



Yen Yen defends her 'lavish' travel costs
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Tourism Minister Ng Yen Yen shot down the opposition's criticisms on her ministry's lavish travel spending, defending it as her strategy to lure in more tourists.

Yesterday, Batu PKR parliamentarian Tian Chua rebuked the ministry for their travel bills that escalated up to 40 percent but coupled with a 70 percent reduction in activities to promote tourism.

Chua had even accused her of being more of a "traveller" than a tourism minister due to her frequent visits.

She attacked her critics labelling them "generalists" for not looking into the bigger picture and called herself a "specialist" in the industry for being successfully in attracting the 23 million last year.

"You want to talk to a specialist, you talk to me," she said visibly upset.

Met at the Parliament lobby today, Ng (*left*) whipped out her Apple iPad from her handbag producing statistics of the ministry's seemingly exorbitant travel expenditures and justifying the lower amount spent on promotion.

"Let me give you the figures. In 2008, the total amount for promotions was RM358 million and our tourist arrivals was 22 million. Then the receipts we had was RM49.5 billion," said Ng.

"Last year our promotions budget was RM337 million and our tourist arrival was 24 million and the income was RM53.367 billion. This is our strategy.

'It means you know your job'

Ng postulated that the boost in tourist arrivals with less promotional costs was due to her personal visits locally and abroad.

"To convince them that Malaysia is a good country to visit, strategies vary. If the impact of the minister's visit is much more than a general promotion, the minister should go. It means you know your job."

Appearing rather agitated this morning when asked about the matter, Ng kept reiterating that she was an expert in her field.

Moreover, she proudly added that last year despite the global economic recession and threat of Influenza A(H1N1) her efforts had brought good returns to revitalise the country's tourism industry.

"We tell them do not be afraid of H1N1, come to Malaysia. We tell them, Thailand may have political problems but we have no problems.

"Well, my numbers have gone up. Up to August, it has gone up 5.2 percent. So to me, how

you promote is whether it is effective or not. If people want look at the minister only and forget everything else, what can we do."

Strategic spending

Noting that since she had taken over last April, the ministry was spending less for promotions as per every tourist who arrived in the country.

"In 2009, for every tourist that came in, the promotion money we spent was RM14 (per person) and the spending of every tourist was (at an average of) RM2,600.

"In 2008, we spent RM16 per tourist. In 2007, we spent RM18 and in 2006, we spent RM20," she said comparing her promotional tactics to predecessor Azalina Othman.

"So I don't wanna talk to these generalists. This is the last time I'm going to talk about promotion."

She also argued that a minister's statement is "important" in restoring confidence.



"Who is going to tell me my strategy is wrong. The figures speak for themselves. You have to know your strategies, if your general strategies don't work, you change your strategies. I don't speak to non-specialists."

Pressed on the Chua's (*left*) statement picking on trips to nearby Singapore as well as Australia and New Zealand, which seemed expensive, Ng said: "I travelled six cities (in Australia and New Zealand)... you know how much it costs for the fare? I don't want to go to that extent.

"All is clear and transparent. It's all audited. If I wanted to enjoy life, I (would have) stayed one city (for) two days.

"If I go to New Zealand and spend one night it is expensive! But if you spend four nights, it's (definitely) cheaper but I am focused on my work and every city I spend just one day," said Ng, asserting that this is the "last time" she would talk about this topic again.