

UMS, college, associations sign pact to boost rural tourism

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KOTA KINABALU: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Almacrest International College (AIC), Kadamaian Tourism Association and Kiulu Tourism Association to collaborate in the effort to strengthen rural tourism.

UMS Vice Chancellor Prof Datuk Dr D Kamarudin D Mudin said tourism is one of the niche research areas of UMS; and sustainable development, responsible consumption, and rural tourism are regarded as the key focus in tourism.

"The roles of higher learning institutions are two folds. Firstly, as a learning institution, we aim to produce competent graduates, especially in tourism and hospitality so as to support the growth of tourism industry for not only the State, but for the country as a whole.

"Secondly, we aim to deliver high quality research outcomes and publications that can benefit the community," he said.

According to Kamarudin, the signing of the MoU was closely related to the two strategic objectives of UMS; to achieve greater access through collaboration, partnership, and community engagement as well as enhancing excellence in research and publication.

"I believe UMS as a full-fledged higher institution in Sabah can play an important role to lead and be part of the team to strengthen tourism development.

"MoU like this would increase cooperation and benefit not only the two higher learning institutions - UMS and AIC - but also the tourism industry as well as key players of tourism stakeholders, specifically those in the rural areas.

The signing of this MoU was deemed as a significant cooperation between educators and industry associations to bring the rural tourism industry to greater height; especially in term of life-long learning as the content of MoU outlines the series of relevant training modules, research potential and publication and youth development, and training for the tourism operators in Kiulu and Kota Belud - Kg Melangkap Tiong, Kg Kiau, and Kiulu.

"We are committed to help the

tourism industry, local communities, and public in providing information and facilitate discussion related to, not only tourism but also knowledge and skill transfer programmes to improve the socio-economic development in Sabah through various channels.

"I am confident that with the signing of this MoU and launching of the related training modules would be able to harness and thrash out all issues or, barriers pertaining to sustainable rural tourism development and youth leaders in participating in rural tourism," he said.

Kamarudin's speech was delivered by Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Student Affairs and Alumni Prof Dr Ismail Ali.

Meanwhile, Sabah Assistant Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister Assafal P Alian said that the State Government has already established tourism as one of the most important sector in the State.

He explained that this is because the State has a vast amount of land filled with a variety of cultures from different races and ethnic groups to offer.

"The government has already been providing assistance to tourism operators where we handle the tourists' arrivals into the State while our agency, Sabah Tourism Board, will promote our activities to tourists in the State," he said.

When asked about the MoU signing, Assafal said the focus was more towards rural areas where most of the tourist attractions are situated.

"We have many notable rivers, along with our popular mountain, Mount Kinabalu, and a community filled with traditions and culture where we can offer as tourism products.

"This is also a good opportunity for the rural communities to be ready as they are about to play a role as tourism ambassadors in the future.

"Additionally, this is also a good opportunity for youths to be involved as they will be the ones who will take over and resume this work in the future," said Assafal.

Also present at the programme were Almacrest International College CEO Stephanie Yen Chung Wai, Kiulu Tourism Association Deputy President Mejin Manggingow, Kadamaian Tourism Association President Walter Kandayan.