

**More Malaysians visiting Philippines**  
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**KOTA KINABALU: The Philippines is fast becoming a popular destination among Malaysian tourists.**

Figures released by the Philippines Department of Tourism showed that in the first quarter of this year, 32,363 Malaysians visited the Philippines, an increase of nearly 4,000, or 13.82 per cent, compared with the same period last year.

Last year, 91,752 Malaysians visited the Philippines, and their tourism department is confident of breaching the six-figure mark for Malaysian tourist arrivals this year.

"We have set a target of receiving 106,000 tourists from Malaysia this year," said department representative in Malaysia Datin Melissa Ong.

The inception of the thrice-weekly Clark-Kota Kinabalu-Clark flights by South East Asian Airlines (SEAIR), through its Tiger Airways Airline Partnership Programme last month, is expected to significantly contribute to the increase.

SEAIR is the second Philippine-based airline to operate flights to Kota Kinabalu, after Cebu Pacific.

"Malaysians are always looking for new destinations and the Philippines could emerge as a popular choice because of its proximity," Ong said, noting Manila was less than two hours from Kota Kinabalu and less than four hours from Kuala Lumpur.

The Philippines' rich history, as evident from its numerous heritage sites and the meticulously-preserved World War 2 relics, are among its key attractions, besides the long list of entertainment choices and shopping complexes, one of which is the SM Mall of Asia, reputedly the largest in the region.

Among the historical sites are Fort Santiago and Corregidor island, where remnants of buildings destroyed during World War 2 and artillery relics such as coastal guns and mortars are found.

Ong said as part of efforts to attract more Malaysians, the department has conducted roadshows and products updates in various cities in Malaysia, as well as taking part in major travel fairs.

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