

Over 7 million tourists stayed overnight in Penang hotels last year, says Wong

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A TOTAL of 7.27 million tourists stayed overnight in hotels in Penang last year, demonstrating the state's enduring appeal to both domestic and international tourists.

Wong Hon Wai (PH-Paya Terubong), the state Tourism and Creative Economy Committee chairman, citing the latest data from Tourism Malaysia, noted that this figure represents a 30.2% increase compared to the 5.58 million tourists who stayed overnight in Penang in 2022.

“This positive figure shows that Penang has always been the choice of domestic and foreign tourists in line with the aggressive efforts made by the state government through its agencies to promote Penang.

“As a result of the increase, new hotels such as The George Penang and Penang Marriott Hotel have opened and begun operations,” Wong said in his winding-up speech at the State Legislative Assembly sitting at the State Assembly Building in Light Street today.

He added that several new hotels will be opened within these three years, including Crowne Plaza Penang Straits City (Seberang Perai), HARRIS Hotel Sunshine Penang, Citadines Tanjung Tokong Penang, Iyf Georgetown Penang, Iconic Marjorie Hotel, Intercontinental Penang Resort, The Westin Penang and Le Meridien Penang Resort.

“This shows the confidence of hotel operators in the development of the tourism industry in Penang,” Wong enthused.

Answering a question raised by Joseph Ng (PH-Air Itam) about hotel fee collection, Wong said over RM72 million has been collected since the fee was imposed in 2014.

The breakdown of the hotel fees is as follows: 2014 (RM3,686,310), 2015 (RM8,590,989), 2016 (RM9,395,560), 2017 (RM9,796,332), 2018 (RM9,595,311), 2019 (RM9,406,481), 2020 (RM3,514,257), 2021 (RM92), 2022 (RM3,832,692), 2023 (RM10,628,531.34), 2024 – until April (RM3,719,144); Total: RM72,165,699.34.

Wong noted that approximately 88% of hotel fees were collected from hotels on the island, with the remainder coming from Seberang Perai.

Hotel fees were introduced by the Penang government to finance tourism development and promotion programmes. Every hotel in the state collects a fee based on its star rating: RM2 per night per room for 3-star hotels and below, and RM3 per night per room for 4-star hotels and above.

To diversify and increase state revenue, the government decided that starting at the end of 2023, hotel fees collected will be included in the State Consolidated Revenue account as state revenue.

Wong stated that the state government will channel part of this revenue to Penang Global Tourism Sdn Bhd, Penang Convention and Exhibition Bureau (PCEB) and Petace (the Exco office for tourism) for tourism programmes.

For the year 2024, an allocation of RM1 million was given to Petace to be used for tourism-related programmes.

Wong also mentioned that the government is currently reviewing the entertainment duty rate to match the current situation.

He emphasised that the state government is intensifying efforts to attract direct flights to Penang to draw more tourists.

As of today, Penang has direct flights to 15 international cities, including Guangzhou, Xiamen, Hong Kong, Dubai, Singapore, Bangkok, Phuket, Medan, Jakarta, Surabaya, Banda Aceh, Taipei, Ho Chi Minh City, Doha and Haikou (charter flights). From May 31 this year, Penang will have direct flights to Shanghai.

In response to a query by A. Kumaresan (PH-Batu Uban), Wong said direct flights from Chennai to Penang are expected to start in December this year.

For domestic routes, Penang has flights to eight destinations, including Senai, Kota Kinabalu, KLIA, KLIA 2, Kuching, Kota Bharu, Subang, and Langkawi.

He said in 2023, the Penang International Airport (PIA) received 6,979,748 passengers, an increase of 64.5% compared to 4,242,997 passengers in 2022.

Of the total passenger movements last year, 3,234,789 were international arrivals, an increase of 156.17% compared to 1,262,728 international arrivals in 2022.

For the first quarter of 2024, the total number of passenger movements at PIA was 1,756,584 passengers, a slight decrease of 3.71% compared to 1,824,177 passengers in the first quarter of 2023.

The total movement of international arrival passengers in the first quarter of 2024 was 922,551, an increase of 27.54% compared to 723,346 passengers in the first quarter of 2023.

Penang is also a significant draw for cruise ships, with 'Costa Deliziosa,' and 'Serenade of the Seas', making their maiden calls in April and May respectively this year. The world's largest private cruise ship, 'MS The World', docked in Penang for several hours on May 12 this year.

In 2023, the number of international passengers at Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal recorded 573,178 passengers, an increase of 30.56% compared to 439,012 passengers in 2022. In addition, 156 international cruise ships berthed at the terminal in 2023, an increase of 85.71% compared to 84 ships in 2022.

In the first quarter of 2024, the number of international passengers at Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal was 194,122, an increase of 20.67% compared to 160,875 passengers in the first quarter of 2023. The number of international cruise ships berthed at the terminal in the first quarter of 2024 was 65, an increase of 30% compared to 50 ships in the first quarter of 2023.

Wong stated that the 28th National International Museum Day Festival, held for the first time in Penang and organized by the Penang State Museum Board, attracted about 1,000 museum practitioners from all over Malaysia and regional institutions from neighbouring countries such as Indonesia and Singapore.

He mentioned that the festival, which included exhibitions, seminars, cultural and heritage performances, drew a total of 214,371 visitors.

The Guar Kepah Archaeological Center project is in the final phase of development. The centre is slated for completion by the end of 2024, with careful consideration given to the process of relocating Guar Kepah skeletons and artifacts.

Wong emphasised that the state government's ongoing commitment to preserving buildings of historical value for future generations.

For instance, he highlighted the support and authorisation granted by the state government for Rumah Teh Bunga on Jalan Hutton to be designated as a heritage site under the National Heritage Act 2005.

Currently, Penang boasts 11 national heritage buildings that have been gazetted as heritage sites under the National Heritage Act 2005.

Wong highlighted the state government's ongoing efforts to introduce new tourism products, such as the recent opening of Gurney Bay.

He said the Penang Hill Cable Car Project is set to commence construction this year and will be completed within two years.

Additionally, he listed Ferringhi Bay, the Penang Waterfront Convention Centre (currently undergoing construction), and the Fort Cornwallis restoration project, expected to be completed by the first quarter of 2025, as several upcoming attractions.

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