

Tourism Malaysia Eyes 70,000 Tourist From Sri Lanka

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By M. Saraswathi

COLOMBO, March 10 (Bernama) -- Tourism Malaysia aims to attract 70,000 tourists from Sri Lanka this year, where more than 200 events await them, its Deputy Director-General (Planning), Datuk Azizan Noordin said.

"Sri Lanka has always been an important market for us," he said.

Tourist arrivals from Sri Lanka stood at 64,051 in 2013, which was an increase of two per cent from 62,821 tourists in 2012.

"With new products and destinations being promoted specifically for the Sri Lankan market, we are expecting 10-12 per cent increase which is close to 70,000 tourists," he told Bernama in an interview here, today.

Azizan said the sales mission to Sri Lanka was the largest ever and the first after a four years gap.

He said although the primary objective of the mission was to strengthen Malaysia's standing as a dream travel destination, Tourism Malaysia was also looking forward to gathering strong support from both the Sri Lanka media, travel trade and airline fraternity for the on-going Visit Malaysia Year 2014.

"We have about 50 participants from Malaysia comprising hoteliers, event operators and travel agents. We have invited about 160 outbound travel agents in Sri Lanka," he said, adding that about 30 media personnel were also covering the event.

He said a wide variety of area were being promoted in Sri Lanka, namely, the F1 Petronas Malaysia Grand Prix, CIMB Golfing Challenge, 1Malaysia Mega Sales, Penang World Music Festival as well as places like the LEGO Land theme park, KidZania.

"After the civil war ended, more Sri Lankans have started to travel, especially the affluent middle income and above, and Tourism Malaysia is working with various airlines to ensure Malaysia is in their radar," he said.

The focus area for Sri Lankan travellers were Klang Valley, Melaka, Penang and Langkawi, he said, adding that there were plans to promote other places as the market expanded.

"We are looking at promoting Borneo. The Royal Belum Rainforest is an exciting and new

ecotourism destination to visit. We are also planning to promote the weekend escapade given the close proximity between Malaysia and Sri Lanka (which takes about three hours and 20 minutes by flight)," he said.

Azizan believed that three years from now Sri Lanka would also emerge as a potential market for Malaysia My Second Home programme, weddings as well as medical tourism.

"These are among Tourism Malaysia's plan for the Sri Lankan market in the future. There are great potentials here and we will move step by step in promoting Malaysia here," he added.

Malaysia's tourism sector continued to be a significant contributor to the country's economy in 2013.

Tourist receipts were RM65.44 billion, an 8.1 per cent increase from RM60.56 billion in 2012. Tourist arrivals grew by 2.7 per cent to 25.7 million compared with 25 million in 2012.

Visit Malaysia Year 2014 is expected to see around 28 million tourists visiting the country and generating receipts of up to RM76 billion.

From Colombo, the Sales Mission will move to India covering Kochi, Bengaluru, Mumbai and conclude in New Delhi.

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