

Push for visa-on-arrival scheme

By **MANDY LEONG HUEY MUN** - August 20, 2023 @ 7:25am



Malaysian Association of Hotel Owners executive director Shaharuddin M Saaid says the complex visa process has caused Malaysia to lose its competitive edge. PIC BY AIZUDDIN SAAD

KUALA LUMPUR: Tourism players want the rapid introduction of visas on arrival (VOA) for citizens from all countries, saying that making it easier for tourists to enter the country would boost the economy.

Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents president Nigel Wong said tourism played a vital role in bolstering Malaysia's economy.

He recommended targeting India as a prime tourist market, and suggested the periodic issuance of VOA to mitigate security concerns, such as offering it only during the summer and winter holidays in India.

Malaysian Association of Hotel Owners executive director Shaharuddin M. Saaid said that currently, India and China nationals could get the VOA only if they transited through neighbouring countries like Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia.

"This has caused travellers to make Malaysia a second, third or even the last choice of destination."

He added that Indonesia offered the VOA with a fee of RM152, and Thailand charged about RM262.

Shaharuddin said the complex process to get a VOA in Malaysia had caused the country to lose its competitive edge, and swift action was needed to reverse this trend.

Malaysia Budget and Business Hotel Association president Dr Sri Ganesh Michiel called on the Home and Tourism Ministries to collaborate to tackle this issue.

He said the effectiveness of VOA hinged on timely implementation to prevent Malaysia from lagging behind its neighbours.

"We are now in a new world of technology, and security should not be used as a reason for us to turn our back on tourists interested in visiting our country."

Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association deputy president Mint Leong advocated for longer visa periods to attract travellers seeking extensive post-pandemic experiences.

She said extended stays could lead to wealthy foreign retirees choosing Malaysia as their new home through the Malaysia My Second Home programme.

Leong said it was important to act swiftly to take advantage of the influx of travellers from the northern hemisphere seeking to escape winter at the end of the year.

She said a VOA would send the message that Malaysia was open and welcoming to the world.