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Legendary yachting centre on the rise

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WHEN Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad performed the soft launch of the Langkawi Yacht Registration in Monaco last September, he did more than just go through the typical ceremony.

Against a backdrop of super yachts moored at Port Hercules for the Monaco Yacht Show 2003, he put Malaysia in her due place on the sea charts of world yachting.

Speaking to the crowd at the most prestigious yacht exhibition in Europe, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had all the natural and cultural attractions plus favourable year-round weather to offer discerning yachting enthusiasts.

"In actual fact, Malaysia is still relatively unknown to the international yachting community but the Government has been aggressively promoting it," he said onboard the yacht Sweet Doll at the Monaco fair.

"We have built many marinas in Langkawi, in the peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak, so it is possible for yachts to sail the Straits of Malacca, stop at the marinas and maybe stay or disembark to enjoy local sights," he said later in the official launch at the recent Lima (Langkawi International Maritime and Air Show) 2003.

Dr Mahathir said the registry would make Langkawi and Malaysia a more well-known destination.

"And hopefully the island could become an eastern point where yacht owners would congregate yearly while sailing to neighbouring countries," he added.

In the earlier ceremony, Dr Mahathir said Langkawi was chosen for its outstanding marina facilities which were as good as those at any resort centres in the Mediterranean.

The first of its kind in the region, the registry is set solely to enable yacht owners around the globe to register their yachts in the island.

At the same Lima exhibition, Langkawi presented the world its latest marina - the Telaga Harbour Park at Pantai Kok whose project consultant is Datuk Azhar Mansor, the first Malaysian to sail solo around the world. It is Langkawi's fourth marina.

Sporting Mediterranean influences in its design and architecture, the RM40 million project is designed to accommodate 100 vessels at a time.

Upon its completion, the harbour park will have a six-storey lighthouse, marina management office, Petronas station and surau, Customs and Immigration complex, 120-unit condominium complex, boutique hotel and commercial units.

The other three marinas in the island are the Royal Langkawi Yacht Club, Rebak Marina Resort and Awana Porto Malai Resort, each with its own characteristics and qualities.

Located next to Kuah jetty, Royal Langkawi Yacht Club gives a good first "yachting" impression of the fabled island to visitors be they average tourists or yachting enthusiasts.

The sight of the 200-berth marina and a beautifully designed clubhouse shows the serious intent of Langkawi as a sailing destination.

Apart from the standard marina facilities, the club provides guided tours for guests while the clubhouse and its waterfront restaurant make a great meeting place for yachters and boat owners.

To the west is the Mediterranean-inspired Awana Porto Malai Langkawi

which further provides the idyllic marine setting to busy Kuah town.

It is located at the secluded part of the island which on normal days offers the calming influence of a retreat. Facilities and activities include well-appointed rooms, food and beverage outlets and bowling alleys.

Though relatively small in terms of berthing capacity, the resort's marina makes its name as the port of call for Star Cruises vessels and as the port where Azhar started and ended his notable sea journey.

At the southwest of the main island, the privately owned Pulau Rebak offers a scenic lagoon shaped marina with berthing capacity for 128 boats and a hardstand of 70 dry bays.

Rebak is fast becoming a safe haven for the region's sailing lines, sailors and yachters. Thanks to its location, it is rather "protected" from weather and criminal elements.

Guests will find their needs and necessities well attended to at its well-equipped marina clubhouse, marina office, marina bar and lounge, Marina Cafe, Harddocke Cafe and the Harbour Store.

Topped with Langkawi's natural beauty, these marina and registration facilities are set to power Langkawi into the forefront of this highly selected and top end band of tourism.

(Travel Times wishes to thank Langkasa Tours & Travel Sdn Bhd - 04-9554320/4 or email rosnibr@pd.jaring.my - for taking the team around