

LETTER | Our tourism industry a shadow of its former self

LETTER | The Department of Statistics has been chronicling the annual performance of our local tourism industry since 2005 and had just released the latest tourism satellite account.

Compared with 2019 figures, the impact on tourism by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 became crystal clear.

It is no surprise that tourism receipts from inbound and domestic expenditures declined by 71.2 percent from RM182.1 billion in 2019 to RM52.4 billion last year, an unprecedented drop. Outbound tourism receipts were left out in this 2019 tourism satellite account.

Domestic tourism expenditure declined from RM92.6 billion in 2019 to RM38.7b last year and inbound tourism expenditure plummeted from RM89.4 billion in 2019 to RM13.7 billion last year.

Outbound tourism expenditure was RM44.8 billion in 2019 and should be around RM7.5 billion in 2020.

The percentages of the main components of inbound tourism remained largely unchanged. They were shopping at 34.4 percent, accommodation 23.1 percent and passenger transport 17.5 percent. In 2019, the percentages were 33.3 percent, 24.4 percent and 18.4 percent respectively.

Similarly, the percentages of the main components in domestic tourism were shopping at 55 percent, food and beverage at 19.4 percent and automotive fuel 9.4 percent. In 2019, shopping was 42.1 percent, food and beverage 15.9 percent and automotive fuel 16.7 percent.

Former glory

It would take a long time for international travel to regain its former glory, having reached its acme in 2019 before being brought crushing down in 2020 by the Covid-19 pandemic.

For tourism businesses that were reduced to ashes, what are their chances of being resurrected?

As the world will continuously be disrupted by future pandemics, natural disasters, terrorism, armed conflicts and major wars, the future certainly looks bleak.

But then again, human beings will get numb to such threats and will carry on with life as usual as if there is no tomorrow.

And if they could brush aside the spectre of war and doomsday clock ticking ever closer to midnight, they are not going to allow any coronavirus to stop them from travelling and enjoying what the world has to offer.

Tourism will be recovering even when it is not totally safe to travel.

Therefore, it would be rather pointless to continue with lockdowns such as imposing travel restrictions within the country and closing borders to choke the flow of citizens and foreigners entering and leaving our country.

Lives must be saved but so too are livelihoods.

As Covid-19 is expected to become endemic in Malaysia by end of October, we will have to learn to live with the coronavirus.

Slippery slope

While citizens are reminded to change and adjust to live in the new normal, the authorities must first lead the way by replacing old measures with new ones.

But antiquated mindsets could cause more harm than good. The revised Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) programme has sent ripples across foreign communities affecting not only retirees living here but also deterring foreign visitors, students, businesses and investments.

The tagline 'Malaysia Truly Asia' had successfully projected our country's image that we could showcase to the world the best that Asia could offer, having benefited from large numbers of people and their cultures from west, south, southeast and east Asia settling in Malaysia.

But retrogressive leadership would send our nation into the backwaters, while countries that have managed to break free from shackles imposed by selfish leaders are developing fast and racing ahead. Bent on wanting to be insular and exclusive, we are sliding down a slippery slope.

Never-ending sloganeering is nothing more than syiok sendiri exercises and meaningless to those who are unemployed, weak or hungry. Talk is cheap but sickening to hear.

What we need are concrete steps to lift millions out of poverty, more so as B40 group had grown much bigger.

Sadly, our politicians continue to fan the flames of race, religion and royalty to gain popularity, power and possessions, instead of putting in genuine efforts to bring real benefits to the people, such as job opportunities, raising income, advancing healthcare and overhauling education.

All these need government funding and tourism can contribute immensely. No other business requires lesser capital that could bring the highest return on investment within the shortest time. This would only happen when tourist and business-friendly policies are put in place.

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