

Sarawaks tourism sector focusing on ecotourism

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KUCHING: The tourism industry in Sarawak is focusing on ecotourism by tapping the available resources such as rivers and lakes, said Tourism Minister Datuk Amar Abang Haji Johari Tun Openg. He said the introduction of the eco-friendly 'River Taxi' as another tourist attraction was in line with this stance. "Basically this will be our way forward in the tourism industry, especially in Sarawak. This will definitely become part of our effort to encourage green technology, including in transportation," Johari told a press conference after a cruise on the 'River Taxi' from Kuching Waterfront to Medan Niaga Satok here, yesterday. He said the 'River Taxi' was a pioneer project undertaken jointly by Sarawak Tourism Board (STB) and Sarawak Rivers Board (SRB) and its strength would be "Eco". "The boat is environmental friendly as it produces zero emission. We want to maintain the quality of the water. We want to encourage people to adjust in whatever they do by incorporating the importance of environment and using the latest technology available. "If we want to develop tourism-related projects, we have to take into account the environment, which is why green technology plays an essential role in determining tourism-related projects in the future," said Johari. He cited as an example that the proposed UCSI Hotel was designed to comply with the Green Building Index (GBI) with numerous green features such as the usage of river water to lower temperatures, harvesting rain water and minimising solar gain. "The two electric-powered boats have been acquired at the cost of RM170,000 each and they are fully equipped with refrigerators, MP3 players and safety features for tourists to enjoy their cruise. "This electric boat's battery is rechargeable and it takes only two hours of charging to sustain an operation of up to eight hours, The 'River Taxi' is the first in Malaysia," he said. Johari said the jetty at Medan Niaga Satok was already equipped with the power source panel for recharging the boat. "The boat's design and technology are from America but fabricated in Australia under franchise as it is heavily used at the Gold Coast, Perth and Brisbane. The boat is suitable for Sarawak River and can accommodate the maximum of 12 people, making it ideal for ferrying passengers of eight," he said. He said further plan would be made in future based on the response to this new facility, and he would also request the industry players in private sector to acquire the boat which would benefit them in the long run as pollution caused would be minimal. "In the development of the hinterland under the master plan to develop hydro projects, the moment an area is under water and becomes a lake, it can become a t o u r i s t a t t r a c t i o n , " h e a d d e d .