

Event travel reshapes local tourism

Concerts, sporting events and festivals drive post-pandemic growth

By YUEN MEIKENG
meikeng@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Putrajaya have seen the biggest rise in domestic tourists in the past decade, as more Malaysians travel for concerts, sports tournaments, festivals and other attractions.

Tourism industry players say this trend of planning trips to attend events was becoming more common, especially after the pandemic, and is one of the main drivers for domestic travel.

The number of domestic tourists in Kuala Lumpur more than tripled from three million in 2015 to 10 million last year, making it the largest growth among all states and federal territories.

This is followed by Penang, which welcomed 5.63 million domestic tourists last year – up by 160% from 2.16 million in 2015, based on data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia.

Domestic tourists are defined as residents in Malaysia who travel outside their usual environment within the country for at least one night.

Overall, Malaysia recorded an increase of nearly 70% in domestic tourists from 62.7 million in 2015 to 106.5 million in 2025.

Malaysian Tourism Federation (MTF) president Dr Sri Ganesh Michiel said many Malaysians are

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now travelling specifically to attend events, generating demand for hotels, transportation, shopping and food and beverage services.

“Kuala Lumpur benefits from hosting major concerts, sporting events, exhibitions, shopping and business tourism, while Penang continues to attract visitors through its world-renowned food, heritage attractions, beaches, festivals and family-friendly experiences,” he said when contacted.

Sri Ganesh said feedback from MTF showed that hotels located near major event venues generally experience stronger occupancy during concerts and sporting events.

“This trend has become more evident since the pandemic,” he added.

Among upcoming events in Malaysia are the Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix at the Sepang International Circuit from Oct 2 to 4 and concerts by rock band My Chemical Romance

on Nov 19 and 20, as well as K-pop supergroup BTS on Dec 12 and 13.

Malaysian Association of Hotels president Datin Christina Toh said the trend of local tourists planning their travels around events was something many members have observed, particularly among younger travellers and families.

“Hotels often experience higher occupancy during weekends when Kuala Lumpur hosts international concerts, football matches or major sporting events,” she said.

Toh said if the event falls on a weekday, many guests usually stay for one night, but for weekends or public holidays, more tend to extend their stay by an extra night.

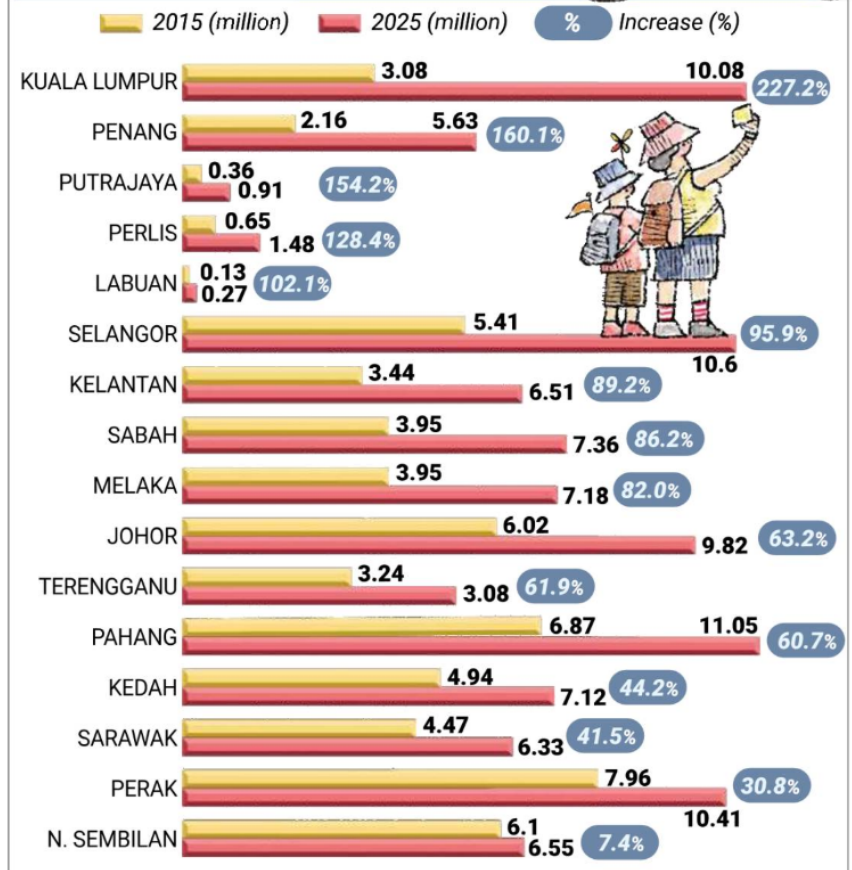
Malaysian Tourist Guides Council president Jimmy Leong said periodical events organised regularly, such as car shows, book fairs and leisure and travel fairs, also attract big crowds.

He said an emerging trend was that more tourists were travelling in smaller groups, such as between four and eight people compared to large numbers before.

“There is also a demand for personalised services, as well as for avoiding over-commercialised areas and products,” Leong said.

The rise of domestic tourists in Malaysia

Number of domestic tourists in each state in 2015 and 2025.



Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia

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