KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

SURAT KHABAR	:	STAR LIFESTYLE			
TARIKH	:	20/11/2021 (SABTU)	MUKA SURAT	:	4
JABATAN	:	JPSM			

Sarawak gets crafty

The state sets its eyes on promoting community-based tourism.



A woman looking for ambal at a beach near Kuching, one of the many ecotourism experiences tourists can try in the state. — Photos: Bernama



Casuarina trees were recently planted at the Teluk Arong Eco Forest Park in Mersing.

EFFORTS to strengthen community-based tourism (CBT) in Sarawak will be further intensified through commercialisation and craft development programmes, said Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri.

Nancy, who is also Batang Sadong Member of Parliament said that apart from enjoying the beauty of Sarawak's flora and fauna, tourists are also looking for a different kind of tourism experience such as obtaining unique craft products which each district in the state could fully utilise to their advantage.

She is confident that Sarawakians could generate lucrative income making and selling crafts because between Jan 1 and Sept 30 this year, the 1,109 craft entrepreneurs in the state managed to generate more than RM11.7mil in sales.

"This shows that we (residents) benefit a lot. So in this case, the ministry, through agencies such as the Sarawak branch of the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation will actively empower community-based tourism which is one of the segments under ecotourism," she said in an interview.

Apart from that, to further promote Sarawak to the world, Nancy said the ministry is also planning to highlight all that the state can offer to international tourists at Expo 2020 Dubai, which is running from October to March 2022.

She said the ministry would utilise the main slot in week 13 of the expo to promote Sarawak as an ecotourism-based destination, as well as a venue for international conferences and exhibitions. This has garnered RM457mil in revenue for Sarawak in the past 10 years.

The ministry has also met with the Sarawak government to coordinate and drive the development of nine ecotourism clusters it had identified including Lundu-Sematan-Telok Melano-Tanjung Datu; Bako-Santubong-Kubah-Semenggoh-Bau-Padawan; Sri-Aman-Batang Ai-Ulu Sungai Menyang-Maludam; Sibu-Kapit-Tunoh-Baleh-Palagus; and Mukah-Daro-Pulau Bruit-Tanjung Manis.

Nancy said the establishment of these ecotourism clusters was to ensure that the locations could be developed sustainably through CBT activities as well as to enable holistic development of the homestay experience programme.

She said in terms of skills and training, the ministry is ready to offer tourism upskilling and reskilling programmes to local residents so that they could compete significantly at the international level.

In a separate report by Bernama, Sarawak Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Abdul Karim Rahman Hamzah said that the tourism sector in the state has been showing signs of recovery since October, which recorded tourism receipts of RM47.48mil compared to RM42.5mil in the same period last year.

The tourism receipts increased 11% while the number of visitors rose 14% to 20,926 people from 18,338 in October 2020.

"This is a positive development for Sarawak tourism," he said, adding that there were 19,310 domestic visitors in October this year, a 25% increase over the 15,571 in the same month last year.

However, the number of foreign visitors dropped 45% to 1,616 from the 2,967 registered in October 2020.

Abdul Karim said the implementation of compulsory quarantine was a contributing factor to the drop.

"I can understand why the figure dropped. The entry restrictions were imposed to prevent the spread of Covid-19 cases. As a result, no foreigners wanted to come here because they had to undergo the mandatory two-week quarantine upon arrival," he added.

Abdul Karim said Sarawak needed to adhere to the proposal by the National Recovery Council meeting recently to open the country's borders to international visitors by Jan 1 the latest.

"I think we in Sarawak must adhere to it. If the opening of the borders becomes a reality, it will enable tourism activities in the state to continue to recover," he added.

Inspired by Nami Island

Elsewhere, casuarina trees, commonly known as rhu, were planted at the Teluk Arong Forest Eco Park in Mersing, Johor recently. The park was inspired by the landscape on Nami Island in South Korea, and is set to be a new attraction for local and international tourists.

Johor Forestry director Datuk Salim Aman said that they took inspiration from Nami as the island is famous among tourists from all over the world.

"We chose casuarina trees to plant around the Teluk Arong Forest Eco Park to ensure that they become a new attraction for visitors. The park is still in the process of development, and will be equipped with public facilities including public toilets.

"We also propose that the concept of 'car camping' be developed in the park," he told reporters after the park's recent groundbreaking ceremony, officiated by Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Hasni Mohammad.

He said that there were four development components in the area, namely the Arong State Park Forest Complex, Gunung Arong climbing track, restoration area and Teluk Arong Forest Eco Park; the area is expected to be completed within five years.

Hasni said that the Mersing district has potential, especially in the tourism sector.

"We have discussed the marine-based higher education centre that is seen to have the potential to be developed in this district. Through the existence of this education centre, it will further highlight the state's treasures, as well as increase local (economic) development," he said. – Bernama