

TOURISM MALAYSIA PLANS TO ATTRACT 36M TOURISTS BY 2020



Tourism Malaysia, the country's tourism board, announced their plan to increase the number of visitors to the country. The goal is a very ambitious one - reaching 36 million tourists by 2020.

To attract more visitors Tourism Malaysia recently signed a partnership with Etihad Airways which will use its global network to further promote inbound international tourism.

"Malaysia is among our main destinations. **Since 2007 Etihad Airways carried more than one million tourists from and to the country,**" said Andrew Ward, marketing vice president of the carrier.

The airline and the tourism board will implement a series of marketing activities addressing the main markets from which tourists mostly come, such as the United States, Europe (UK, Germany, France and Italy) and the Middle East (Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait).

These countries bring more than 1.2 million tourists annually. Chong Yoke Har, deputy director general for Tourism Malaysia said: "In 2014 this number accounted for a 10% increase compared to the previous year."

Another measure to boost the tourist numbers includes visa exemptions for Chinese tourists. **From October 1 to March 31, 2016, visitor groups from China will get visa-free entry.** Travel agencies estimate that thanks to free visa the price of group tours from China will drop by 10 percent.

According to the Prime Minister, Najib Razak, the country will invest 120 million yuan in tourism promotion in ASEAN countries, China and India, and another 1.6 billion yuan will be allocated for infrastructure construction, as well as the repairs of parks, museums, and attractions. He also added that visitors from major source countries will be able to get their visa electronically.

Thanks to the growing tourist numbers several prestigious hotel chains race to secure the best locations in Malaysia for their new establishments. **The most demanded area for hotel projects is around Kuala Lumpur, where 4000 new rooms are expected between now and 2018.** Then comes Penang with 2000 new rooms planned and Kota Kinabalu in Sabah where also 2000 new rooms are expected. The projects are very ambitious. Multi-million structures are designed to combine hotels with high level apartments and malls for luxury brands.

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