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Alor Setar's 'secrets' revealed through Kedah Legend Cruise

ALOR SETAR: River cruises in many countries are popular attractions among tourists and locals as it allows a whole new experience in enjoying the scenic view and atmosphere.

When asked about river cruises in Malaysia, many will point out to the river cruise available in Melaka or Sarawak.

Yet not many are aware that Kedah is another state that offers such activity as well.

In fact, Kedah is the first state in the northern region to conduct this activity for its visitors.

The Kedah Legend Cruise, operated by World Tree Holdings Sdn Bhd, began operating on 6 June, 2015 from Tanjung Chali.

Two boats are available from Thursday to Sunday to ferry visitors along Sungai Anak Bukit and Sungai Kedah.

Each boat could accommodate up to 40 passengers.

The passengers will be taken on a 4 kilometre ride which will take about 40 minutes.

The Legend Cruise is among the tourist attractions planned by the state government in line with the Discover Kedah 2016 campaign which targets five million domestic and international tourists.

A warm greeting welcomed this writer and other tourists as they stepped inside the boat.

A boat crew known as Pak Man, manoeuvred the boat along Sungai Anak Bukit where its passengers witnessed some historical sites and old villages.

On their left they could see Kampung Seberang Nyonya, an old village, and an elderly Chinese man providing sampan (boat) services to get to Kampung Seberang Nyonya from Pekan Cina.

The two places are separated by Sungai Kedah. This services, known as 'perahu tambang' (water taxi), were once the main transport mode for villagers who wanted to

get to Pekan Cina.

Meanwhile, a 153-year-old Chinese temple built facing Sungai Anak Bukit lies on the right hand side.

Rumah Merdeka, which was the home of Malaysia's father of independence Tunku Abdul Rahman also grabbed the group's attention.

The building now houses collections and memories of Tunku.

Moving further along the river their eyes soaked in the view of the Alor Setar Tower and Zahir Mosque, making sure photos they capture clearly include the two icons of Alor Setar.

As the boat took the Bernama reporter and others along Sungai Kedah heading to Ampang Jajar the crew made a short stop to allow its passengers to feed the deers, another opportunity for passengers not only to see but get a feel of nature.

Despite its potential to become a great tourism product, there was more that Legend Cruise could improve.

Boat operator Cheah Hwai Min, when interviewed by Bernama, said only about 3,000 tickets were sold until early September 2015 and this was a small number. Furthermore, he said, many were unaware about Legend Cruise possibly due to lack of promotion.

However, Cheah noted the bigger problem was the lack of cheerful elements along the river route.

"The main problem is that the sight of river bank at the left and right is not cared for, not cheerful and cleanliness is always an issue.

"The river is muddy when it rains and the garbage floating on the water becomes an eyesore," he added. At night, the area is pitch dark without the presence

of lights making it difficult to enjoy the scenic view during the night.

"When we use Sungai Anak Bukit, we depend on the light that comes from the Zahir Mosque," he said hoping that the state government would look into the problem.

Even Tanjung Chali Tower did not offer any light after its electric cables and equipment were stolen.

According to Prof Datuk Dr Abdul Kadir Lebai Din, who is a Professor Emeritus at Universiti Utara Malaysia's (UUM) School of Tourism, Hospitality and Environmental Management, a feasibility study should be done before setting up any new tourist attractions. He said this includes the 9A concept - Attraction, Accessibility, Availability, Affordability, Agency, Accountabilty, Alternative, Attentive, Accomodation.

"When we talk about Attraction, for example, there must be an added value to allow a person to go to a place. Meanwhile, Agency refers to the presence of a special body to monitor the management and journey to a location," he said.

He said each aspect had to be looked into and studied beforehand because these aspects would ensure tourist attractions were preserved and they consistently attract visitors.

He pointed out further that Kedah already has two big assets in the form of Sungai Kedah and Sungai Anak Bukit, but a systematic and orderly development would lure more visitors to the state.

This is especially in terms beautification of the river and its surrounding areas.

At the same time he hoped the state government could hold talks with tourism experts prior to making any decision. - Bernama

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ALOR Setar Tower (left) and Zahir Mosque, the two icons of Alor Setar as seen from Kedah Legend Cruise. The Legend Cruise is among the tourist attractions planned by the state government in line with the Discover Kedah 2016 campaign. - PHOTO: BERNAMA