

SPEECH BY: DATO' SERI DR. MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
(PRIME MINISTER)

EVENT: THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE PATA

VENUE: THE PUTRA WORLD TRADE CENTRE IN KUALA LUMPUR

DATE: 14 APR 1986

TIME:

The Honourable
Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah,
Minister of Trade and Industry,
and Chairman of PATA '86;
Mr. Alwin Zecha,
President of PATA;
Distinguished members of the
PATA Board of Directors;
Distinguished members of PATA;
Distinguished guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to be here to open this conference. We in Malaysia have been preparing for this event for a long time as this Conference means a great deal to us. It is with pleasure therefore that I bid you all a very warm 'Selamat Datang'. The last time we hosted the PATA Conference was in 1972 and the past fourteen years have seen a lot of changes and improvements in our tourism facilities. I trust that while you are here you will be able to sample the improvements that have been made.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. As members of the international travel and tourism industry, I am sure you are all fully aware of the state of the industry worldwide. In the past few years, the global economic picture has become very different from what it used to be a decade ago. Where once straight-forward trade and manufacturing dominated, now tourism has created a powerful niche for itself, particularly in Asia. Tourism now generates business to the tune of US\$100 billion yearly; and it is growing by leaps and bounds.

3. These are facts that are hardly known outside the industry. In 1984, 300 million people travelled world-wide. The cost of travel has gone down tremendously. The rise in fuel costs spawned a new generation of fuel-efficient aircraft which will now benefit further from the fall in fuel prices. The chances are that even greater growth will be seen in the travel industry in the near future.

4. Of course if the people in the industry and Governments make travel really hassle free, there will be such a

tremendous boost that the peoples of the world will literally be next-door neighbours. Knowing each other and the different countries is important for then we will have a better perspective when we read of some happenings in a particular country. It is our inability to think of other countries as being just like our country, and other people being just as human as ourselves that has made us prejudiced and suspicious and biased when thinking of other people and countries. This better perspective cannot but make us better judges of the frailties of our fellow men and accommodate them.

5. There are, however, many people who wish only to see the negative aspects of tourism. They say that tourism will lead to the progressive erosion of cultures and values and the way of life. How wonderful say these people, to leave the natives in their natural habitat, unspoilt by camera-totting tourists and their money.

6. We agree that nothing is more beautiful than to see a full-moon shining on an attap hut with swaying coconut trees. But for the man who at that very moment is sweating and swatting mosquitoes and trying to sleep, the beauty of the scene is lost. He would rather have a brick and mortar terrace house, electricity and piped water and other modern conveniences. And these he will have a chance to have if he can earn something from tourism or at least when the country is enriched by tourism.

7. The culture can be preserved. So can the hut and the moonlight and the swaying palms if the tourists want to see these. But a whole nation cannot be expected to expose themselves to mosquito bites and be deprived of a decent life merely because someone is concerned that we should not spoil their way of life. Preserving the stone age will no doubt make parts of this world picturesque and interesting but that is a heavy price for these people to pay simply because we want to see the picturesque and the interesting. Let us stop worrying too much about the loss of cultures and values. Malaysia, for example, knows fully well that once it loses its special character the tourists will cease to come. We also know we can retain our character without need to suffer mosquito bites and rickety huts.

8. Tourism is not 100% good, of course. Bad values and ways of life do spread as more people are able to travel. There is always a price to pay. Nothing in this world is free. But the benefits tourism brings to poor countries far outweighs the negative aspects of tourism. A country must know how to minimise the deleterious effects of tourism. If the country needs advice on how to do this, such advice can be given. But no country should be protected from tourists by well-intentioned groups unless some alternatives that can contribute towards development can be given.

9. Today, the tourist industry has reached a high level of sophistication. It is possible for anyone to travel to almost any part of the globe in comfort and style. In the process much benefit is spread among a vast segment of the peoples of the world. The souvenir peddler benefits no less than the five-star hotelier. And all are highly efficient in the provision of their particular kind of service.

10. We have come a long way from the family guest-house where the land-lord shares breakfast with his irregular guest. Now high technology has found its way into the industry. Not only can we travel faster, but we can reserve rooms world-wide instantly and a piece of plastic can pay for almost everything everywhere. Still we cannot replace the human element. When we travel, it is not the hotel computer system that we remember. It is the people that we meet, their kindness and the hospitality shown us, their guests that leave a lasting impression. Even if the only people we meet are the hotel staff or the ticketing agents, these people can make or break our trip. It is important therefore that this human element be nurtured and trained in the art of interacting with people. Indeed, there is everything to be gained from the hospitality extended to guests. The particular society can actually be more congenial and progressive.

11. Of course, in hard economic terms, tourism has its role too. In these times of recession, many countries including Malaysia look towards tourism to take up the slack following upon the fall in commodity prices. As Malaysians do a lot of foreign travelling, we have to have more incoming tourist to balance the trade.

12. However, tourism is not the overnight answer to any country's economic woes. Like many other industries, tourism requires planning and investment, and supportive Government policies. Tourists will not come just because you want them to.

13. For the Government mere encouragement for the tourist industry is not enough. No one will visit a country that is unstable or unsafe. Nor will they go to countries where nothing works, where bureaucratic red-tape entangle travellers or where officials unnecessarily intrude into activities which are no concern of theirs. Governments must therefore assure political stability and a minimum of regulation for visitors.

14. If these preconditions are met then there is still the question of marketing. No matter how beautiful a country is, without good marketing, nobody will come. Marketing provides international awareness of a country and assuming that this awareness is positive, tourists will want to visit it. Marketing involves everyone; the Government, the tourist industry people and the media. The first two may try very hard because they have a vested interest. But an

insensitive media may negate all their efforts. It is important therefore that the media, both national and international, report fairly and without exaggeration the incidents that no country can be free from. Indeed, they should help promote tourism for if the countries prosper through tourism, the media will also prosper.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

15. I have followed the development of the tourism industry with great interest. I have found that, though the industry is an arena where several forces interplay, it is essentially a business of moving large numbers of people over vast distances conveniently and cheaply. Only air transportation can achieve this. While we do not believe in total deregulation which bankrupts airlines neither can we accept extortionate price fixing through cartels. What we need is fair competition which apportions to travellers a reasonable benefit from any savings not from the airlines own special efforts.

16. Taking all relevant factors into account, and in line with the Malaysian Government policy to accelerate the growth of the tourism industry, I am pleased to make the following announcements.

17. Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Kota Kinabalu will be developed as gateways for international visitors to this country. From these points facilities will be provided for the foreign tourists to visit places of interest that are found in various parts of Malaysia.

18. On the occasion of PATA 1986, I am happy to announce that the Malaysian Airline System or MAS will introduce special fare schemes for the promotion of tourism within Malaysia. International passengers visiting Malaysia by air using Kuala Lumpur or Penang as gateways, may fly to one other intermediate point in Peninsular Malaysia at no extra cost, or visit Kota Kinabalu, Labuan or Kuching at 50% discount in airfare. Similarly, passengers using Kota Kinabalu as gateway may fly to one other intermediate point in Sabah, Labuan or Sarawak at no extra cost or visit Kuala Lumpur or Johore Bahru at 50% discount in airfare. For travel on any additional sector, a 25% discount is given.

19. The second scheme offers individual passengers from regional points and domestic passengers travelling in groups of three on all domestic sectors a 25% discount in airfare. It is hoped that the introduction of these special fares by MAS will further generate tourism in the country.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

20. I believe in recent years, the level of awareness of the Pacific area as a tourist destination has grown steadily. Where once, people were only aware of certain

parts of the region, and then not always for the best of reasons, nowadays more and more West Pacific countries are gaining exposure and attracting tourists. I understand that the Pacific Area Travel Association has contributed a great deal towards this growing awareness. The Association has worked hard to bring tourists to this region from the United States and from Europe. This has contributed towards the development not only of the tourism industry in these Pacific countries, but also towards their overall economic development as well.

21. The Pacific basin is an area of high potential and the 21st century should see it displacing the Atlantic region as the most economically advanced region of the world. Already many South East Asian countries are growing by leaps and bounds. But as their economies progress they will have to avoid the mistakes of western countries. They will not allow their natural beauty to be destroyed. Thus they will remain attractive to tourists.

22. Malaysia which has lately suffered from acute falls in commodity prices, is looking towards tourism to pick up the slack. The tourist industry here has grown very rapidly even without full Government help and inadequate facilities. Both have been remedied. The Government is backing the tourist trade strongly and is willing to listen to the ideas and appeals from those in the trade. Facilities too have been enhanced. It will require a long stay indeed for anyone wishing to experience all the unique things in Malaysia.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

23. We have made a very special effort for this PATA Conference as no doubt you will discover. One result of this effort is the Turtle logo. Normally you can see the leather-back turtle only on certain stretches of our 600 kilometres sandy east coast beaches at 3 o'clock in the morning. Now you will see them everywhere. You will also notice that Malaysian turtles now wear dark sun glasses. These are gifts from the TDC to the turtles. As turtles only lay eggs at night, it is hoped that they will be tricked by the dark-glasses into laying eggs in the day time for the tourists.

24. Before I end, I would like to wish you a pleasant Conference and stay in Malaysia. After the Conference ends, you will be able to see our country with the Post-Conference Tours that have been arranged for you. I hope you will take this opportunity to see for yourselves the real Malaysia which brochures and audio-visual shows cannot do justice to.

25. Once again I wish you Selamat Datang to Malaysia and a fruitful Conference and with this, I hereby officially declare the 35th Annual Conference of the Pacific Area Travel Association open.

Thank you.