Malaysia is aiming to get more quality tourists - those who will stay longer and spend more. The tourism segment with the highest potential of accomplishing this aim is the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) sector.

The average tourist who comes to Malaysia spends RM2,600 per person, but those who come for MICE tend to spend twice the amount.

“They are a valuable source of income for the country as they bring in higher spending,” said Tourism Malaysia director-general Mirza Mohammad Taiyab.

MICE arrivals over the past three years were more than 220,000 per year or about 3.5 per cent of the country’s total tourist arrivals bringing some RM3 billion or about 10 per cent of the total tourism revenue.

Mirza says Tourism Malaysia has set a target for MICE arrivals to increase to 10 per cent of total arrivals, contributing to one-fifth of income derived from the tourism industry. This will translate to some two million MICE arrivals and RM8 billion in revenue based on the 2007 target of achieving 20.1 million visitors and RM44.5 billion in revenue, respectively.

The estimated figure for 2008 is encouraging. Mirza says MICE arrivals this year are expected to increase to 220,000. But the figure could be more, as some of the foreigners who come here for MICE do not write the actual purpose of their visit on the Immigration disembarkation cards.

“Instead, they say their trip to Malaysia is for a vacation. We also want to increase the average night stay of MICE visitors to seven days from the present five. They tend to spend two days for conferences and three more days for pre- or post-event tours,” Mirza says.

He suggests that the responsibility of tabulating the arrivals and other details also rests on hotels, associations, convention centres and others who are involved in the MICE industry in order to get a clearer picture of the sector’s performance.

“The arrivals play a big role in the ranking of countries as MICE destinations. Singapore currently ranks third in the world as a MICE destination. Malaysia was ranked fourth last year. However, the country is one of the top 10 MICE destinations in Asia.”

With a stronger focus on promoting Malaysia as an attractive MICE destination, the country is gaining...
Road shows to promote MICE sector

momentum to improve its ranking.

“This is thanks to the many big events
held here,” says Mirza, adding that some
of the international events hosted by
Malaysia include the recently concluded
Federation of International Gynaecologists
and Obstetricians conference that saw
some 8,500 delegates at the Kuala
Lumpur Convention Centre.

There have also been other
international events held in the country,
including the Pacific Asia Travel
Association (PATA) Travel Mart, OIC and
NAM meetings.

Next year, the Accountants Congress
will be held in Kuala Lumpur and other
big events are also in the pipeline.

“More events will mean more tourists,
money and a better placing in the
international ranking. Malaysia also wants
to be the head office hub for international
bodies as that means more meetings will
be held here.

“Malaysians who are office bearers
or hold positions in international-level
bodies must lobby to hold conferences in
Malaysia,” says Mirza.

The MICE industry players, including
convention centres, hotels, associations
and others, join Tourism Malaysia road
shows four or five times annually to sell
Malaysia.

The road shows have been held in
Europe, Japan, the US, China and India,
which are regarded as some of the major
markets for MICE.

Mirza says the selling is done under
the MICE brand name of “Meet and
Experience Malaysia Truly Asia”. Annually,
the Malaysian MICE suppliers meet some
100 international buyers through Global
Meet Malaysia, a buyer-meet-seller event.

Malaysia has also taken part in travel
fairs held in Thailand, Germany, Australia,
Spain, the US as well as China and India.

While Kuala Lumpur is the preferred
destination for MICE tourists, Genting
Highlands is favoured by the Chinese and
Indians.

“The Indians are excited about
Malaysia and they find the destination
very glamorous because of the Petronas
Twin Towers, which is an icon. The global
perception of a country is also important
when associations and foreigners choose a
country to hold an event.

“Mind you, we are competing with
so many other cities, and so we have
to keep on aggressively promoting
Malaysia,” says Mirza. — By SHANTI
GUNARATNAM