

UMS campus as tourism draw

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KOTA KINABALU: Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) has the potential to turn its campus into a lucrative tourism product, according to Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Masidi Manjun.

Towards this end he pledged his Ministry's commitment to help and support UMS' effort to market its campus as a tourist destination.

"I think there are not many universities that turn their campuses into tourism products.

"UMS' campus is the biggest and the most beautiful in Malaysia or even in Asia. And there are many tourists who are fascinated with the campus which was built beautifully.

"And now, UMS is not only an academic excellence centre but also a tourism product," he said during the opening of the UMS-EcoCampus Visitor Information Centre (UMS-EVIC), on Wednesday.

He also said, the varsity should leverage on its advantages to further boost its marketability.

"UMS is lucky as it has a land area of 1,000 acres. It is also located in one of the most beautiful parts of Kota Kinabalu... it has a sea view, hillside and it is only a 10-minute drive from the city centre."

The percentage of developed area in the campus is also little, compared to the untouched areas, Masidi said.

"This is definitely an attraction for tourists, especially those who don't have much time to spare to visit places out of the city... they can experience Sabah's nature's beauty right here in Kota Kinabalu."

As Sabah's current tourism industry is witnessing a spike, Masidi proposed that UMS get more creative by introducing value-added products that can attract

more visitors.

"As more people visit the city, they need to go somewhere, and the best way to do is by creating a product, perhaps within the city itself.

"And UMS is the best place for it. So it is important to have the creativity to cater to short-term visitors so that they too can enjoy the whole of Sabah.

"You can hike on the hills in the campus and along the way, you can see a natural exhibition with a variety of trees. As you climb and trail down the hill, you can gain more knowledge as well," he said.

Aside from that, Masidi also recommended UMS offer birdwatching packages as the hobby is increasingly popular with the global value of the birdwatching sector being about US\$4 billion per year.

"And perhaps UMS can work together with a company to set up a hotel in the campus which can also be utilised as a practical training centre.

"UMS has a magnificent sea view... and we lack five-star hotels in the city.

"We need to expand the horizon of our mind and think of something that can generate income for the university."

The UMS-EVIC is a one-stop centre for UMS EcoCampus Tourism to house an information counter for centralised ticketing system and payment, briefing hall for the visitors, souvenir shop and a refreshment outlet.

UMS EcoCampus Tourism involves tourism activities within the compound of UMS consisting of five packages or products - gallery and museum tour, nature delight tour, architecture heritage tour, sunset tour and nature education camp.

Also present were UMS Vice-Chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Mohd Harun Abdullah and Sabah Tourism Board General Manager Gordon Yapp.



Masidi (third left) and Mohd Harun (second left) browse through one of the products offered at the UMS-EVIC.