

Malaysia Has Become India's Biggest Tourist Market In Asean Region

Bernama

October 22, 2011

By Manik Mehta

SINGAPORE, Oct 22 (Bernama) -- Malaysia has emerged as the biggest tourism market in the Asean region for India-bound traffic.

This assessment was given by Rajesh Talwar, director of Singapore-based IndiaTourism, India's official tourism promotion agency, in an interview with Bernama at "ITB Asia" tourism fair, here.

ITB Asia is the Asian Edition of "ITB Berlin", the world's largest tourism fair.

Talwar said the Asean market was doing well, with traffic from Malaysia and Thailand registering an impressive 16 per cent growth each.

"However, Malaysia provides the highest traffic of all the Asean countries to India in absolute figures. Some 150,000 Malaysians visited India last year," he said.

Singapore, with 96,000 visitors, ranked second-most important Asean country behind Malaysia. Thailand, with 74,000 visitors, came third, he said.

Talwar cited the expansion of Malaysia's low-cost carrier, AirAsia, as a driving factor for traffic growth to India.

"AirAsia flies to eight or nine destinations in India and serves India's vast geographical region. The overall flights, including by airlines in India, between India and Malaysia have increased to 145 a week," he said.

South India is very popular among Malaysian tourists. The so-called "golden triangle" comprising New Delhi, Agra and Jaipur was another popular destination among Malaysians.

Many Malaysians are also showing a tendency to visit the Himalayas, venturing into Kashmir and Sikkim, both are becoming popular destinations.

"Indeed, every part of India is getting a good share of business from the Asean region, particularly Malaysia, whose nationals feel at home in India and can easily relate to the Indian culture and history, thanks to many common features between the two nations.

"There is also the Bollywood factor which appeals to many Malaysian tourists. Bollywood has definitely played a role in propping up India's image as an attractive destination," Talwar said.

To increase traffic from India to Malaysia, some Indian tour operators were privately saying that they would like Malaysia to relax or completely rescind the "strict visa regime" for Indian passport holders.

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