



VMY 2007 to bring a lot more fun

Q: In a nutshell, what can the world expect for Visit Malaysia Year 2007?

A: Malaysia is actually a showcase and we can expect that more of our cultural ethnicity will be on display to the world next year. There will be a lot of activities for people from all walks of life to do once they are in Malaysia.

For instance, there will be a floral parade in Putrajaya in January, an aerospace exhibition brought in specially from Russia and a laser show entitled "Eyes of Malaysia". For me, I think it will be a waste for a foreigner not to come and sample Malaysia during VMY 2007.

Q: So will Malaysia be a year-round playground?

A: Yes. Normally, we only have 194 celebrations a year on our tourism calendar, but since VMY is coinciding with the country's 50th year of independence, we have decided to add another 50 events. We are also trying to persuade retailers to have four Mega Sales instead of the present three a year.

Q: Why is VMY 2007 important? Does it mean tourism doesn't matter so much in other years?

A: Visit Malaysia Year is a special promotion and this is the third one. The first in 1990 was to boost tourist arrivals and there was an increase of

Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor has had to weather a storm over a proposal to extend opening hours of entertainment outlets, a vital part of making Visit Malaysia Year 2007 a success. He is still pressing ahead, because billions of ringgit and half a million jobs hang in the balance, he tells JUNE RAMLI.

about 50 per cent. There was another 50 per cent increase in arrivals in 1994 for the second VMY.

For VMY 2007, we hope to achieve our target of 20.1 million visitors, (then aim) to hit the 24 million target set for 2010, before the end of the Ninth Malaysia Plan.

Because the Government has targeted RM55 billion (in tourist takings) for 2010, VMY 2007 is basically to see if we can cross that 20 million visitor mark.

At this moment, the tourism industry directly employs about 500,000 people, and two million Malaysians benefit indirectly. It is an important industry for the country. So I hope the people of Malaysia would think tourism and understand the importance of tourism. We must ensure that this industry becomes a successful industry.

Q: Have problems such as rude taxi drivers who overcharge and prey on foreigners been solved?

A: Yes. The Cabinet has decided to approve 300 licences for tourist cabs for Kuala Lumpur early next year. These cabs would be jointly run by the Tourism Ministry under Pempena and also the Entrepreneur and Co-operatives Development Ministry.

The cabs would be painted in tourism colours of red, green, blue and yellow and also display the VMY 2007 logo.

It would be slightly more expensive than normal cabs. But tourists and Malaysians alike can rest assured of service and also not be afraid of being cheated or overcharged.

The cabs will also be comfortable to ride in as they are brand-new 2000cc Mercedes Benz and Naza Ria multi-purpose vehicles.

Q: What about the proposal to extend opening hours at pubs, discos and restaurants in tourist belts to 5am?

A: The Tourism Ministry has proposed

to extend the operating hours of pubs and restaurants in the city's Golden Triangle area until 5am to provide tourists with an outlet to hang out during their stay in Malaysia.

We are planning to do this in Kuala Lumpur in the Golden Triangle first before moving on to Malacca, Johor, Penang Road and Langkawi. We are also planning to have a bazaar which operates along these areas in Malacca to be opened by the year-end.

Q: Where did the idea come from?

A: It was not my idea, it is what tourists want. It was based on feedback received by Tourism Malaysia offices abroad from foreigners who visited Malaysia.

The ministry has submitted the proposal and now it is entirely up to city halls and local councils (to decide).

Q: Many people are betting that locals, and not foreigners, will patronise these outlets.

A: That would not be the case. We will wait and see what happens when the proposal goes through.

I don't want Malaysia to become like Bangkok, Las Vegas or Singapore. That is not the idea for this proposal, but more of giving tourists an outlet for them to hang out in when they are on holiday here.