

# Think local, tourism players told

By SHANTI GUNARATNAM

**F**ORGET luxury chocolates and imported snacks. From now on, the trend will be to serve locally produced tidbits in hotel rooms and at social events. Malaysian products like kerepek, chips and nuts will be some of the local delicacies offered to visitors.

"What we need is more attractive packaging to make them more competitive and saleable. Our local hotels and resorts should start offering local snacks in their gift baskets or in the rooms. They can do away with chocolates and imported fruit which cost so much more," said Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said.

"I get really irritated when I step into a hotel room and find chocolates and imported fruits. What is wrong with having local snacks? Is it a status symbol to serve foreign items?"

She said that many Malaysians get excited when they see food outlets abroad selling Malaysian-made instant noodles and dodol but we are reluctant to put locally-made snacks on our shelves here.

"We can sell Malaysia through food, like what Malaysia Kitchen is doing overseas. The Tourism Ministry will soon be working with the Agriculture and Agro Based Industry Ministry to promote more Malaysian-made snacks locally and abroad."

The Ministry is also looking at enhancing the highly successful nine-year-old Malaysia Truly Asia campaign that is used worldwide.

Azalina said some rethinking has to be done on the campaign to see how it can work better.

"Malaysia is truly Asia because of its multi-racial and

multi-cultural makeup. But look around — countries in this region, like Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia, are very similar to us in many ways.

"In fact, many countries in the world are so cosmopolitan and they have so many different races and religions living under one roof. What we should do is to start looking at other things like our forests, flora and fauna," she said.

According to Azalina, Malaysia should give tourists more options - other than its unique racial makeup and diverse cultures.

"Yes, our biggest selling point is our people and our culture. But we can give more like eco-tourism and nature which are hard to find in other countries," she said.

"We have to make tourists excited by giving them many options. This is where we have to start thinking out of the box, have killer instincts and be very, very creative. Let's not dictate terms to them by telling tourists what they should see and do when they are here."

She does not want industry players to go out and sell Malaysia and then return home to sit on their laurels.

Tourism, she said, is about serving people and not just going jalan-jalan on foreign trips to promote Malaysia at fairs, expos and other events.

The perennial problem of under-performing service industry also came under fire from Azalina who is keen to tackle the problem.

While our neighbours — Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia — are bending over backwards for tourists, Malaysians do not see the importance of being nice to our tourists.



Azalina says we should sell Malaysia through food like locally made snacks

"What is the point of asking them to visit Malaysia when we cannot be nice to them. Tourists are like guests in our house," she said.

"When we have guests, we clean our houses and are on our best behaviour. Likewise, with tourists, we should never forget our manners and smiles."



For Azalina, her Ministry and Tourism Malaysia, the focus now is on eco-tourism