

Achieving excellence in tourism: UMS VC

Larry Ralon

KOTA KINABALU: Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) Vice Chancellor Prof Datuk Kamaruzaman Ampon said all levels of society, even world communities, must be involved to achieve excellence in the tourism industry.

"The authorities are not exempted in playing this role. Hence, various routines which involve security, cleanliness, law within a State or country are required to be in line with tourism standards," he said at the opening of the International Conference on 'How To Successfully Design And Implement Master Plans For Sustainable Tourism Development' organised by the university's School of Business and Economy in collaboration with Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), at 1Borneo grand ballroom here Monday.

Dr Kamaruzaman said nowadays, tourism means much more than just taking a vacation while shopping.

"Tourists now are starting to focus more on elements such as product uniqueness and the distinctiveness of an offered package...at the same time, the hygiene element of the product and environment, the security level and public order are often determinants as to whether tourists return to a particular destination or not," he said.

Sabah has great potential to fulfil these requirements, he said, adding this is because the tourism in the State is still at an early stage and much can be done to improve Sabah so that it becomes the best holiday destination in Malaysia.

"Therefore, the involvement of various parties in realising this aspiration is most welcome. In this respect, UMS, together with the Government, has expended much effort in promoting an attractive tour package in Sabah as well as in Malaysia," he said.

Efforts to improve the country's economy via the tourism industry are still relevant through academic means, he added, saying this is especially so in the 21st century, where the excellence of all commercially-oriented industries is based on information technology advancement.

UMS as a noted national institution is well able to com-

plete this mission with the sharing of academic expertise in relevant areas, he said.

"UMS, via the proactive actions of its academicians, is always planning and implementing various programmes to spur the economic development of the country. A few academic discourses and seminars were held within and outside the main campus of UMS and UMS-Labuan International Campus."

According to him, one of the ways for a university to become highly competitive is to have a high level of accountability.

"There are a few definitions of university accountability. However, I am impressed by the definition which states that accountability by a university refers to the relevancy of its research findings in the past and future, and not only in the present."

In other words, he said studies or knowledge formed in the university is always developing and is continuous from one generation to the next. As Drew Gilpin Faust, President of Harvard University, once said, "A university has a longer view. It is not about a ticker tape of the day's gains and losses. It is about learning that moulds a lifetime; learning that transmits the heritage of millennia; learning that shapes the future..."

Dr Kamaruzaman said the current rapid development of the tourism industry requires a framework at the strategic level to achieve sustainable tourism development.

The drafting of the tourism master plan has taken into account three major dimensions, namely sustainability from the economic, environmental and social aspects, he said, adding the multi-disciplinary tourism industry needs a master plan that can become an important mechanism to coordinate tourism activities undertaken by all stakeholders.

"A tourism master plan needs to take into consideration changes and trends, be flexible, be feasible and possess a mechanism to monitor plan implementation."

He said the responsibility in implementing the sustainable tourism development agenda does not lie solely with the Government, as it needs the support of industry players, NGOs, local residents and universities including UMS.

Therefore, the organising of this conference by UMS, together with the Islamic Tourism Centre, is UMS' manifestation of its commitment towards sustainable development whereby effective networks and partnerships are also highlighted.

"*Insyallah* (God willing), our aspirations and efforts will bear fruit. To advance a nation, the economy needs to be first strengthened. May the national tourism industry continue to further advance where Sabah has great potential to be the leader in this industry," he said, hoping the participants will obtain much input and benefit from the conference.