

Tourists flock to Sabah due to natural beauty

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KOTA KINABALU: Environmental and wildlife protection has a great impact on the economy of Sabah, said Economist Dr Rafiq Idris (pic).

The senior lecturer of the Universiti Malaysia Sabah's (UMS) Financial Economics Programme (Business, Economics and Accountancy Faculty) said this was a topic of interest, especially in developing countries, where people discuss whether a country should prioritise the economy or the environment.

Some argue on the ability of the developing countries to achieve better growth if they were not allowed to extract their resources freely, he said, adding questions such as whether environmental regulation affect productivity or economic growth was frequently asked.

Speaking on the importance of environment and wildlife protection to the economy of Sabah specifically, he believed, despite many issues relating to wildlife in the State, "we are okay."

"We still have many healthy, fresh, clean, unpolluted environment and protected wildlife. Having said that, nevertheless, efforts to further strengthen the protection of environment and wildlife conservation is extremely important and efforts for this should be intensified.

"In relation to whether a country should prioritise the economy or the environment first, I would say both are important. Indeed, environment and wildlife protection contributes to the economy," he said, in conjunction with World Environment Day which falls on June 5.

"To me it helps the other. Environment protection and wildlife conservation contribute to the economy. Certain resources can be extracted in a way which does not harm the environment," he said.

On the contribution of environmental protection and wildlife conservation to the economy of Sabah, he said it created or increased economic value.

"How? Having good environment protection management and regulation with good wildlife conservation programme can become an attraction for tourists.



"Good environment and wildlife protection would attract tourists from around the world to visit Sabah. By this, it has the potential to further contribute to Sabah's tourism sector significantly. With an increasing number of tourists, it increases business opportunities, create jobs and attract investments."

On why there were a big number of tourists visiting Sabah, Dr Rafiq said it was not for mere shopping as Sabah is not a shopping destination.

"People continuously visit Sabah because of 'nature.' The beautiful beaches, islands, mountain, waterfalls, jungles and wildlife, among others, are among the main reasons for tourists to come. We will be able to sustain the performance of the tourism sector if we continuously protect our environment and wildlife.

"With good environment and protected wildlife, it also has the potential to attract investors or even medical scientists to come over for research. All this eventually contributes to the State's economy," he said.

He said environment protection and wildlife conservation awareness have increased around the world, policies or regulations on this have changed or being improved overtime.

"It is not impossible at least in the long run, trade agreement will include stringent requirements on environment or wildlife protection.

"Recent trade agreement such as the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement has seen greater commitment by member countries to go beyond those stated in the CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora).

"There is also possibility in the far future of boycotting countries in trade for certain products if that countries do not comply with certain international standard or regulations," he said.

To sum up, he said, environment protection is important to sustain our current economic performance, especially for the tourism sector.

"Poor environmental quality affects economic growth and well-being by lowering the quality and quantity of resources or due to health effects. There is a huge body of literatures which confirm this," he said.