

Tapping the growing market for cruise tourism

CAN Penang's cruise ship travellers — who need not spend the night here — benefit beach resorts? Why not?

A beach resort in Batu Ferringhi has struck a deal with major cruise ships that call on Swettenham Pier to become a 'beach hub' for their passengers.

They can explore the seaside tourist belt while having at their disposal all the facilities of Shangri-La's Golden Sands Resort.

"They can use our pool, shower

rooms, restaurants and all other facilities. No need for them to get a room," said resort communication director Suleiman Tunku Abdul Rahman.

Suleiman said he had chatted with many cruise ship passengers to understand their needs.

"After being at sea for weeks, they want to get rid of their sea legs and feel sand or grass between their toes.

"They don't need hotel rooms but enjoy the comfort of a resort

while roaming in Batu Ferringhi," he said, adding that the resort was the only beach hub at present for cruise ship travellers.

Commenting on the rapid growth of cruise tourism in Penang, Suleiman agreed that it was changing the tourism scene.

"Tourism can sometimes be a feast or famine sector. A resort could either be fully packed or totally empty.

"We once had what we called the Arab season in July, August and

September, when temperatures are over 40 degrees Celsius in the Middle East.

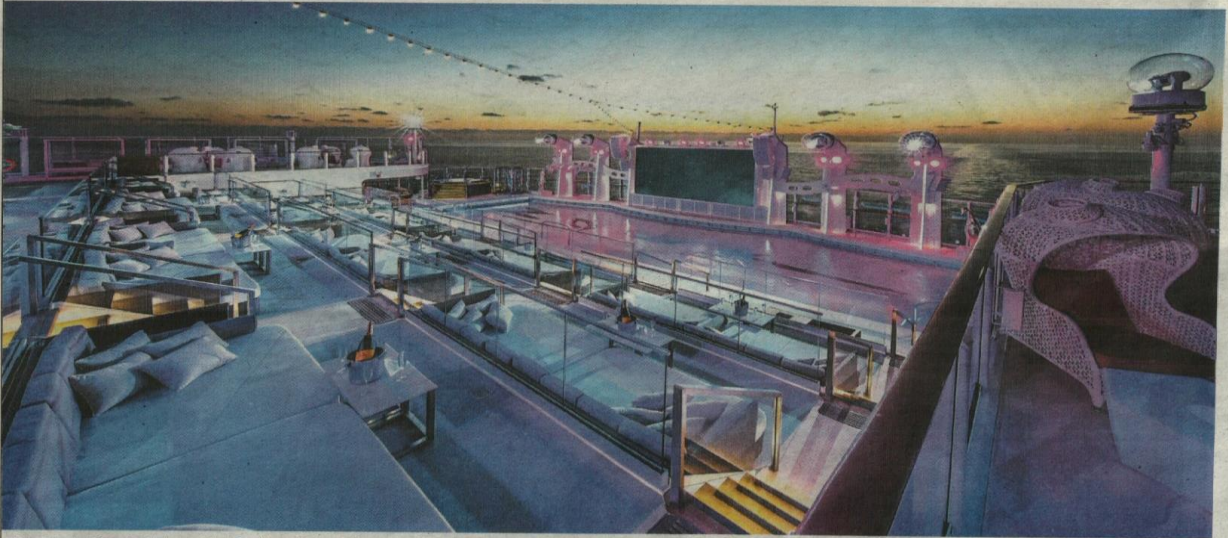
"We also used to rely on China's Golden Week, the country's week-long National Day holidays, and the winter months of Europe.

"Cruise ship arrival rates are reshaping our tourism economic pie.

"And even though we are a beach resort, a little imagination will still lead us to benefit from the change," he added.

More ships come a-calling

Penang overwhelmed by influx of cruise ship travellers



The Zouk Beach Club on the Genting Dream liner doubles up as an outdoor cinema and party venue. — Pic courtesy of Dream Cruises

By **INTAN AMALINA MOHD ALI**
intanal@thestar.com.my

AN UNPRECEDENTED spike in cruise ship arrivals this year is showing that the tourism business in Penang is changing, especially for retail players, says Penang Port Commission (PPC) chairman Datuk Tan Teik Cheng.

The growth has prompted PPC to study methods for sharing marketing knowledge with Penang tourism entrepreneurs to prepare enriching experiences tailor-made for cruise ship travellers.

Between January and June, cruise ships made 125 calls at the Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal, carrying 264,000 tourists.

In the whole of last year, 230,000 passengers came through 150 cruise ship calls.

Expecting the number of calls to swell to 200 by the year-end, Teik Cheng said PPC was taking heed of the growth and contemplating organising forums or discussion groups with retailers in the local tourism sector to help them understand the micro marketing dynamics of cruise ship travellers.

The pier's success as a cruise ship magnet, he added, had



(From left) Teik Cheng and Yang Pang showing a photo of the Genting Dream luxury liner that will make its maiden call at Penang on Nov 27.

redefined tourism in Penang.

Stressing that all cruise ship passengers only made day-calls for eight to nine hours at the most, he said the tourism sector needed to understand these visitors' needs

and package 'Penang in a nutshell' experience for them.

"We are exploring how to hold discussion groups or dynamic sharing sessions to give Penang tourism entrepreneurs and

attractions operators the chance to get a deep understanding of this market. This may include presentations by the cruise lines and experienced tour operators."

Teik Cheng added that Penang's fame as a cruise ship destination needed industry-wide synergy, and PPC was well positioned to spearhead the growth because the government agency had close links with all the cruise lines.

Tourism operators eager to liaise with PPC can e-mail Teik Cheng at sppp@penangport.gov.my.

Earlier, in a press conference, he announced that Genting Dream, a gleaming new cruise ship less than a year old will make its maiden call at Penang on Nov 27.

Also present was PPC private secretary to the chairman Tan Yang Pang.

Teik Cheng said that the ship — launched last November — was the second biggest in the world based on passenger capacity, after the Royal Caribbean's Harmony of the Seas.

He added that Genting Dream stretches 335m and with a displacement of 151,000 tonnes, with a capacity to transport 3,400 passengers and 2,000 crew members," he said.