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PUBLIC ASSURANCE PRIORITY FOR HOTELS

“Hotels Working Closely With Authorities To Assure Public On Preventing Spread Of The Wuhan Coronavirus To Malaysia”

Wisma MAH, Ampang (28 January 2020) – In an industry meeting held yesterday and today, Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) and other tourism stakeholders made a commitment to support precautionary measures and standard operating procedures (SOP) set by the government to prevent the spread of the Wuhan coronavirus, including the decision to temporary halt immigration facilities for citizens of Wuhan and areas around Hubei province. Hotels, to date had received multiple cancellations and are expecting more to come.

With the current reported cases in Malaysia, tourism is on the spotlight as Malaysia under the Visit Malaysia 2020 campaign, is expecting 30 million tourist arrivals with composition of 3.48 million arrivals from the China market. According to MAH, cancellation of room bookings picked up since the government of China issued a ban on its citizens from booking overseas tours, flights and hotels on Saturday, 26 January 2020, at the height of the Chinese New Year holidays.

“We have earlier received multiple cancellations of free independent travellers (FIT) at hotels around the country, and since the ban, we have been contacted by online travel agents (OTA), local and international travel agents to allow cancellation of group bookings from now till the end of February 2020,” said Kamaruddin Baharin, President of MAH.

At the moment, hotels both local and international brands had expressed willingness to facilitate postponement of bookings or cancellations and refunds of payments made. MAH estimated losses suffered by hotels to reach hundreds of thousands at hotels especially at destinations where it is highly dependent on China market. “Hotels at Kota Kinabalu and Langkawi in particular, are anticipating a drop in occupancy from 30% to 60% immediately, while other destinations like Melaka, Ipoh, Port Dickson and Penang are looking at an immediate impact from 10% to 50% but this is just the beginning,” added Yap Lip Seng, Chief Executive Officer of MAH.

When asked about preparedness of hotels in managing the situation, MAH was quick to assure the public that hotels are fully prepared with sanitising facilities for both guests and employees, scheduled cleaning of all contact and touch points as well as isolation procedures for any suspected cases. “Emergency and extraordinary preparedness are part and parcel of hotels’ standard operating procedures (SOP), this is something that homes cannot provide. Home sharing accommodation such as Airbnb does not provide assurance of safety and health, staying in a home converted tourist accommodation is always a risk,” he added.

At the moment, various industry stakeholders affected including airlines, travel & tour operators and hotels are considering immediate contingency plans to boost tourism from other markets. “We are working together to strategize attractive packages as alternative to those planning or planned to travel to China, this will not only promote domestic tourism but could also cushion the negative impact from the current situation,” said Yap.

The industry is also anticipating forward on recovery plans when the situation subsides, and had preliminary discussions with the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) to recapture the market once it reopens. MAH and its member hotels are ready to support marketing and promotion initiatives through Tourism Malaysia.

MAH is confident with the emergency and crisis preparedness of the Malaysian government, and that Malaysia is safe for tourists.