

22/11/2003

Sarawak seeking direct air link with Japan to woo more tourists

KUCHING, Fri. - Sarawak is exploring the possibility of getting Japan Airlines or Malaysia Airlines to fly direct between Japan and Miri.

State Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Abang Johari Tun Abang Openg said he would bring up the matter soon with the authorities, including the Japanese Association of Travel Agents (Jata).

Speaking after he met with officials of the Hiroshima-Sarawak Friendship Association, Abang Johari said Sarawak was still relatively unknown to the Japanese unlike Sabah.

As such, having a direct link between Miri and possibly Fukuoka would help bring in more Japanese tourists to the State.

"Miri would be an ideal gateway to the State as it is nearer to Japan.

Besides, Miri will soon have an international golf course and that should make the place even more attractive to the Japanese.

"Miri has set aside an area for the construction of homes which foreigners can buy.

"With a 99-year land lease, the homes should serve as a good second home to the Japanese," Abang Johari said.

He said he planned to introduce a programme to woo honeymooners from Japan and other countries to the State.

"Once here, they will be given the opportunity to plant trees in a specific area and have their names etched on the trees.

"That way, these honeymooners and, probably their children and other family members, can make trips to the State later to see the tree they had planted," he said.

The seven-member delegation from Jata were led by its chairman, Yamaki Yasuo, who is also Hiroshima Prefectural Assemblyman.

Abang Johari said the State enjoyed warm relationship with Japan, especially after former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad introduced the Look East policy.

"Japan has been an important trading partner not only in timber but in other sectors as well, especially in the electronics sector," he said.

To strengthen existing ties between both parties, Abang Johari said the existing student exchange programmes should be enhanced.

He added this would enable Malaysians and the Japanese to know each other's culture better.