

'We can be an arts hub'

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GAINING RECOGNITION: Art works should be showcased as tourism products, says DPM

PUTRAJAYA: MALAYSIAN art and culture should be promoted rigorously, locally and abroad, to attract more tourists to the country, said Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

He said Malaysia had a number of renowned and talented new artists whose art works should be showcased as tourism products.

"There is a need to enhance awareness and cultivate interest in society about our contemporary art.

"As an ardent fan, I believe that contemporary paintings can place Malaysia as a major destination for domestic, as well as foreign tourists," he said after the launch of Motour Art Gallery at the Tourism Ministry yesterday.

Muhyiddin said once tourists discovered the interesting art available in the country, this would turn Malaysia into one of the most interesting tourist destinations in the world.

He also commended the Tourism Ministry for turning its building lobby into an art gallery.

"A few years ago, I discussed with Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen to set up this initiative to showcase paintings and arts by renowned, or new Malaysian artists.

"Today, it has become a reality and I want to congratulate Dr Ng for her innovative approach. This will give young artists the opportunity to promote their work in line with the ministry's theme 'Malaysia, Your New Art Tourism Destination' and the 1Malaysia Contemporary Art Festival (1MCAT).

"This is also in line with the government's effort to place the tourism industry as one of the 12 National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) to spur the country's economy."

The gallery features Malaysian Orang Asli sculptures by the Mah Meri tribe, which has received the Unesco's seal of excellence recognition -- the only one in the world.

It also showcases sculptures by Suhaimi Fadzir, who recently won the Dublin Biennial 2012 award of excellence, and contemporary artist Ahmad Shukri.

Dr Ng, meanwhile, said over RM8 million worth of artworks had been sold since 1MCAT kicked off three years ago.

"It is a thriving industry. This year, the event has generated RM4.1 million in sales through art auctions, about RM1.7 million and RM3 million in sales in 2010 and 2011 respectively."

She said the government hoped to be able to position Malaysia as one of the top 10 nations in terms of global tourism receipts by 2015.

"Our long-term target is for Malaysia to attract 36 million tourists with an income of RM168 billion by 2020."

Malaysia recorded 11,632,478 tourist arrivals in the first six months of this year, registering a growth of 2.4 per cent, compared with the same period last year.

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