

Penang still top choice for cruises

Island to see 995 vessels visiting with over 600,000 passengers in 2022

By R. SEKARAN
rsekaran@thestar.com.my

GEORGE TOWN: Penang is set to retain its top spot as a cruise destination in the country with the arrival of 660,318 passengers in 995 vessels next year.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wee Ka Siong said the ships calling on the Sweetenham Pier Cruise Terminal (SPCT) would give a much-needed spillover economic effect to the small and medium businesses, taxi and e-hailing drivers, trishaw riders, and those in the food and beverage businesses here.

He said from Dec 22 to next March, SPCT will receive 58 cruises that will accommodate roughly 47,000 passengers.

“Each cruise will operate at a 50% passenger capacity as part of the Health Ministry’s standard operating procedures (SOP),” said Dr Wee as he inspected *Star Pisces*, a liner owned by Star Cruises, at SPCT yes-



At the helm: Dr Wee taking a ride in the captain’s seat in the fast boat towards Raja Tun Uda ferry terminal on Penang island. — LIM BENG TATT/The Star

terday during a symbolic event to mark the resumption of the Malaysian cruise industry.

The numbers, said Dr Wee, were definitely smaller compared to the one million passengers a year from

2013 to 2019, with SPCT maintaining its top spot throughout the years.

He said the SPCT expansion, which was completed in May, saw the pier extended by 220m at the

north terminal, with the overall extension measuring 820m presently.

“A total of RM95mil was spent on the expansion project with Penang Port Sdn Bhd (PPSB) planning further upgrading in the next phase, which would involve the development and restructuring of the passenger terminal with better facilities for the convenience of ships and passengers.

“Following the National Security Council (NSC)’s approval on Nov 24, the Transport Ministry, together with the Penang Port Commission (PPC), PPSB, and cruise operators, have worked hard to reopen this sector,” he said.

Cruise activities, said Dr Wee, was an important strategy to ensure domestic tourists do not only concentrate on existing tourist destinations, especially during weekends.

“It acts as an alternative for local and foreign tourists.

“We are also working hard to get

the international cruise sector to reopen as soon as it is safe to do so.”

Dr Wee said the NSC’s approval was the government’s commitment and aspiration to hasten economic recovery, adding that it’s crucial for all to comply with the SOP.

“It is in everyone’s interest, whether terminal operator, cruise company or the passengers, that the SOP is strictly adhered to.

“We hope the domestic cruise industry can continue to operate again as smoothly as possible and reactivate cruises as a tourism option for local travel and leisure,” he said.

Also present at the ceremony were PPC chairman Datuk Tan Teik Cheng, PPC general manager Monaliza Suhaimi, PPSB chairman Datuk Syed Mohamad Syed Murtaza, PPSB chief executive officer Datuk Sasedharan Vasudevan, Genting Cruise Lines vice-president Cynthia Lee, and *Star Pisces* captain, Capt Johan Aron Bohman.