

Malaysia welcomes the WORLD

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**TOURISM
MALAYSIA**



Malaysia eyes larger **MICE** arrivals

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 expositions (MICE) sector.

The average tourist who comes to Malaysia spends RM2,000 per person, but those who come for MICE tend to spend twice the amount.

"In Malaysia, the MICE sector is an add-on to the whole tourism industry. In the last three years, foreigners who come to Malaysia for MICE have increased steadily," says Tourism Malaysia director-general Mirza Mohammad Taiyab.

MICE arrivals over the past three years were more than 550,000 per year or about 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 2006 is encouraging. Mirza says MICE arrivals this year are expected to increase to 750,000. 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-



Mirza: Malaysia aims to improve its ranking as a MICE destination

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 34 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

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Road shows to promote MICE sector

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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**