

DPM: Tourism industry to help push Malaysia forward
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KUALA LUMPUR: Business entities and entrepreneurs need to anticipate opportunities in the travel and tourism sector, Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said at the opening of the 2012 Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Annual Conference at The Royale Chulan Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) forecast that international tourist arrivals will reach one billion by 2012, and 1.8 billion by 2030, with the Asia and Pacific areas gaining most of the new arrivals.

"In addition, these countries will enjoy an increased share of the global tourist market, from 22% in 2011 to 30% in 2030," said Muhyiddin.

Even today the charm of Asia and the Pacific remains irresistible to many, he added, highlighting that in 2011, 217 million international tourists flowed into Asia Pacific, which is a far cry from the 22 million recorded in 1980.

"I must say that Malaysia is fortunate to have its fair share of the global tourism market. A little over a decade ago, we received only seven million tourists, but last year, we had 24.7 million tourists."

Tourism was the seventh largest industry contributing to the Gross National Income (GNI) in 2011, after the oil, gas and energy; wholesale and retail; palm oil and rubber; financial services; agriculture; and electrical and electronics sectors.

Statistics showed that in 2011, Malaysia received 24.7 million tourists, a big jump from the seven million tourists that visited in 1999.

It is Malaysia's fourth time since 1972 to host the event by the international membership association that aims to catalyse the responsible development of the Asia Pacific travel and tourism ministry.

On the issue of climate change, Muhyiddin urged PATA to take the initiative to address its adverse effects on the region's natural attractions and tourism activities.

"Tourist attractions, hence tourism commercial activities, in the Asia-Pacific region largely comprises the exploration its natural environment and ecology. Therefore, concerted efforts by all parties are necessary to protect these priceless resources," he said.

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation has warned that the rise of sea levels, crop yield losses, extreme weather conditions will directly impact tourism and niche markets. It would take some US\$40bil (RM122.6bil) a year until 2050 for Asia Pacific countries to prepare for the effects of climate change.

"The Malaysian Government also acknowledges the potential of our tourism industry, as it is one of 12 high-growth industries that will be used to kickstart the Government's Economic Transformation Programme (ETP). 12 Entry Point Projects have been identified to spur the growth of the industry between now and 2020, providing almost half a million job opportunities," he said.

By 2020, the tourism industry is expected to contribute RM103.6 billion in GNI, with arrivals increasing to 36 million.

Among Malaysia's most popular tourism offerings is the Malaysian Homestay tourism experience. There are 150 homestay clusters located all over Malaysia, with 3,211 operators offering 4,309 rooms to allow tourists to experience Malaysian culture in rural areas, away from the modern trappings of city life. In 2011, RM15.74 million in revenue was generated from the homestay programme, which flowed back into the local communities.

Other sustainable tourism initiatives by the Tourism Ministry include the Malaysia Business Tourism Green Programme known as "Let's Meet and Green" to support the government's commitment to offset carbon emissions by 40% by the year 2020 and the "Green Hotel" classification of accommodation according to the Asean Hotel Standards.

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