

## KERATAN AKHBAR

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AKHBAR : THE STAR

# Starting point for revival

## Health and safety prioritised to ensure travel bubble's success

**LANGKAWI:** Come Malaysia Day, all eyes will be on Langkawi, the first local tourist destination to open its doors as part of a "travel bubble" pilot project.

Many business operators on the resort island are ready to welcome tourists, believing the move could help revive Langkawi's struggling economy.

Hotellers are applauding the move as well, although most say they remain cautious due to the high number of Covid-19 cases.

Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) Kedah and Perlis deputy chairman Razmi Rahmat said hotel operators here are well prepared in terms of complying with the standard operating procedure.

He said all hotel staff members on the island are also fully vaccinated.

"Hotels here will strictly follow the SOP, such as wearing face masks and observing physical distancing, among others," he added.

MAH Kedah and Perlis chairman Eugene Dass said hotels have already received bookings not just for September, but for the months after as well.

"The market is very positive towards the opening and there are some hotels that have recalled staff members who were on unpaid leave.

"Although the news is something



**Time to fly:** Langkawi hotels operators welcome move to reopen the island to tourists.

we have been waiting for, the hotel industry is also very cautious about a spike in cases that could happen any time if the SOP is not adhered to.

Eugene added that the tourism industry would need support from the authorities to enforce the SOP, especially at airports and ferry terminals.

Langkawi Business Association deputy president Datuk Alexander Isaac said the pilot project was a

good move that would definitely boost the island's economy.

"We hope tourists will strictly follow the SOP that has been mandated," he said.

Langkawi Chinese Chamber of Commerce chairman Lee Han Eng said the announcement was timely as the economy of the island had been in dire need of help.

"We know we have to live with the virus and everyone must do his or her part by following the SOP.

Only then can we help the economy and provide job opportunities for the locals," he said.

The Langkawi Development Authority (Lada) has submitted proposals to the National Security Council (NSC) on new the SOP for the reopening of the island.

Lada CEO Nasaruddin Abdul Muttalib said the proposals were sent to the NSC last week together with the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry, and are now pending evaluation and approval.

Meanwhile, the Kedah government, in welcoming the news, said it hoped the island would recover from the economic downturn caused by the pandemic.

State tourism committee chairman Mohd Firdaus Ahmad said the state would work closely with the relevant agencies and industry players to ensure the project's success.

Firdaus, who is also Kuah assemblyman, said Langkawi had achieved a vaccination rate of more than 80% of its adult population.

It was reported on Thursday that fully-vaccinated local tourists would get to visit Langkawi starting Sept 16 under a tourism bubble.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said the starting date was agreed to at a meeting of the Special Committee to Address Covid-19.