

**Tourism Sector Has Contributed Significantly Towards Malaysia's Economy – Najib
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- The tourism industry has contributed significantly towards Malaysia's economy since the inception of the National Transformation Programme (NTP).

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the nation's tourism sector is now the sixth largest contributor to the national economy, contributing a total of RM161 billion or 14.9 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2014.

"In spite of a year of tragedies that saw the whole world grieve with us, our tourism industry still managed to attract 27.44 million tourists with RM72 billion in tourist receipts to boast. These are healthy figures that we are not afraid to flash out.

"However, the impact of tourism goes beyond tourist arrivals or tourist receipts, its impact is most important on the sustainable development of our economy and society," he said in his blog NajibRazak.Com here Saturday.

Since the inception of NTP, the tourism industry has played a role in opening up new opportunities for Malaysians, therefore, the prime minister thanked the Tourism and Culture Ministry for its aggressive promotional campaigns abroad, as it has resulted the nation no longer being known as "the country between Singapore and Thailand".

"The promotional campaigns have successfully showcased our uniqueness, our harmony and diversity. We are the model country for a progressive and moderate Islamic nation.

"One billion tourists, one billion opportunities, the theme of this year's World Tourism Day, celebrated recently on September 27, strikes a resonance to Malaysia's journey towards 2020," he said.

In turn, tourism had benefited Malaysians directly, in 2014, the industry brought in RM19.4 billion of investment, more impressively, it had contributed a total of 1.77 million jobs (13 percent of total employment), Najib said.

"The trickle down economy will benefit even the small homestay in the remote area of Sabah providing the local communities opportunities to enhance their quality of life.

"The consistent growth of our tourism industry had also encouraged cultural practitioners to keep on championing our heritage as a source of living. I thank them (cultural practitioners) especially for keeping our culture alive and reminding us of our identity," he said.

In realising the potential that Malaysia has, from the beauty of the Borneo islands to our lush tropical forests and shopping heavens, the government will make the tourism industry

the new frontier in facing the current economic challenges, Najib said.

"The recently announced economic measures have seen an additional RM80 million to be allocated to intensify promotional activities in selected markets including Asean, China and India," he said.

Malaysia's strategic and effective promotional efforts abroad plays a vital role as it acts as a window to Malaysia, showcasing our rich and vibrant history to the world outside, he added.

"At home, our National Museum will be given a new life with the new capital injection and I aspire to see that it will be of the same footing as the British Museum. We will see the same transformation to the National Monument and the Perdana Botanical Garden making it more attractive and accessible to visitors.

"In 2017, Malaysia will be the home for the region's most exciting integrated destination resort, the Desaru Coast in Johor. It will present a seamless integration of modern luxury living and fun activities, offering five luxury resorts and hotels, championship golf courses, a lifestyle retail village, a water theme park and a conference centre.

"At first glance, we may be seen as attracting high income tourists, professionals and foreign guests who see Malaysia as their second-home, but on second thoughts, this is perhaps a win-win strategy as they will be here to spend their money on food and beverages, tour guides, garments and many others where goods and services are owned and served by locals," Najib said.

Malaysia stood to benefit a great deal out of this model, be it from macro indicators of GDP and currency exchange, or at a micro level the income of locals, he explained.

Malaysia's diverse history, culture and religious diversity presented a great opportunity for tourists to get to know Malaysia and for Malaysians to rediscover our historical and cultural roots, Najib said.

"For the culture enthusiasts, we can always start by discovering the legend of Mahsuri in Langkawi then hop onto the ferry to Penang to visit Kek Lok Si temple and continue down south to learn about the history of Melaka, home to one of the earliest Malay Sultanates as well as the Peranakan heritage," he said.

For the adventurous travellers, Malaysia is home to one of the best diving sites in the world, as well as two United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) natural heritage sites which are the Gunung Mulu National Park in Sarawak and Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Najib said.

"We are also home to exciting events such as the Formula 1 Grand Prix, Le Tour de Langkawi and KL Tower Base Jump. Not forgetting that each and every one of these places are also famous food destinations that cannot be missed!

"In a recent poll conducted by independent Italian sources at the Expo Milano that I have just returned from, Malaysia is ranked third most preferred destination by visitors to the Expo. This, I believe, is a strong and positive indicator for the Malaysian tourism industry," he said.

Najib said Malaysia was a blessed nation, blessed with a vibrant economy with good balance between physical development and preservation of nature, blessed with a harmonious multicultural society as well as peace and stability. "Our diversity is a blessing, something that unites us, not divide us. Malaysia is indeed a melting pot of culture, a destination that caters for all. A land of endless opportunities," he said.

Najib said when he first took over as Prime Minister, Malaysia was faced with the challenge of having a sustainable source of income to run the country, back then, Malaysia's oil dependency was at 41.3 percent and its oil supply was predicted to be able to last for merely 15 years.

"Fifteen years means my grandchild would grow up to a Malaysia that would be struggling to sustain itself if nothing was done to rectify the problem.

"Hence, I initiated the NTP with a vision to create a sustainable system for developing our homeland. Our homeland is the sacred ground that needs to be appreciated and treated with respect; our development must continue to go hand in hand with the best interest of Malaysians," he said.

The NTP allowed the government expectations for 2020 to be achievable via rationalised means, therefore, there was an urgent need to diversify the nation's economy, he said.

"The tourism industry plays an important role in strengthening and diversifying Malaysia's economy. The NTP has benefited Malaysians directly including the tourism industry," Najib added.

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