Malaysia joins list of world’s top most visited countries

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The growth in international tourism, which continues to show resilience despite concerns over the global economy, augurs well for Malaysia which is now ranked ninth as the most visited country in the world.

Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen says with a record 467 million tourists travelling in the first half of this year, international tourism remains firmly on track to reach one billion arrivals by year end.

Speaking in conjunction with World Tourism Day today, she says at the projected pace of growth, arrivals worldwide is expected to reach one billion by 2020.

"It will help us align our targets, strategic directions, strategies and programmes to harness the potential for tourism. With international tourist arrivals projected at 1.8 billion by 2030, it clearly demonstrates that tourism has an immense potential that every nation can benefit from."

This year’s World Tourism Day will be hosted by Spain and themed “Tourism & Sustainable Energy: Transforming Sustainable Development”.

The national-level World Tourism Day, themed “Tourism & Sustainable Energy: Transforming Sustainable Development”, will be launched by the minister today.

For the first six months of this year, Malaysia welcomed 11,632,483 tourists, a 2.4 per cent increase compared with the corresponding period last year.

"The rapid growth of the tourism industry has helped Malaysia climb into the ninth position of the most visited country in the world and 14th in terms of tourist receipts," says Dr Ng.

Under the Malaysian Tourism Transformation Plan, the industry is targeted to generate RM316.8 billion in tourism receipts, attract 36 million tourists by 2020 and create 500,000 additional jobs.

"To achieve our targets, 12 entry point projects were initiated based on the themes of affordable luxury, family fun, nature adventure, business tourism, international events and spa and sports," says Dr Ng.

In addition, innovative tourism products have been developed such as the Malaysian International Shoe Festival, Malaysia International Tourism Night Floral Parade (Magic of the Night), Malaysia Contemporary Art Festival (SMACAT), Fabulous Food Malaysia and Malaysia Homestay Experience.

"The success of the tourism industry in Malaysia hinges on innovation and creativity in developing new products and services such as LMCAT and Fabulous Food Malaysia," stresses Dr Ng.

Positioning Malaysia as a shopping destination and to increase the shopping receipts to 35 per cent by 2020 are among some of the objectives outlined under the Economic Transformation Programme.

The homestay programme, meanwhile, has been well received by the public with the number of tourists staying at homestays increasing from 31,833 in 2006 to 254,981 last year.

Due to evolving trends and lifestyle in cycling activities worldwide, the ministry has introduced the CCIM (Cuti-Cuti Malaysia) Bike Ride packages.

These packages not only promote cycling activities but also other tourist destinations in Malaysia. It will benefit the locals via the hiring of local cycling guides, food outlets, homestays, handicrafts and many others," says Dr Ng.

Currently, a total of 87 CCIM bike ride packages by 45 travel agents are available.

A series of CCIM has been done in Putrajaya, Sabah, Terengganu, Sarawak (Kuching), Penang (Georgetown), Perak and Pahang (Kuantan). Another on-going campaign is "Malaysia Green, Malaysia Clean" which aims at changing the mindset, habits and attitude of Malaysians towards cleanliness.

"The ministry is taking the lead by establishing and promoting cleanliness as a standard for Malaysia as we strive to maintain our position in the top 10 most visited countries in the world."

The ministry has lined up various programmes to commemorate this year’s World Tourism Day such as a panel discussion involving the Performance Management & Delivery Unit (Pemandu), National Key Economic Area members, non-governmental organisations and industry players, and exhibitions.

Among the topics to be discussed are green technology application in the tourism industry, tourism incentives, the role of sustainable tourism in wealth creation — a Malaysian experience, and preservation and conservation of nature in a developing society.

Dr Ng says Malaysia adopts the best practices in sustainable tourism management and upholds the principle that tourism conserves, preserves and protects.

It is also committed to addressing serious like climate change, global warming, carrying capacity and environmental degradation.

"In this regard, sustainable development is the cornerstone of Malaysia’s tourism development plans," she says, adding that the move to designate 14.3 million hectares of land (44 per cent of the country’s total land area) as permanent reserved forest boars testimony to Malaysia’s commitment in sustainable efforts.

The ministry is also launching a personalised corporate stamp depicting the country’s various tourist landmarks such as Taman Negara, Redang Island, Malaysia Tourism Centre and its fabulous food such as satay, roti canai, dim sum and nasi lemak.

"These features best represent the essence of Malaysia. They are also famous among local and foreign tourists," adds Dr Ng.