

Sabah's tourism industry is one of the major contributors to the State's economy, which is rapidly developing at a rate that distinguishes it as a force to be reckoned with. At the helm is the newly-appointed Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment, Datuk Masidi Manjun, who aims to spearhead Sabah's tourism efforts with fierce determination. Datuk Masidi hails from Ranau and has long been in service to the State. Prior to becoming the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment, he served as the Minister of Youth and Sports from 2004 to 2007.

At the recent 'Afternoon With The Minister' a session with the tourism players, Datuk Masidi shared his hopes, aspirations and directions for the industry. He expressed that the key to Sabah's tourism industry's continuous success is to uphold the quality of goods and services while striving for improvement. "We must not rest on our laurels. There must be continuous effort to be better in all we do," he said. The Minister cited the example of how the current expansion development works of the Kota Kinabalu International Airport (KKIA) has curtailed charter flights into Sabah, hence affecting arrivals into the State. However, he stressed that tourist target arrivals are mere numbers and believed in the adage that "quality is more important than quantity." He further emphasized on the importance of providing quality service in order to attract quality tourists, hence making Sabah a world-class destination.

In our drive to bring the tourism industry to the forefront, Datuk Masidi reminded that tourism has the capacity to contribute towards the alleviation of poverty for the rural community. "Tourism has created many jobs, both directly and indirectly. It is a vehicle and instrument to elevate the income of rural Sabah," he said, citing examples such as homestay programmes. One of the strategies is to identify scenic routes and districts which make

Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment Sabah Datuk Masidi Manjun: *His vision and aspirations for Sabah*

ideal locations for such homestay programmes. Such developments not only help the local community but attract tourists to enjoy Sabah's natural surroundings while experiencing our culture and warm hospitality. Another vital effort in the pipeline is the building of infrastructures to facilitate the expansion of the tourism industry to rural Sabah. "These basic amenities include restaurants and eateries as well as toilets, particularly along the main trunk roads from Kota Kinabalu to Sandakan, Kota Kinabalu to Tenom and Kota Kinabalu to Sindumin – the last being an important and major access for our visitors from Brunei," he said. He added that maintenance and cleanliness are top priorities. Datuk Masidi also addressed the need for conserving the environment, an effort that must begin with the cleaning up of our rivers. "It is a sad sight to see our beautiful rivers plagued with rubbish. Not only is it an eyesore, but a threat to our health and environment...We must step up and clean our rivers before it is too late," he said. The Minister concluded that maintaining high quality standards remain the main focus of the industry. With concerted efforts, a clear vision and a leader of great abilities to pave the way, Sabah's tourism industry is set for greater heights.

