

Rural tourism gets attention



Joniston together with the Enactus UMS students and Kg Tudan residents holding the Mulberry Tea product

NST 18.8.2017 5
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KOTA KINABALU: Rural tourism is gaining traction in Sabah with agro-tourism and eco-tourism as its main focus.

Sabah Tourism Board chairman Datuk Joniston Bangkuai said that a recent tourism road show which attracted 10,000 visitors saw an increase of tourists in all four promoted districts - Kiulu, Ranau, Tambunan and Kedamaian.

"Most of the districts have already activated their committee district tourism and this shows our rural tourism is gaining popularity," he said at a press conference with the Enactus University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) team on the Morus (plucky mulberry) project here yesterday.

Joniston said the Morus project which is conducted together with Kg Tudan residents in Kiulu and Enactus UMS has helped in promoting rural tourism products and bringing economic development to rural communities.

"Enactus UMS brings hope to villagers by exposing them about the production of tea from the Mulberry leaves and indirectly optimize the use of the entire Mulberry tree.

"At first the villagers did not know the true potential of mulberry plants which can be found in their village," he said.

The students saw the potential of the Mulberry leaves to be turned into tea. Upon research, it turns out that the leaves have a lot of health benefits and nutrients including antioxidant.

He added that the Enactus UMS team together with the villagers has constructed a Morus dryer which enables them to dry the mulberry leaves

and maintains its nutritional value.

The project took a year and helped uplift the lives of 300 villagers by increasing their average monthly income from RM514 to RM700.

The Kiulu assemblyman thanked UMS in choosing Kampung Tudan for their Morus project which brings great impact to the economy of the rural community.

"I personally followed the project from the beginning and pleased that this project has succeeded in winning the National Enactus Competition recently in Kuala Lumpur, and the team will represent Malaysia to the internationally in Enactus Competition in London.

"Their success will eventually leverage the development of Kampung Tudan as Sabah's first mulberry cultivation centre and also in eco-tourism and agro-tourism," he added.

"I hope after the completion of the road network from Kiulu to Tudan, we can expand the mulberry farm," he said, adding that they were also in discussions with the agriculture department to make Kiulu as the center of the mulberry cultivation and also turning it into a food hub as the villagers also produce stingless bee honey.

Besides mulberry tea, the villagers also produce their own wine using the extracted juice of the mulberry fruit and also lotion from the plant itself.

With collaboration of Sabah Tourism, Tudan mulberry-based products will be promoted to local markets and tourists via the board's subsidiary company Sri Pelancongan Sabah Sdn Bhd.