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## **MALAYSIA WARMS UP A FREEZING FINLAND AT MATKA TRAVEL FAIR**

**HELSINKI, FINLAND, 22 JAN 2016:** As the weather in Finland reached -16 degree Celsius, a Tourism Malaysia delegation warmed up the frozen Helsinki winter with posters of tropical beaches, lush jungles and rolling countryside at its booth at MATKARESA (MATKA) Nordic Travel Fair 2016.

The Malaysian delegation to MATKA, headed by Dato' Hj Azizan Noordin, Tourism Malaysia's Deputy Director General (International Promotion), consisted of representatives from Sabah Tourism Board and Langkawi Development Authority. Also present was the Director of Tourism Malaysia Stockholm for Nordic regions and a 6-member cultural troupe from Malaysia.

"This is a major tourism exposition held annually in January to promote the tourism industry in the Nordic regions and outbound tourism especially to the Far-East. This is the 22nd time Tourism Malaysia has participated in the fair and Malaysia's tropical weather during this sub-zero weather conditions here is always a big draw for visitors to the fair. It provides a great incentive for Finnish tourists to come to Malaysia for their holidays," said Dato' Azizan Noordin.

The exposition was opened on 21 January by the Foreign Minister of Helsinki and will continue to welcome both trade and consumer visitors until 24 January. MATKA Travel Fair is the biggest travel fair in the Nordic countries with more than 70,000 visitors annually. This year the fair celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Tourism Malaysia is focusing its efforts on promoting eco-tourism and sports and recreation products to the Finnish tourists, including tours to national parks, beach resorts, island resorts and shopping. Besides that, international events such as F1, Moto GP and Malaysia International Shoe Festival are also promoted at the fair. The pleasant weather conditions in Malaysia is also attractive for Finnish tourists who enjoy golfing and diving in Malaysia.

Ms. Azlina Ahmad Zubair, Senior Assistant Manager for Langkawi Development Authority, is confident that the island will appeal to the Finnish tourists as it has many ecotourism products such as the Langkawi Geopark and the surrounding small islands that can be

**MALAYSIA TOURISM PROMOTION BOARD**

(MINISTRY OF TOURISM & CULTURE, MALAYSIA)  
No. 2, Tower 1, Jalan P5/6, Precinct 5, 62200 Putrajaya, Malaysia  
Tel: +603 8891 8000; Official: [malaysia.travel](http://malaysia.travel); Corporate: [tourism.gov.my](http://tourism.gov.my)  
Facebook: [friendofmalaysia](https://www.facebook.com/friendofmalaysia); Twitter: [tourismmalaysia](https://twitter.com/tourismmalaysia); Blog: [blog.tourism.gov.my](http://blog.tourism.gov.my)



visited throughout the year. Furthermore, LADA is planning to promote Langkawi's as a low carbon city in line with its green tourism concept.

Sabah Tourism Board, meanwhile, aims to educate travel agents and promote the flight connectivity between Helsinki and Kota Kinabalu via Singapore and Hong Kong. According to Ms. Noredah Othman, Sabah is a year-round destination that offers beaches, wild life, mountains and city life. Sabah, with an average temperature of 32 degrees, is a safe destination that suits families as well as elderly people. Quite a difference from the Finnish winter!

Due to the lack of direct flights from Helsinki, efforts are being made to encourage agents to organize charter flights to Malaysia, especially to Langkawi and Kota Kinabalu. Tourism Malaysia is offering special incentives for charter operators such as support for advertising, tactical campaign, and familiarisation trips. Malaysia Airports Berhad is also on board to encourage charter flight operations to Malaysia and is ready to offer free landing fees and a promotional budget as incentives.

The Langkawi Development Authority is also offering special incentives for charter operators to the island. According to Dato' Azizan, the charter operators in Finland are interested to organize charter tour packages to Malaysia during the winter season from November to March and the summer months from June to August.

Tourism Malaysia is also exploring opportunities to work with other airlines to bring more Finnish tourists to Malaysia. Currently Finnair operates 14 flights weekly between Helsinki to Bangkok and 7 flights weekly to Singapore.

The day before the MATKA fair, Tourism Malaysia participated in the Global Workshop aimed at finding new tour operators from Finland and the Baltic countries who are keen to sell holiday packages to Malaysia. About 200 potential operators were at the workshop.

For the second consecutive year, the Nordic Travel Bloggers Experience was organized to attract more than a hundred travel bloggers from the region to the fair. Noriah Jaafar, Director of Tourism Malaysia Stockholm said, "Tourism Malaysia is taking advantage of the presence of these influential bloggers who have a big following in the Nordic region by organizing a competition just for them. The bloggers are encouraged to visit the Malaysia Pavilion, take photographs and post them on their social media network. This is a new strategy to capitalize on the digital and social media platform to promote Malaysia to the younger generation. The winner of the competition will receive a 5 days 4 nights tour package to Sarawak sponsored by Turkish Airlines and Sarawak Tourism Board."

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The number of Finnish tourists to Malaysia in 2014 was 19,718 while the total number of tourists from the Nordic region was 107,887.

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**MALAYSIA TOURISM PROMOTION BOARD OR TOURISM MALAYSIA** is an agency under the Ministry of Tourism & Culture, Malaysia. Tourism Malaysia focuses on the specific task of promoting Malaysia at all levels. Since its inception, Tourism Malaysia has grown by leaps and bounds and it has emerged as a major player in the international tourism scene. In 2014, Malaysia registered 27.4 million tourist arrivals and RM72 billion in receipts, making tourism its second largest foreign exchange earner.

Through the Tourism NKEA (National Key Economic Area), collaborative efforts between the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, other Government agencies and the private sector have been enhanced to help secure Malaysia's position as a leading tourist destination and achieve the country's target of 36 million tourist arrivals and RM168 billion in receipts by 2020.

The targets set under the Tourism NKEA will be achieved through the implementation of twelve Entry Point Projects (EPPs) clustered under five themes: Affordable Luxury; Nature Adventure; Family Fun; Events, Entertainment, Spa and Sports; and Business Tourism.

**Press contact:**

**Media Relations Unit:**

Shukri Hanafiah, Senior Deputy Director, Corporate Communication Division

Tel: +603-8891 8767

Email: [shukrihanafiah@tourism.gov.my](mailto:shukrihanafiah@tourism.gov.my)

**Editorial Unit:**

Anis Rozalina Ramli (Ms), Senior Editor, Corporate Communication Division

Tel: +603-8891 8759

Email: [anisramli@tourism.gov.my](mailto:anisramli@tourism.gov.my)

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