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## Tourism Malaysia Gets Boost From Football Club Sponsorship

By Neville De Cruz

MELBOURNE, Oct 6 (Bernama) -- There has been a 27 per cent increase in the number of Australians from the states of Victoria and Tasmania visiting Malaysia in August this year compared with August 2008.

More visitors to Malaysia now come from these two states than from any other state in Australia.

This significant boost is attributed mainly to Tourism Malaysia's clever sponsorship of the Carlton Football Club, the most successful club over many years, in the Australian Football League (AFL).

During the six-month football season, which ended two weeks ago, 1.3 million members and fans attended Carlton's 23 matches and a massive 17 million watched the games on television nationwide.

Tourism Malaysia's logo "Malaysia -- Truly Asia" was featured prominently on the shirts, jerseys and jackets of Carlton players and officials.

No one could miss Malaysia's tourism branding and it made Malaysians, especially our students, proud to be part of a sport that is said to be a religion for many in Australia.

It is reported that many Malaysian students have become Carlton supporters because of Tourism Malaysia's sponsorship.

Carlton realises there are opportunities to help Malaysian students, especially by inviting them to the club's family events and activities.

"This will be really very good for us students as we will be able to make more friends among Aussies, especially at a family level to better understand their culture and way of life," said Izhar Moslim, president of Club Umno Melbourne.

Umno Club liaison officer Haerris Riani said there were about 7,000 Malaysians studying in Melbourne and to have a link with Carlton would be tremendous.

"It will be a new experience for us and I am sure contact with Carlton members will enrich our career and our stay in Australia," said Haerris, a keen Carlton fan.

"We Malaysians are very happy to see Carlton promoting Malaysia, both on the ground and on TV. Australians are becoming more aware of Malaysia as a great country to visit," he said.

Carlton, the most successful club in AFL history, has a record-breaking membership of more than 43,000 and has enjoyed a good season on and off the field.

The partnership with Tourism Malaysia is also evident on the Carlton website, the second most visited AFL club website, with more than 120,000 unique visitors each month.

Carlton's weekly e-mail newsletter to members and supporters highlights Malaysia's tourism products.

Such is the productive link between Carlton and Malaysia that in a recent survey, 90 per cent of Carlton members were aware, unprompted, of Tourism Malaysia's sponsorship of the team, with Malaysia ranked second when respondents were asked to recall a holiday destination that first came to mind.

Carlton members who had visited in Malaysia were impressed with what the country had to offer for an exciting holiday and described Malaysia and Malaysians as friendly and hospitable.

Tourism Malaysia's relationship with Carlton became public when a group

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of Carlton players, coaching staff and officials, including its president Stephen Kernahan and its then patron, the late Richard Pratt, a close friend of Malaysian billionaire Tan Sri T. Ananda Krishnan, visited Penang in January this year.

The Penang visit received outstanding media coverage in Australia, including a front-page photograph and feature articles and several photos inside Australia's largest-selling newspaper, the Herald Sun, which has sales of about 554,000 copies a day and an estimated 1.5 million readers.

The dedicated media coverage after the Penang visit included a one-minute feature during the half-time segment of the free-to-air TV broadcast of Carlton's round-one match against Richmond Football Club in late March, which was watched by Malaysian High Commissioner to Australia Datuk Salman Ahmad, and more than 90,000 spectators at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

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