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Sabah Travel & Leisure Guide

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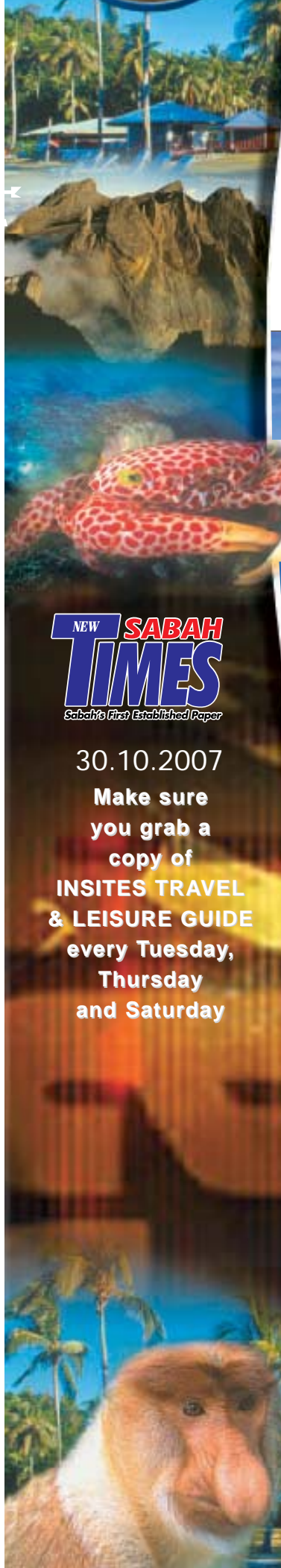
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Eco tourism

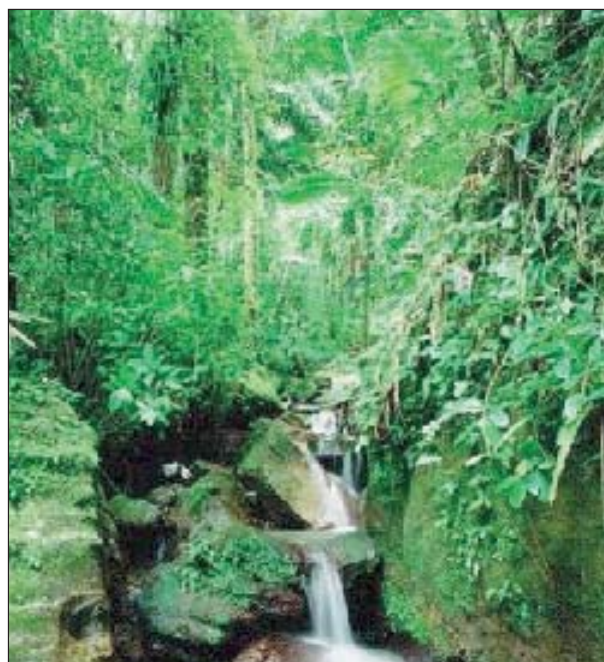
By ANNA VIVIENNE



NEW **SABAH TIMES**
Sabah's First Established Paper

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As time goes on, we become more aware and perhaps more concerned about our environment. We now know that interconnection of nature around us.

With this awareness, however, comes the need to know and see more of nature; so much so that it becomes fashionable to 'languish' with nature, even though some of us could be there just because Miss A is there.

Because of this, eco-tourism is becoming increasingly popular in our country.

This is made easier with the advance of transportation and information technology; the world seems to become smaller and remote areas of the earth seem within reach of travellers.

In fact, tourism is now the world's largest industry, with nature tourism the fastest growing segment; in Sabah tourism is the second income generating sector to palm oil.

Eco-tourism...this term has become increasingly popular in both conservation and travel circles.

The concept of ecotourism is believed to have been misunderstood. It is believed to be used as a marketing tool to promote nature-related tourism.

According to the World Conservation Union (IUCN) ecotourism means:

"Environmentally responsible travel to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promote conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples."

This means ecotourism is different from nature tourism by its emphasis on conservation, education, travellers' responsibility and active community participation.

One of the areas that tour operators and the relevant authorities can look into is to ensure the basic principle of ecotourism is to benefit locals.

This means that the local communities should benefit from conservation, economic development and education.

For instance, those living nearby the parks and protected areas may be affected by development, but they can also benefit through conservation.

The operators can bring residents into the ecotourism operations and allow them to earn while giving them a sense of belonging.

This trend is now showing in the Kinabatangan Conservation area, where the residents of riverine villages are actively involved in the homestay programme. The residents there play host to tourists who wish to enjoy the diverse flora and fauna of Kinabatangan.

The authorities will work closely with indigenous people to establish community businesses, provide tourism training and marketing assistance, and develop compatible economic activities such as handicraft production and tour guiding. This focus on people reflects the authorities' commitment to incorporate the natural world and the people that live in it.

This way tourism and conservation work together to ensure that development of one or the other does not affect them adversely. While, these two are complementing one another, the locals are benefiting.