

Langkawi has to be protected from ill effects of mass tourism

THE 2018 Budget presented by Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak holds great promise for many sectors, including tourism.

Funds were also allocated for the expansion and upgrade of Langkawi International Airport (LIA). This will certainly boost tourism on the island.

Langkawi has a lot to offer. As a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) geopark heritage site since 2007, it offers a wide range of attractions and activities. The island is a popular destination for foreign tourists, especially those from Asia. AirAsia and China Southern Airlines are the latest airlines to fly in tourists from

from Guangzhou and Shenzhen, China.

Last year, LIA handled 2,655,271 passengers and 31,035 aircraft movements, a growth of 8.8 per cent compared with 2015. LIA handles about 230 flights per week, while the port in Kuah berths ferries from Malaysia and Thailand. AirAsia alone aims to fly 1.3 million tourists to Langkawi this year through 300,000 direct international flights.

The Langkawi Development Authority (Lada) is promoting the island through attractive holiday packages to new markets such as China and India.

With the increase in tourist arrivals, a number of sustainability

issues need to be considered. Tourism is regarded as a valuable tool for development. But, there are both positive and negative sides to the tourism story.

A positive impact can be seen from the tourist dollar earned and the economic development of the island. Greater investment by foreign companies in Langkawi's tourism sector has also contributed to its progress.

But, if not managed properly, tourism can have a negative impact on the environment that is irreversible. Studies reveal that tourism has put lots of pressure on the island's natural resources.

Research carried out on Langkawi by Universiti Putra Malaysia's Faculty of Economics

and Management provides evidence that the natural environment has deteriorated. Excessive development in the coastal areas has significantly changed the island's status in terms of water quality, degradation of its natural resources, land structure, marine life variety and others.

Overcrowding has become a big challenge especially during the peak season. The influx of visitors has produced a huge amount of waste which damages the environment. However, efforts made by the local community and NGOs have reduced the amount of waste around the island.

Langkawi is too beautiful to be allowed to succumb to the ill ef-

fects of mass tourism. The participation of government agencies, the hospitality industry and the local community, and greater coordination between federal agencies and the local government are needed to develop a comprehensive programme to ensure the island's sustainability. There is also a need for tourism impact assessments to be conducted to ensure that Langkawi is protected for future generations.

**ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
DR YUHANIS ABDUL AZIZ**

Deputy dean (Graduate Studies)
Faculty of Economics and
Management,
Universiti Putra Malaysia