

The sail is back on



The Star Pisces by Genting Cruise Lines will be able to start sailing again in a few weeks, just in time for the Christmas holidays. — Filepic

THE government has allowed the resumption of domestic cruises from Dec 22, beginning with Genting Cruise Lines at Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal in Penang, said Penang Port Commission (PPC) chairman Datuk Tan Teik Cheng at an event at the state recently.

“We are happy to announce the resumption of cruises, which will stimulate the growth of domestic tourism and the local economy by generating jobs for ship crews.

“The PPC will assist Genting Cruise Lines in ensuring the services provided are safe and comfortable, so passengers need not worry as the Swettenham Pier is strictly controlled for their safety, with tight standard operating procedures and guidelines on how to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

“In 2019, we received 1.5 million cruise passengers from around 20 companies operating in Swettenham Pier, but we had to disentangle operations in March last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic,” he said.

Genting Cruise Lines sales division deputy president Cynthia Lee was, who was also present at the press conference in Penang, said that the company would use the international cruise ship Star Pisces to offer five trips every week. This includes a to-and-fro trip from Penang, a two-night package to Langkawi, Kedah and a one-night trip along the Straits of Malacca, adding that the packages start from RM199.

“Star Pisces will operate with a passenger limit of 50%, with around 850 passengers and between 400 and 500 crew. We have taken various upgraded preventive measures in accordance

to the local needs and international standards.

“Every individual on the cruise must have completed their vaccinations and passengers have to take an Antigen Rapid Test (ART) at the Swettenham Pier before boarding to ensure the safety of other passengers and crew onboard,” she said.

The resumption of cruises would bring much needed relief to the industry and the public, she said, adding that international tourists who have completed their quarantines and observation orders can make reservations in mid-December.

“Star Cruises also filters and channels 100% fresh air throughout the ship, including our cabins.

We also have doctors and nurses onboard, including infectious disease officers, a medical centre with a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) machine to conduct Covid-19 tests onboard, as well as isolation cabins,” she added.

Better days to come

Meanwhile, the tourism industry in Tasik Kenyir, Terengganu is expected to pick up strongly next year with the completion of a three-star hotel in Pulau Poh.

Terengganu Incorporated (Terengganu Inc) president and executive director, Burhanuddin Hilmi Mohamed, said the construction of the eight-storey hotel with 100 rooms was over 90%

completed and was expected to open to tourists in the second quarter of next year.

“We are preparing a Request for Bid (RFB) document for several companies that are interested in managing this hotel.

“We want to find an operator that has a strong reputation and a big name in the industry because we do not want to encounter problems in the future,” he said earlier this week.

He added that apart from the hotel, Terengganu Inc has allocated RM1.5mil for repair work on the nearby water theme park which is scheduled to begin next year.

Burhanuddin Hilmi said the theme park had been operated by the Central Terengganu Development Authority (Ketengah) but had to be closed due to several factors including the implementation of the movement control order.

“We will conduct a minor revamp on this theme park ... maybe we will replicate the Sunway Lagoon Theme Park to make it a new attraction to Kenyir which relied heavily on houseboats.

“If possible, we want this theme park to be under the same operator as the hotel, but we need to issue the RFB document first and see how it goes,” he said.

The construction of the hotel in Pulau Poh, which started in 2017, is part of the Kenyir Lake duty-free zone development plan. It includes other facilities such as the cargo jetty and an iconic bridge which have already been completed and opened to the public. — Bernama