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Giving tourism a big boost

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New visa scheme set to attract more visitors from India

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PETALING JAYA: Namaste, India! The traditional greeting will be given all out for India, as Malaysia eyes a slice of its lucrative tourism market with an easier and cheaper new visa scheme.

This comes as the Indian tourism market is projected by the United Nations' World Tourism Organisation to reach 50 million outbound tours by the year 2020. Total outbound spending is expected to cross the US\$28bil (RM123.9bil) mark.

The scheme, scheduled to be announced during Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's official trip to India, would see Indian tourists paying only US\$20 (RM88.50) as a processing fee for a 15-day visa to Malaysia. The visa is free.

It was reported that the company previously managing the e-visa applications charged an additional RM270 per application apart from the RM108 payable to the Malaysian and Indian governments, making the total fees RM378.

Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) president Datuk Hamzah Rahmat said with the new visa scheme, Malaysia could expect at least a million Indian tourists to come here, compared to 722,141 in 2015 and 638,578 in 2016.

A report by FCM Travel Solutions India projected that India could be second only to China in business travel spending in another 15 to 20 years.

Hamzah said the visa application process was one of the obstacles for Indian tourists wanting to visit here.

With the new arrangement, he said Indian tourists could apply for a visa on their own

without having to go through a third party.

"It's not so much about the price but the ease of obtaining the visa.

"Travellers want things easy for themselves, including not having to send their passports to the embassy for the application," he said.

Hamzah cited the case of travellers from China where the numbers increased since Malaysia made it easier for them to obtain their visa.

There were over two million visitors from China last year. Malaysia welcomed 26,757,392 tourists last year with tourist receipts of RM82bil.

Tourism Malaysia director-general Datuk Seri Mirza Mohammad Taiyab reportedly said Malaysia aimed to attract 31 million tourists and RM114bil in spending this year.

Two weeks ago, Tourism and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz said the new scheme would see Indian tourists only paying US\$20 for a 15-day visa.

He also said during a visit to India in February that the country was Malaysia's sixth top tourist source market.

Malaysian Associated Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (MAICCI) president Tan Sri Kenneth Eswaran, who is in New Delhi for Najib's visit, was pleased with the new scheme to woo Indian tourists.

"Indians are spending huge sums on medical tourism and overseas wedding packages," he said.

The Malaysian Government, he said, had done the right thing.

He said the promotion of medical tourism was raised during Najib's meeting with India's captains of industry, organised by MAICCI in Chennai on Friday.



Deep in discussion: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Najib during the official welcoming ceremony in New Delhi. — AP