

DATE: 15/05/2008

'Make country a top tourist destination'

NST- 15/5/2008

■ By Mazlinda Mahmood
news@nst.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi wants Malaysians to work hard to make the country the first choice in the world's tourism destination.

He said all Malaysians must do everything they could to make the country more beautiful and attractive to tourists.

"Everyone must be tourist-friendly, helpful and cheerful. These are the extras we can offer, besides the country's diverse natural attractions," he said when launching Zoom! Malaysia at Saloma Bistro here yesterday.

The new campaign by the Tourism Ministry and Tourism Malaysia replaces the previous "Cuti-cuti Malaysia" campaign to strengthen and stimulate domestic tourism by motivating Malaysians to plan their holidays within the country.

The campaign also urges Malaysians to give priority to domestic holiday destinations and encourages locals to look at places with a fresh perspective.

Abdullah said during his visit to the Middle East, those who visited Malaysia praised her warmth and hospitality.

"They feel comfortable in our country. There is no discrimination, unlike when they visit other countries.

"We must be grateful, even though our country does not have historical sites like those in the Middle East, we are still blessed with beautiful islands and beaches, forests, flora and fauna."

Therefore, he said Malaysians must ensure that the country's natural treasures were kept clean and preserved.

Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said said through the campaign the ministry would promote lesser known attractions which were more popular among foreigners but unknown to locals.



Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi launching Zoom! Malaysia domestic tourism campaign at the Saloma Bistro yesterday. With him are Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said (right), Datuk Dr Ong Hong-Peng (left) and Datuk Masidi Manjun.

"The fact is local travellers are the closest market for the country's domestic tourism industry and more focus must be given as this is a market with a huge potential," she said.

Azalina said the number of local tourists staying in hotels across the country jumped 13.7 per cent last year with 36.3 million people, adding that this was a good sign.

Last year, the country received about 21 million foreign tourists, an increase of 19.5 per cent from the previous year, contributing RM44.5 billion to the country's earnings.

Also present were Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board deputy chairman Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid, foreign ambassadors and high commissioners.