

Korean tour guides in Sabah temporary measure, says Dr Ng Yen Yen

KOTA KINABALU: The decision to allow foreigners, particularly South Koreans, to be tour guides in Sabah, was made in the best interest of the nation and tourism development, said Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen.

She said the move was merely a "temporary measure" to meet the demand of the increasing number of

South Korean tourists to the Land Below the Wind.

As such, the government sought a long-term solution to this for the common good, she reasoned.

Dr Ng said Malaysia had relaxed its policy prohibiting foreign tour guides in the country, especially in Sabah, only in the case of South Korea because it was difficult to get

Korean-speaking tour guides.

"In fact, this is a request from the Korean Government, or rather Korean Embassy (Kuala Lumpur) because Sabah is becoming a popular destination for Korean tourists.

"As of June, about 43,800 Korean tourists visited Sabah, as compared to about 36,000 during the same period last year, but we have only

eight local Korean-speaking tour guides in Sabah.

"Certainly, this is not enough to cater to the increasing number of Korean tourists," she told reporters after the presentation of the 1Malaysia Student Discount Card (KADS1M) ceremony at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) main campus in Likas near here yesterday.

Dr Ng was asked to comment on a call by the Sabah Tourist Guides Association on Sunday, requesting the ministry to rescind its recent decision to allow foreigners to take the localised tourist guide course here.

Its chairman, Daniel Doughty, was quoted as saying that allowing foreigners to take up tour guide jobs

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here would affect the livelihood of local tour guides.

Dr Ng said that so far, of the 19 Korean guides interviewed, only seven had work permits to take up the job in Sabah.

She said the recruitment was part of the government's efforts to galvanise the tourism sector in the country, in the hope of giving the best service in the tourism industry.

On tourist arrivals in the country, she said the government was confident of achieving the targeted 25 million, with

receipts of about RM60 billion this year.

Earlier, in her speech, the minister hoped UMS would introduce park management course to equip park managers with the necessary skills, thus improving the management of parks in the country.

On KADS1M, she said, 231 companies had participated in the project nationwide, and hoped the KADS1M meant for students of private and public higher institutions would help reduce their living costs. – Bernama