

Destination of Choice

Taiwan is courting Malaysian tourists as it seeks to grow international visitor numbers.

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On Oct. 13, 2022, international tour groups returned to Taiwan for the first time in over two and a half years. The date marked the complete lifting of pandemic border controls, and among those eager to gain entry was a 15-member delegation from the Malaysian Chinese Tourism Association. Led by its national president, Paul Paw, the group spent five

days seeking out hidden gems and sampling activities such as fruit picking and traditional tea brewing.

“We couldn’t wait to come to Taiwan again to explore new things to incorporate into our travel packages,” Paw said. “Taiwan has long been a favorite holiday destination for Malaysians, especially those of Chinese descent. Discovery trips like the one we took last fall help us create

a diverse array of tours so we can grow our customer base.” According to the association’s president, since many Malaysians visiting Taiwan are repeat visitors, they prefer leisurely trips that allow them to gain a deeper understanding of a place rather than fast-paced round-the-island tours that pack as much into an itinerary as possible.

“Taiwan’s abundant cultural, historical and natural attractions, as well as its appetizing food, convenient transportation, safety, friendliness and language similarities, strongly appeal to Chinese Malaysian tourists,” Paw said. Cooper Huang, chief executive officer of Kuala Lumpur-based Malaysian Harmony Tour and Travel, concurs with Paw, adding that Taiwan’s leisure farms are a particular draw. The mix of hands-on and ecological activities, specialty foods and natural scenery make the farms perfect for both family and group tours.

Statistics compiled by the Tourism Bureau under the Ministry of Transportation and Communications underscore Taiwan’s popularity: 537,692 Malaysians visited in 2019, making Malaysia the primary source of arrivals from the region prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. In a sign the trend is continuing as global tourism returns to pre-pandemic levels, Taiwan’s one millionth visitor since reopening was Ho Long Shi from Malaysia on March 25.



01. Malaysian internet celebrity Cupcake Aisyah, third left, shares her Taiwan visit at a travel fair hosted by Kuala Lumpur-based Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents in March.
02 & 03. Affluent shoppers at premier mall Suria KLCC in Kuala Lumpur and ethnic Chinese residents are among those targeted by Tourism Bureau marketing.
04. A vehicle advertises southern Taiwan’s Alishan National Scenic Area, one of the cycling and rail destinations promoted under the Taiwan, My Next Destination campaign.

01 & 04. Courtesy of Taiwan Tourism Bureau Kuala Lumpur Office



Zeroing In

Abe Chou (周士彌), director of the Taiwan Tourism Bureau Kuala Lumpur Office, said demand has rebounded strongly in Malaysia. To capitalize on the revived appetite for international travel, his organization is ramping up its presence at travel fairs and organizing collaborative promotions with media outlets and social media influencers. Since the target market is primarily composed of ethnic Chinese and Muslim Malaysians, the office tailors its marketing to the two groups.

The Taiwan, My Next Destination campaign, for example, launched a 200-strong fleet of advertising vehicles wrapped in stunning decals of cycling and rail destinations to pique the interest of Chinese Malaysians. Among the spots featured was Alishan National Scenic Area in the southern county of Chiayi, depicted with an eye-catching close-up of the site’s historic steam train set against lushly blooming cherry trees. Those who snapped photos of the cars and submitted them to the office were entered into a contest to win a

round-trip flight from Kuala Lumpur to Taipei City.

To attract Muslim travelers, the office launched Salam Taiwan, under which it cooperates with local tourism operators to design comprehensive packages catering to the group's specific needs. The office also invited Malaysian singer-actress Ayda Jebat to Taiwan to shoot a promotional video that was released earlier this year. During her trip, Jebat visited Taipei 101, Alishan, night markets and theme parks. She also worshipped at Taipei Grand Mosque and dined at halal-certified restaurants. Jebat said she was impressed by the country's vibrant natural and cultural landscapes, adding that



01. Abe Chou, director of the Taiwan Tourism Bureau Kuala Lumpur Office
02 & 03. Malaysian singer-actress Ayda Jebat, left (above) and right (right), features in a promotional video to boost the number of Malaysian visitors to Taiwan.

02 & 03. Courtesy of Tourism Bureau



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she was moved to tears by the majestic beauty of central Taiwan's 3,416-meter-high Mount Hehuan.

Expanding Outward

Approximately 60 percent of Malaysia's population of 33 million is Muslim, presenting a large potential source of tourists to Taiwan. As the halal tourism market continues to develop, the government is taking steps to improve the travel experience for Muslim visitors by constructing prayer rooms and restrooms at airports, highway rest areas, railway stations and scenic spots nationwide. Currently about 470 establishments—including hotels,

restaurants, travel agencies, hospitals and schools—have obtained halal certifications. The success of these measures is evident in Taiwan's ranking as the second most Muslim-friendly destination among non-Organization of Islamic Cooperation countries and territories in the 2022 Global Muslim Travel Index released by Mastercard and Singapore-headquartered CrescentRating, the world's leading authority on halal-friendly travel. The accompanying report predicted that the number of Muslim travelers would reach 140 million in 2023 and return to pre-pandemic levels of 160 million in 2024.





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04. Malaysian tour operators Paul Paw, left, Cynthia Tan, center, and Cooper Huang are optimistic about the growth of international tourism to Taiwan.
05. A Malaysian tour group visits the Japan-inspired Nantou Monster Village in central Taiwan.
06. Ho Long Shi, center, from Malaysia celebrates with his family March 25, as the 1 millionth visitor since Taiwan reopened its borders.

05. Courtesy of Cynthia Tan
06. Courtesy of Tourism Bureau

The halal tourism market has huge growth potential, fueled by the demographic's rising purchasing power. According to Cynthia Tan, vice president of Kuala Lumpur-headquartered Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents, since many Malaysian Muslims follow strict religious practices and would be first-time visitors to Taiwan, it is critical for the tourism sector to offer products, services and facilities meeting their faith-based needs to encourage repeat trips.

"Taiwan's beautiful landscapes, hot springs, recreational farms and modern shopping centers are some of its biggest draws for Muslim tourists," she said. Tan has traveled extensively and believes Taiwan has a competitive advantage in expanding its international tourism sector thanks to its diverse offerings and reasonable prices.

Chou is similarly optimistic about Taiwan's ability to attract more tourists through incentives like free half-day tours, shopping vouchers and subsidies for travel agencies that organize or receive tour groups from abroad. "At over 100,000 arrivals in the first quarter of this year, Malaysians remain the largest group of visitors from any Southeast Asian country," the director said. "We expect to see even greater growth in the future as a result of the Tourism Bureau's efforts to foster a more welcoming environment for Malaysian tourists."  



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