

Synchronisation effect

Eco-tourism develops in tandem with effectiveness of public transport

By YU JI

yuji@thestar.com.my

KUCHING: Eco-tourism would not develop fully until there was progress on public transportation, said UCSI University's Pre-U Centre head Mukvinder Kaur Sandhu.

"Place is a factory in tourism, specifically, in terms of being strategically placed, where people can have easy access to other locations of importance with minimum carbon emission," Mukvinder told a tourism forum at the university here yesterday.

Mukvinder, who is part of a Malaysia-China study group on eco-tourism, said despite China's badly perceived environmentally friendliness, there were pockets of eco-developments that were far superior than Malaysia's.

"Tianjin in northern China is being developed in a very sustainable manner. It has an efficient public transportation system. It is an eco city partly because it is designed to be compact.

"It allows cycling and walking to places. From a tourism point of view, that would mean tourists are able to travel to a lot of important spots in short distances."

Mukvinder is part of a study group on the perception and readiness of the hotel industry in Malaysia towards eco-hospitality.

She said preliminary findings, which were obtained solely based on respondents in Kuching, had indicated that eco-tourism depended on local grassroots movement.

"We call it the 3 'P's - process, people and place. The people factor has a strong impact," she said, adding that awareness among people and public transportation were linked in the likeliness to adopt green practises.

"The Malaysian authorities really do need to look at how to make cities (feel) more compact. We definitely need a more efficient public transportation system that allows

people to get around more easily. It is something that needs to be taken into account if the eco-tourism concept is to be more successful," she said.

Meanwhile, Malaysia's public transport sector is badly developed. According to statistics released recently, there are just about 850 buses for a population of almost 5 million in Kuala Lumpur.

By comparison, the city of London, which has a population of about seven million, has 7,500 buses. In Singapore, an island nation with a population of about 5 million, there are 3,200 buses, allowing more Singaporeans to travel on buses rather than trains, which are considerably more expensive to build.

Yesterday's 'Symposium of Tourism Studies: Current Trends and Issues in Tourism' event was a collaboration between UCSI University and the Russian Economic University after GV Plekhanov in Plekhanov in Tashkent.

Forum organising chairman Lah Wan Yee told reporters the Government would have to step in to assist the development of eco-tourism.

Lah, who is head of the campus' Hotel Management Department, said eco-tourism operators needed to be provided with incentives like tax breaks.

On hotels for instance, she said the construction of more eco-friendly infrastructure that were certified on the Green Building Index (GBI) needed to be encouraged.

"I don't think there is any tax incentive for eco-tourism presently aside from GBI. There should be more incentives, new policies, which take into account that introducing new products (like building GBI hotels) is very expensive," Lah said.

The two-day forum ends today.

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— MUKVINDER KAUR SANDHU