

**Najib Tells Stakeholders To Leverage On Strong Tourism Fundamentals**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 27 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Malaysia's tourism fundamentals, just like its economic fundamentals, are still strong and need be conveyed through various channels to woo in more visitors to the country.

The prime minister listed them down as the country's renowned hospitality and a culture of friendliness, rich natural heritage, cultural diversity and now, more than ever, the value for money that foreign tourists would experience in Malaysia compared to other destinations due to the exchange rates.

"All of these are still huge selling points that need to be amplified and communicated across all channels to drive up tourism numbers," he said at an event titled 'An Hour with the Prime Minister' organised by the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) here Thursday.

Najib said the government was aware that the competition was stiff, with other countries equally driven to pull in tourists into their borders.

To make Malaysia's tourism sector more competitive, he said: "Incentives may need to be revised and immigration issues like visa-on-arrival and visa fees as well as electronic visas need to be revisited to make it easier for tourists to enter the country."

Najib said airlines and airports too needed to be further engaged to increase direct flights and greater connectivity, both of which had shown to be directly correlated to increased tourist arrivals.

He suggested that the Cabinet Committee on Tourism reconvene soon to tackle cross-ministerial issues that had to be resolved.

"In the meantime, the industry itself must believe in Malaysia's tourism fundamentals and must in their own way market those fundamentals to help boost the industry," he said.

Najib pointed out that MATTA and its members had a role to play to help project the truth about the country to markets abroad.

This should be done, he said, "so that misconceptions and negative views grounded in falsehood - especially as spread through social media - can be corrected and tourists are not put off from visiting the country".

The prime minister noted that official figures showed that the number of tourist arrivals to Malaysia had dropped by 8.6 per cent in the first quarter of the year compared to the same period last year.

The situation was due to several factors, most of which were beyond Malaysia's control, Najib said, citing the twin Malaysia Airlines tragedies and the Air Asia crash as well flooding as examples.

He said the vagaries of the global economy also impacted the decision of travellers as to which city or country they chose as their destination.

"It's worth noting here that this uncertain global economic climate has had a negative effect not just on Malaysia but other ASEAN countries as well," he said.

Malaysia was ranked 12th in terms of international tourist arrivals last year, which translated to about 27.4 million arrivals.

Najib further said that industry players should strive to meet evolving expectations of tourists by making the sector flexible and adaptable enough to adjust to changing circumstances.

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