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Langkawi-Tourism
LANGKAWI REMAINS A TOURIST MAGNET

By: Zulkafli Ibrahim

LANGKAWI, Jan 20 (Bernama) -- The island of Langkawi, despite fears that it would enter a dark era after Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's retirement, has proved the skeptics wrong by remaining a tourist magnet.

It is no secret that the development of Langkawi as a world-class tourist destination was the former Prime Minister's pet project, and many thought it would be over for the island when he retired.

However, based on encouraging figures of tourist arrivals to this duty-free island, it is a strong indication that the infrastructures developed and promoted during Dr Mahathir's administration were more than enough to ensure Langkawi remains competitive as a tourist haven.

Throughout last year, Langkawi received close to 2 million tourists compared to 1.9 million in 2002.

Langkawi Development Authority's (Lada) Public Relations Officer Ramizi Hassan told Bernama, 1.98 million local and foreign tourists visited the island in 2003.

Although it has a strong competitor -- the exotic island of Phuket in Thailand, Langkawi has its own uniqueness and niche elements which attract not only tourists from far flung corners of the world, but from Thailand itself.

In fact, Ramizi said tourists from Thailand accounted for the highest number of foreign tourists -- 58,635 followed by Singapore (27,815), Australia (18,806), India (10,277), Indonesia (9,964) and United Kingdom (8,105).

Tourists from China are also increasing in numbers, with 5,340 last year. And perhaps due to the promotions via the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIMA) exhibition, the island also received 1,073 Russian tourists.

Also visiting Langkawi were 4,994 Japanese tourists, 3,196 Germans,

3,304 holiday makers from Hong Kong, 2,505 Americans, 2,173 Frenchman, 1,977 Filipinos and 1,440 South Koreans.

Ramizi said in conjunction with the Chinese New Year celebrations this week, hotels and chalets were almost fully booked.

Malaysia Airlines District Manager for Langkawi, Mustaffa Kamal Abdul

Wahab said the airline would conduct additional flights in conjunction with

Chinese new Year which included using Boeing 747 aircrafts.

He said last year alone, the airline handled 249,018 domestic and

international passengers via the Langkawi International Airport.

Langkawi also received a huge influx of British tourists with the

introduction of direct flights from London to the island since October and

also a string of chartered flights from several Asian and European countries.

Several tourists met only had praises for the island.

"The island's cleanliness and the warmth of Langkawi's people is what

attracted me to come here," said maritime engineer, John Joseph from the

United States.

New Zealander, Peter Thornley and his wife made a second visit to

Langkawi as they had fallen in love with the island's beauty and also the

magnificent food.

Ahmad Al-Sudany from Saudi Arabia on the other hand said that Langkawi

was quiet and calm.

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