

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
(PERDANA MENTERI)

EVENT: THE OFFICIAL LAUNCHING CEREMONY OF "MALAYSIA: HEART OF
SOUTHEAST ASIA BOOK PROJECT"

VENUE: THE ARTIQUARIUM, KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 26 JUL 1991

TIME:

I am pleased to be here this evening to officially launch what is the first international calibre photo book on Malaysia, that is "Malaysia: Heart of Southeast Asia".

2. The successful completion of this photo book demonstrates the contribution of the private sector in efforts to promote the growth of Malaysia's tourism industry. The launching of this book is also timely as Malaysia is currently at the start of the Sixth Malaysia Plan, which recognises the importance of tourism and its role in the growth of the national economy.

3. Malaysia is a very fortunate country as it is generously endowed not only with rich resources but also with a very unique and varied flora and fauna. These in themselves are strong factors for the healthy growth of the tourist industry. However, there are still many more other attractions which remain to be discovered. In this context, although tourism in Malaysia has had a late start compared with some of her neighbours, I think in many areas Malaysia still has her competitive edge. It is, therefore, incumbent upon us to determine the manner in which this resource can be exploited.

4. Many visitors are discovering that Malaysia has a lot to offer - from the bustling city life to the tranquility of the palm-fringed beaches, and to some of the most spectacular sights of nature. And tourism being a relatively young industry; we can learn from the lessons of other countries how best to marry these assets to provide the tourists with the holiday of their choice.

5. In recent years, tourism has also proven to be a resilient industry the world over. It is fast becoming a key economic priority and its contribution as a foreign exchange earner for both the government and the private sector is evident in the improvement in Malaysia's services account of the balance of payments. Gross receipts from tourism grew by 24.5 per cent per annum during the Fifth Malaysia Plan period. Without doubt, the country has benefitted from the concerted efforts to put Malaysia on the international tourism map. The highly successful Visit Malaysia Year 1990, and the accolades it received is the best illustration of the public-private sector teamwork.

6. As we are all aware, the private sector also has a vital role to play in promoting the tourism industry, be it in the hospitality arena, in the provision of tour and travel packages, or facilities and amenities for the visitors. It is, therefore, crucial that programmes and activities designed for the tourism industry should complement and supplement the tourism promotion efforts undertaken by the government.

7. However, there is still much ground to be covered and the Government's efforts in this area is a continuing process. Under the Sixth Malaysia Plan, the major thrust of the policy on tourism is the efficient development of the sector while at the same time enhancing the quality of life of the local people. The policy underscores the need to increase the participation of the local people while maximising economic opportunities from tourism.

8. One area in which Malaysia has fallen behind her neighbours is in the overseas market for tourism publications on the country. Books are an effective vehicle for promoting a destination and while there are now quite a few books on Malaysia - and I congratulate those who have taken the initiative to produce these publications - they are not sufficient and are seldom designed to promote the country. Indeed some books give an unfair picture of Malaysia.

9. I am, therefore, encouraged that the publishers, sponsors and project team have had the foresight to recognise the need for a book which would appeal to the international market.

10. "Malaysia: Heart of Southeast Asia" is a book with a difference. No other book can boast the works of some of the world's best photographers and a text written by well-known authors.

11. The images captured in this high quality publication create an instantaneous encounter with Malaysia's unparalleled natural wonders, its colourful mix of traditions and way of life. Its potent and memorable impact will serve as a magnet to draw visitors the world over to Malaysia. For Malaysians, this book will provide a graphic insight into their country's proud heritage and spectacular hidden treasures.

12. It has come to my knowledge that several of the photographers, having had a taste of Malaysia while working on this book, have expressed keen interest to return to do more, particularly on Malaysian wildlife and nature. I am pleased at the prospect as this will lead to greater exposure of our natural and unique attractions to the world.

13. For all these reasons, I am confident that "Malaysia: Heart of Southeast Asia" will not only be a success in promoting and encouraging more visitors to travel to Malaysia, but will also help stimulate further the interest among

Malaysians to undertake domestic excursions to experience for themselves the beauty of their country.

14. I would like to congratulate the publishers, sponsors and project team on the successful completion of "Malaysia: Heart of Southeast Asia". Their initiative and confidence in the project is a heartening example for all to emulate.

15. I know I am speaking for all parties when I wish the publishers every success in the promotions and sales of "Malaysia: Heart of Southeast Asia", both locally and overseas.

16. On this note, I am pleased to officially launch this exciting publication, "Malaysia: Heart of Southeast Asia."