning up the rivers on the island of garbage and tree branches which were restricting the smooth flow of water.

The cleaning works would be undertaken in stages and moribund wooden bridges would be replaced and roads would also be upgraded, he said.

#### EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Hashim said there were two schools one a primary school and the other a secondary in Kampung Tekek and two other primary schools at Kampung Juara and Kampung Mukut.

Work is in progress on a residential school and teachers quarters at Kampung Tekek.

Locals are confident that Pulau Tioman with its own unique location and attractions can rival other duty free island resorts in the country.

-- BERNAMA

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