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EVERY CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING: THE PROSPECTS OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN POST PANDEMIC

Friday 04/06/2021

KOTA BHARU, June 4 (Bernama) -- The tourism industry is currently facing a huge challenge, but with an optimistic hope that the industry will experience a recovery process soon after the approval of interstate travel permits.

Demand for the tourism sector always exists because tourism activities have been in the hearts of the community and act as a medium that can improve the community's quality of life.

The Covid-19 pandemic has totally changed the normal landscape into becoming chaotic worldwide.

Supply chains are disrupted, the economy is in turmoil, social activities become retarded, and many more implications that we could not have imagined. One of the most affected industries in this pandemic is tourism and its related industries such as hospitality, transportation, and other service sectors.

It is realised that this industry played a significant role in the contribution to the national GDP in 2019, which recorded approximately RM86.14 billion.

This lavish industry has proven to have provided much to the national economic income, as well as having created and promoted employment opportunities to local communities.

The tourism industry has become a pulse to the local economic development and a catalyst for economic growth.

However, the prosperity of this industry did not stay long following the global pandemic which had caused the total tourist arrivals to decline sharply from 2.164 million in January 2020 to only 7546 in April 2020 due to the implementation of the Movement Control Order (MCO) and inter-stated travel ban.

However, in July 2020, when the restrictions eased, the number of tourists gradually increased from 6585 in June up to 18660.

The situations has caused a huge loss to the industry's key players. The unemployment rate increased from 772.9 thousand in December 2020 to 782.5 thousand in January 2021, resulting from the drastic reduction of business operations in tourism-related industries, which consist of accommodation and food services, passenger transportation, entertainment, and recreational activities (Department of Statistics Malaysia).

Figures from statistical data have certainly caused concern and anxiety to various parties, especially to those who have been severely affected and have suffered losses.

Many hotels and tour operators have reduced or closed their business activities because they cannot afford the fixed cost of operations.

On the part of the community, there are those who have lost their source of income due to retrenchment, while those who look forward to tourism cannot continue this activity.

For this group, tourism activities can increase the level of individual utility that can improve the quality of life with the family.

However, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is expected to be temporary. The government has introduced initiatives to revive domestic tourism activities.

Among the latest is the National Tourism Policy (DPN) 2020–2030, which focuses on the effective recovery of the tourism industry based on new norms, strengthened competitiveness, sustainable and inclusive tourism sector development, and awareness of future disasters.

In addition, the PENJANA Tourism Financing Scheme worth RM 1 billion has been provided to fund transformation initiatives by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector to remain competitive in the new era of normality.

It remains unsure as to when this crisis will end, but of course, optimism is needed in hoping that the situation will improve and recover so that tourism activities can be resumed, even if only at the domestic level.

The desire to travel undoubtedly exists among members of the community, especially after a long period of interstate movement ban due to the daily increase of Covid-19 cases.

According to the data on income and visitor receipts each year before the pandemic, it proves that tourism activities have become part of the society's routine.

The desire to travel after the Covid-19 pandemic is also further strengthened in the findings from the Survey on Domestic Travel in Malaysia After MCO 2020, reporting that respondents still want to travel domestically, although 97.4 percent of respondents consider hygiene and safety before traveling.

Thus, the issue of demand for tourism activities is not the main issue to worry about; the main question that needs to be given attention is whether the industry is ready to receive a demand surge when travel restrictions are eventually eased. Can the industry players meet the local demands after operations in this industry have been severely affected?

In the meantime, tour operators should formulate a strategy to deal with the surge in future demands. This is also the best time for industry players to organise, plan, restructure, build, and restore their operations in facing the recovery process.

Tourism industry players need to focus more on matters related to new packages and approaches, safety and health issues, and the identification of market segments and target groups for the purpose of facing a new era of tourism after the pandemic.

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