

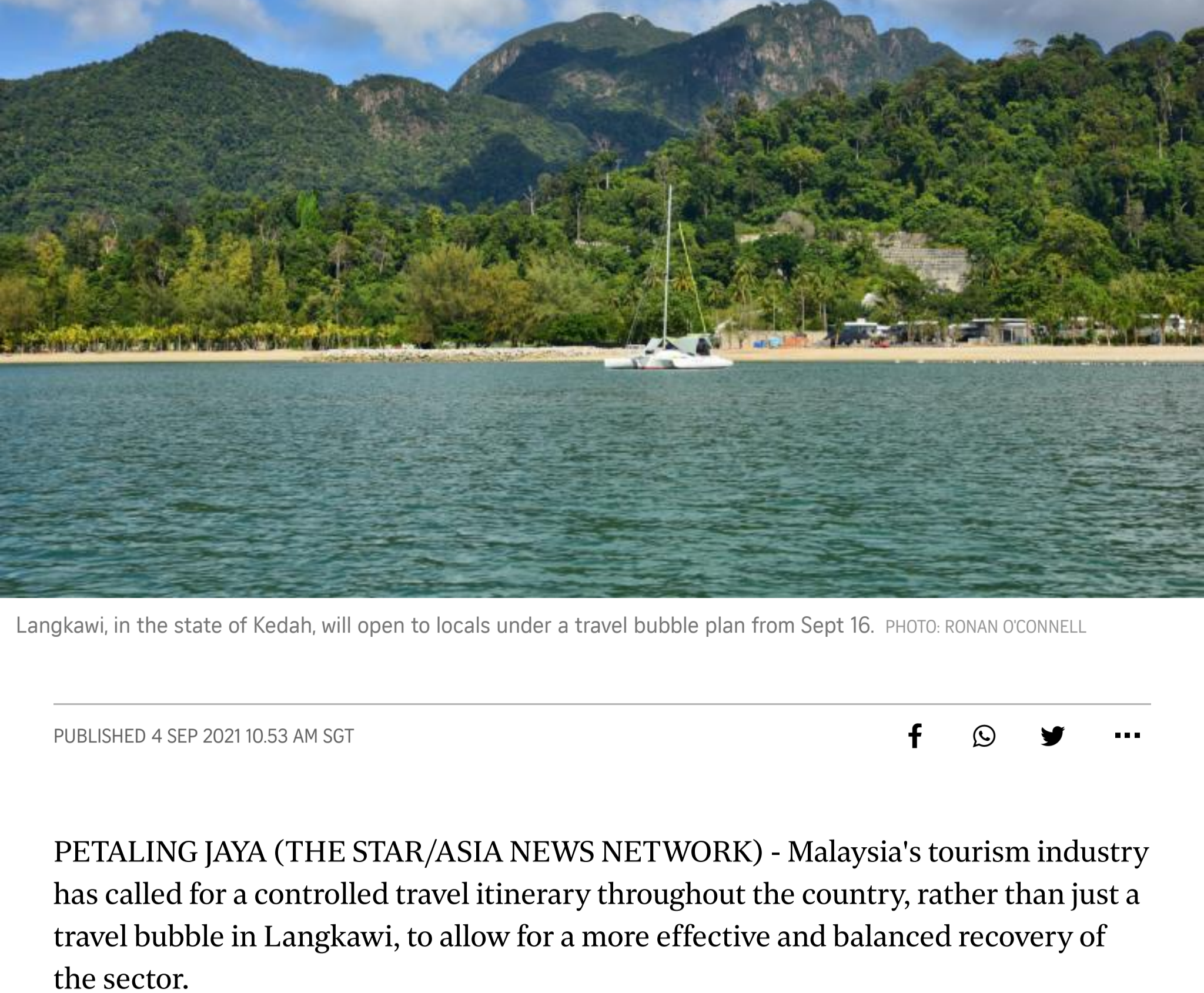
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# Malaysia's tourism sector calls for reopening of tours beyond Langkawi



Langkawi, in the state of Kedah, will open to locals under a travel bubble plan from Sept 16. PHOTO: RONAN O'CONNELL

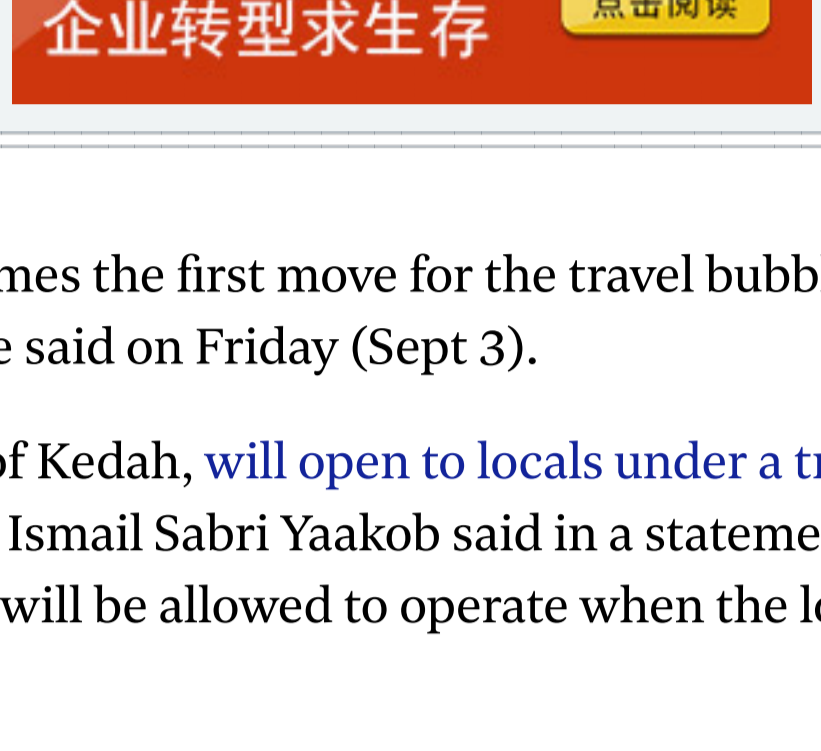
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PETALING JAYA (THE STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK) - Malaysia's tourism industry has called for a controlled travel itinerary throughout the country, rather than just a travel bubble in Langkawi, to allow for a more effective and balanced recovery of the sector.

Datuk Tan Kok Liang, president of the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (Matta), said that with a controlled travel or fixed itinerary, fully vaccinated travellers could choose local tourism destinations that had achieved herd immunity.

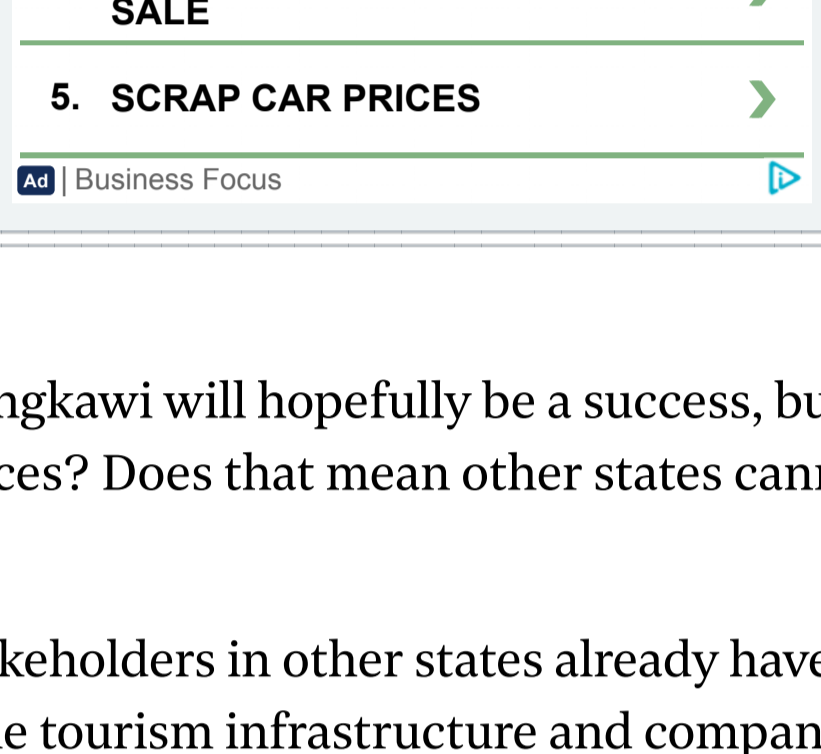
"This is a more effective recovery strategy as it will allow more tourism destinations in Penang, Terengganu, Pahang, Melaka, Sabah and Sarawak to open up in tandem with Langkawi.



"However, Matta welcomes the first move for the travel bubble in Langkawi as it is better than nothing," he said on Friday (Sept 3).

Langkawi, in the state of Kedah, will open to locals under a travel bubble plan from Sept 16, Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said in a statement on Thursday, adding that other destinations will be allowed to operate when the localities' vaccination rates hit 80 per cent.

Mr Tan noted that in Langkawi, a controlled travel fixed itinerary would also be applicable as people would still be at risk of getting infected with Covid-19 without a proper standard operating procedure (SOP).

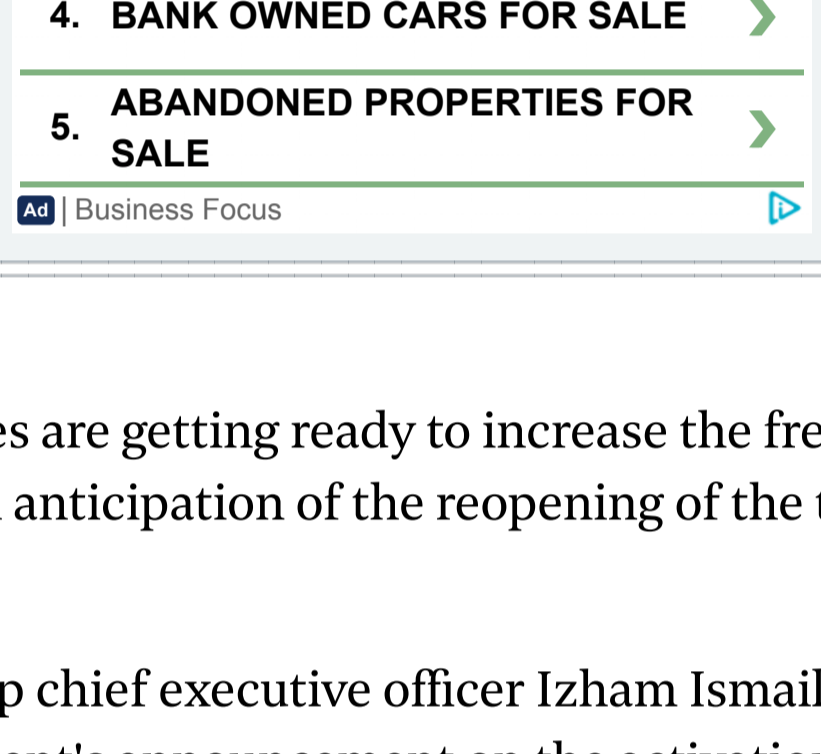


"The pilot project in Langkawi will hopefully be a success, but what if it fails due to unforeseen circumstances? Does that mean other states cannot start tourism activities?" he said.

He added: "I believe stakeholders in other states already have their SOP in place. We can't wait too long as the tourism infrastructure and companies would be 'dead' by then."

Kedah/Perlis Malaysian Association of Hoteliers chairman Eugene Dass said hotels were anticipating a growth of 20 per cent in occupancy rate, which was expected to pick up after October if the country achieved 80 per cent herd immunity.

He believed the Langkawi travel bubble would be "very domestically driven" as the country was still not open for interstate travel.



Meanwhile, local airlines are getting ready to increase the frequency of their services to Langkawi in anticipation of the reopening of the tourism sector there on Sept 16.

Malaysia Aviation Group chief executive officer Izham Ismail said Malaysia Airlines welcomed the government's announcement on the activation of the Langkawi travel bubble.

He added that this would be a starting point to reviving domestic tourism for the fully vaccinated.

"Currently, Malaysia Airlines operates four times daily to Langkawi, and will adjust capacity to meet demand," he said on Friday.

In conjunction with the reopening and Malaysia Day, which also falls on Sept 16, he said Malaysia Airlines is offering tickets for as low as RM89 (S\$28.80) for all-in fare, while its tour operating arm, MHolidays, is also offering bundled flight and hotel packages with up to 50 per cent discounts.

"The airline remains steadfast in its commitment to adopting the highest safety and hygiene standards in air travel. Most recently, the Malaysia Aviation Group achieved 100 per cent vaccinated status, which further provides passengers with peace of mind."

Mr Izham added that the measures in place include the mandatory use of face masks, frequent aircraft disinfection, and early replacement of aircraft Hepa (high-efficiency particulate absorbing) filters to ensure effective filtration of 99.97 per cent of microorganisms on board.

Passengers would also receive complimentary hygiene kits, he said.

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Firefly Airlines marketing and communications head Koo Kee Wai said the airline would also be gradually ramping up flights to Langkawi.

"We are ready with full compliance to the SOP, with the recent launch of our Covid-19 testing, travel insurance with Covid-19 coverage, and with all our pilots and cabin crew fully vaccinated," he said.

AirAsia Malaysia CEO Riad Asmat said Malaysians were eager to resume travelling and Langkawi, famed for its world-class facilities, pristine beaches, family-friendly atmosphere and local cuisine, is by far one of the top domestic destinations.

"The government's decision to commence this travel bubble bodes well for the recovery of Langkawi's tourism industry, and we look forward to working closely with the government, Langkawi Development Authority as well as Tourism Malaysia, to support the revival of the tourism sector.

"We are working on a few campaigns to revitalise tourism in Langkawi, with some very attractive deals to be announced soon," he added.

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