

# Fikirlah: Boost Domestic Tourism, Visit Malaysia

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By Sakini Mohd Said

**KUALA LUMPUR** (Bernama) – Some of my friends and I were recently talking about travelling and I asked them if they had visited the whole of Malaysia.

One of them Fina, 37, said she has yet to visit Johor and Sarawak. I burst out laughing when I heard her reply as I found it odd that Fina, who I have known for 10 years and is a self-professed travel junkie, has not stepped into Johor and Sarawak.

“I prefer to go abroad for my vacations as I want different experiences and like to learn about other people’s culture,” she told me.

“I have visited more than 10 countries so far, including Indonesia, Turkey, Greece and England. In fact, I was planning to visit South Korea this month to spend my birthday over there but I’ve to postpone my trip due to the COVID-19 scare. It’s a good thing I didn’t buy my air tickets yet.”

Fina is now considering a domestic holiday, a cheaper and more sensible option considering the coronavirus outbreak and also the prevailing economic uncertainties. Perhaps, this time around Johor or the Land of the Hornbills may be the destination of choice for my friend.

I am quite sure that like Fina, many Malaysians out there have yet to fully explore Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak. Even if some of you have set foot in all 13 states and three federal territories, I don’t think you would have had the opportunity to fully explore the uniqueness of each state or territory.

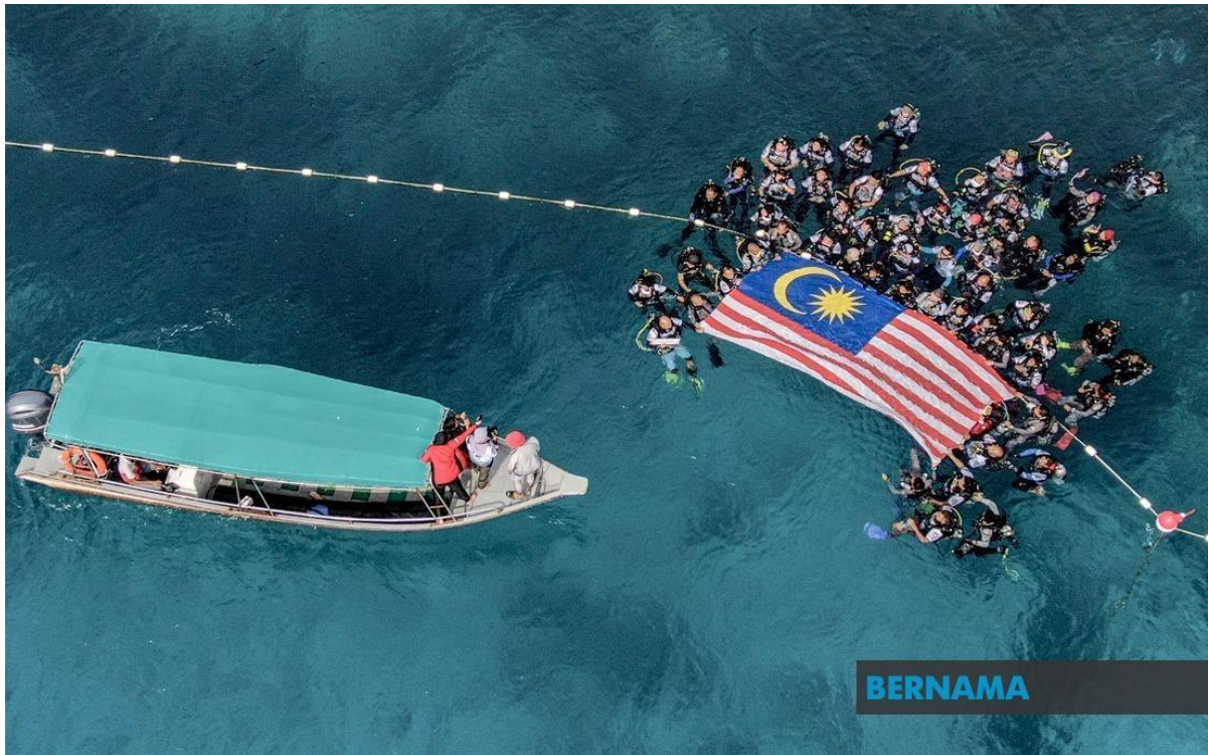


A group of young visitors standing on the peak of Maragang hill while taking a photograph with Mount Kinabalu in the background. --fotoBERNAMA (2020) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

This is because each of them has many attractions to offer, whether or not we are aware of them.

I myself have been to almost every state in our country, except Labuan, but that does not mean I managed to cover all the attractions in the states and territories that I visited.

In Sabah, for instance, so far I have only been able to visit some of the main towns, as well as Kundasang which is popular with holidaymakers. Semporna, which is nine hours by road from Kota Kinabalu, is well-known for islands such as Pulau Mabul, Pulau Sipadan and Pulau Bohey Dulang but I have not ventured into that part of Sabah yet.



Pulau Bidong, off the coast of Terengganu, is not as well-known as Pulau Redang or other islands but it has its own beauty too. --fotoBERNAMA (2020) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Our country is blessed with holiday destinations that offer all kinds of unique experiences to visitors. Certain villages offer homestay packages that promise a typical kampong atmosphere for visitors who have the opportunity to try their hand at planting paddy and playing traditional games.

For those who enjoy feasting their eyes on nature's beauty, they have a number of islands and jungles to choose from. Malaysia's rainforests and national parks are still pristine and their plethora of flora and fauna beckon visitors from all over the world.

Destinations for extreme sports and adventurous activities are also aplenty. And so are historical sites, duty-free shopping havens and food options, all of which guarantee visitors an unforgettable experience.



Abseiling is among the activities available for those who like extreme sports at Kampung Lingga Kiulu in Sabah. --fotoBERNAMA (2020) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Also unique is Malaysia's ethnic diversity. I am sure many of us are still unfamiliar with the unique features of the various ethnic communities.

In fact, our plural society is among our most valuable assets and international communities are in awe of the uniqueness of our heritage and traditions, including handicrafts.

When I was in Sarawak sometime last year to cover a programme organised by the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (Kraftangan Malaysia), I came across a craft produced by the local Iban community known as *pua kumbu*, a handwoven textile featuring beautiful motifs or designs – I had never seen anything like that before.

The *pua kumbu* is just one among many interesting handicrafts of the Iban community. Imagine the handicraft heritage of each and every ethnic community in Malaysia that not many of us are aware of.

While foreign tourists enjoy spending their vacations in Malaysia and appreciate the local handicrafts, Malaysians seem to prefer foreign locales.



Tourists get to see Sabah's famous pygmy elephants up close by taking a boatride on the Kinabatangan river --fotoBERNAMA (2020) ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

It is not wrong to go overseas but then Malaysia too has its share of attractions. A local holiday within our home shores is not only easier on our pocket but will also help to boost the domestic tourism industry in line with the aspirations of Visit Malaysia Year 2020.

In an effort to boost Malaysian tourism amid the COVID-19 outbreak, former interim Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad had announced an economic stimulus package which included several incentives for Malaysians.

These include a personal income tax relief of up to RM1,000 on expenditure related to domestic tourism and digital vouchers of up to RM100 a person for domestic flights, rail tickets and hotel accommodation.

COVID-19 is already having an impact on Malaysia's tourism revenue as more than 157,000 hotel room bookings have been cancelled leading to losses amounting to RM66 million as at Feb 17, according to the Malaysian Association of Hotels.

***(This commentary expresses the personal views of the writer and does not reflect Bernama's stand.)***

Translated by Rema Nambiar

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