

Promoting agrotourism development in Asia

Agrotourism has tremendous potential for increasing farm incomes and the development of related small and micro enterprises in rural areas, concluded the 19 participants in the training course on Development, Promotion, and Marketing of Agrotourism Products, 10–16 December 2012 in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia. The course was organized by the APO and Colombo Plan Secretariat in cooperation with the Malaysia Productivity Corporation (MPC) and implemented by the MPC Regional Office in Sabah, Ministry of Agriculture, and Tourism Board of the State Government of Sabah. It aimed to enhance knowledge of the concept, models, and techniques for developing, managing, and marketing agrotourism products and community-based, tourism-oriented enterprises in member countries to increase productivity and optimize the use of local resources. In addition to the participants from 12 countries, four international resource persons from Japan, the ROC, Thailand, and the Netherlands attended.

Various case studies showed that agrotourism has become part of the mainstream tourism industry in many advanced countries. It not only benefits farmers and rural communities economically but also creates environmental and cultural awareness and shows the importance of agrobiological diversity. “Development of small farms for agrotourism has proven to be viable in several Latin American countries and in Tanzania in Africa, and Asian countries can do it also, although not all rural areas and farms can be suitable for tourism,” according to Harro Boekhold, Managing Director of CONTOUR Projects Ltd. in Amsterdam.

In many countries in Asia, the potential of agrotourism is still to be realized. “The concept of agrotourism is fairly new to many stakeholders, especially small farmers, and more information dissemination and training need to be undertaken to create that awareness and develop the entrepreneurial sense of farmers,” pointed out Deputy Director Zefrinus Wong, of the Department of Fisheries Sabah, a course participant. He also saw the need to train extension personnel supporting farming communities to participate in community-based resource management for conservation and tourism development.

Participants visited the Mari Mari Cultural Village in Kiamson, Kota Kinabalu, which showcased the rich cultural heritage of various ethnic groups in Sabah state; Sabah Tea Agrotourism in Ranau district which demonstrated tea farming and processing-based agrotourism; and Tagal Moroli Ecotourism in Ranau district to observe best practices in the conservation and management of river resources for tourism. 🌱



Participants experiencing “fish foot massage” in Kampung Luanti, Ranau district. The fish are trained by villagers to administer healing massage to humans.