

# Penang to woo Bollywood, Kollywood to its shores



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*Penang tourism exco Yeoh Soon Hin says India has a huge population that also shares many cultural similarities with Penang. – The Malaysian Insight file pic, February 11, 2019.*

PENANG is looking to India's film industry to boost the state's tourism by selling itself as a filming destination and ideal location for holding international meetings and events.

Penang Convention and Exhibition Bureau chief executive officer Ashwin Gunasekeran said Indian tourists only knew Malaysian destinations like Kuala Lumpur in the past for the Petronas Twin Towers, Genting Highlands, and Langkawi for its filming locations.

He said the state has been aggressively promoting the island in India, which is famous for its Bollywood and Kollywood productions, for two years now.

“The filming industry will boost our initiatives. We are bidding for a film to be shot in Penang and talks are underway with one of the production houses in India,” Ashwin told reporters after a Chinese New Year luncheon today.

“Once that is awarded, awareness of Penang will increase among Indian travellers. Filming is scheduled to start in August,” he said, without going into further details.

India is seen as a huge market for Penang. In 2017, 13% of business events in the Asian Pacific region came from India, contributing RM190 million to the state’s coffers.

Last year, PCEB, a state-owned agency, and its industry partners held roadshows in New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and Calcutta. Last month, the bureau returned to the four cities, and added Chennai and Ahmedabad to its promotional tours.

Ashwin said the result of the roadshows last year had delivered an 11% increase in direct Indian visitor arrivals at the Penang International Airport via Singapore and Thailand.

The number should be higher if arrivals via Kuala Lumpur and the Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal were taken into account, he said.

“From this year to the middle of next year, we can safely say that we will be able to see a 30% increase,” he said, citing encouraging response from last month’s roadshows in India.

### **Roadshow success**

The bureau had also connected with over 1,000 Indian agents who expressed commitment to promote Penang as the next destination of interest in Malaysia.

Ashwin said some of the key attractions that have interested Indian agents include the Habitat on Penang Hill, and the Unesco heritage city of George Town.

“Indian travellers are particular about food. They need to have Indian food. They were surprised that Penang has a ‘little India’ where Indian food is readily available.

“Agents can sell four-day and three-night packages,” Ashwin said, adding that PCEB will also step up its promotional efforts by hosting familiarisation trips for the Indian media.

### **More efforts to woo India**

Penang tourism exco Yeoh Soon Hin said the state hopes to look beyond its traditional markets like China and other Asean countries.

“India is part of our main focus in the coming year as we mark ‘Experience Penang Year’ next year.

“We will come up with more strategies to promote Penang in India, which has a huge population that also shares many cultural similarities with Penang.

“Indian travellers also have huge spending power. They can afford to travel, as we see many of them touring Europe,” he said. – February 11, 2019.