

PENANG holds the status as a favoured cruise tourism destination in Malaysia, as it consistently attracts a growing number of cruise liners to its port.

State Tourism and Creative Economy Committee chairman Wong Hon Wai said the number of international vessel berths and passenger numbers continued to exhibit an upward trend for January and February in both 2023 and 2024.

"The international vessel berths increased from 31 to 45, demonstrating a growth rate of 45.16%, indicating Penang's sustained momentum in attracting international cruise ships.

"Likewise, passenger numbers showed an increase during these periods, rising from 100,803 to 131,208, translating to a growth rate of 30.16%," he said.

Recently, Penang welcomed the maiden call of the *Costa Deliziosa* cruise ship, which has a capacity of 2,828 passengers. This will be followed by *Serenade Of The Seas* - with a capacity of 2,500 passengers - which will call on the Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal on April 26.

The terminal offers tourists immediate access to a Unesco World Heritage Site upon disembarkation, providing a captivating introduction to Penang. Visitors are treated to a land excursion lasting about seven to eight hours.

Wong said that the number of international vessel berths nearly doubled, increasing from 84 to 156, marking an impressive growth rate of 85.71% from 2022 to 2023.

"There's a significant increase in the number of international passengers during the same period, rising from 439,012 to 573,178, representing a growth rate of 30.56%, and these figures underscore Penang's status as a sought-after cruise destination, gradually solidifying its position in the industry," he said.

He pointed out that following the recent completion of the Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal's expansion, it is now capable of accommodating up to two quantum-size cruise ships and catering to 12,000 passengers.

Penang has been one of the stopovers by cruise companies like Royal Caribbean, Resorts World Cruises, Costa Cruises,

# A good sail

Penang is set to be a top destination for cruise tourism in Malaysia, thanks to its robust growth.



The *Costa Deliziosa* cruise ship docked at Penang's Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal last week. — WONG HON WAI/Facebook

Norwegian Cruise Line, Celebrity Cruises, Princess Cruises and Cunard Line.

## Preserving history

The Melaka government will channel a one-off allocation of RM100,000 for restoring and preserving Villa Sentosa in Kampung Morten in the state.

Melaka Chief Minister Datuk Seri Ab Rauf Yusoh stated that the allocation would be handed over to the inheritor and manager of Villa Sentosa, Ibrahim Hashim, 85, in conjunction with the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Villa Sentosa held recently.

"Villa Sentosa is the only traditional Malay house in Melaka left by the late Hashim Abd Ghani which was built in the 1920s; it received recognition as 'The Malay Living Museum', thus becoming a must-stop destination for tourists to the state.

"The various historical materials on display at Villa Sentosa



Villa Sentosa, the only surviving traditional Malay home in Melaka, is now a century old. — Bernama

include traditional Malay clothing, traditional musical instruments and antique furniture," he said at the event.

The ceremony was officiated by the Yang Dipertua Negeri of Melaka, Tun Mohd Ali Rustam. State Tourism, Heritage, Art and Culture Committee chairman Datuk Abdul Razak Abdul Rahman was also present.

Ab Rauf said it was important to preserve Villa Sentosa to

ensure that its heritage, art and history could be passed on to future generations.

He said since it was opened to the public for free, more than 200,000 domestic and foreign tourists had visited the villa, with more than 50% being tourists from France interested in experiencing the culture of the Malay community in Melaka, as well as the traditional architecture of the villa.

"Villa Sentosa is an icon (of) Kampung Morten," he added.

Meanwhile, Ibrahim stated that the grant received from the state government will be utilised to maintain and restore Villa Sentosa to continue receiving visitors in the future.

"Villa Sentosa is 100 years old since its construction on Oct 23, 1923, and some parts of the house are deteriorating and require gradual repairs.

"As the inheritor of this traditional house, I am very grateful to the state government for the financial assistance to preserve this heritage because we do not receive any periodic assistance for restoration and preservation works," he said.

He said Villa Sentosa was open to visitors daily from 11am to 5.30pm, where visitors would be taken on a tour of the house and given brief explanations regarding its construction and history.

About 400 heirs of Villa Sentosa's founder involving 10 generations had also gathered to celebrate the momentous event.

## Sabah crafts and food

Sabah's latest tourism product, Hongkod Avenue, featuring stalls selling the state's traditional food and crafts, is now open to the public.

The RM1.2mil project has 22 food vendors and 12 craft stalls built on the grounds of the Kadazan Dusun Cultural Association (KDCA) Hall.

"We need a centre to promote not only the strengths of our culture, but also the traditional food and crafts in Sabah. I hope that Hongkod Avenue will become a tourist attraction and help boost the state's economy," KDCA president Tan Sri Joseph Pairin Kitingan said during the opening of Hongkod Avenue recently.

He added that the opening was timely as it coincided with the upcoming Kaamatan Festival (Harvest Festival) at the end of May.

"Hongkod Avenue will offer a new shopping experience to locals and tourists. With an assortment of delicious food and lovely handicraft, it will be a good place to enjoy something different and explore local culture," he said. — Bernama