

Borobudur festival take on big ambition



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Many think the Borobudur International Festival 2003 just like any other festival. But for the Central Java administration, it is a starting point of an ambition to turn the province into the country's main tourist destination.

"We realize it's difficult to make our goal come true considering Bali's popularity is still very strong," said the province's Head of Tourism Office Henky Hermantoro, who is also the festival's organizing committee secretary.

Moreover, he said, the province covers vast areas making it hard to select one particular area for promotion. With that problem, the province, in the short term, will work hard to make it the second most popular destination after Bali, and the Borobudur festival, it is hoped, will become the initial step to further introduce

the province.

The costly Rp 4.7 billion festival was organized to mark the 20th year since the Borobudur restoration and the Indonesian Heritage Year 2003 from June 11 to June 17.

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With "Balancing Heritage Conservation and Community Development" as its central theme, the festival itself was considered a success.

Officially opened by President Megawati Soekarnoputri on June 14, participants from a dozen of countries, including Indonesia as host, turned up for the festival.

According to chairman of the festival's organizing committee Mardjiono, as many as 200 foreign partici-

pants including 115 arts and cultural foreign envoys from Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, Belgium, Malaysia, India, Singapore and the U.S. took part in various activities, like cultural performances, seminars, travel mart and the mountain bike open championship.

Local participants included those from Central Java's 35 regencies and municipalities, as well as 12 provinces outside Central Java taking part in various events, like art and handicraft exhibitions and trade, tourism and investment expos.

The participating provinces included Yogyakarta, DKI Jakarta, Banten, East Java, Bali, East Kalimantan, South Kalimantan and North Maluku.

"We recorded a direct transaction of some Rp 2.3 billion from the exhibitions alone during the festival," said Mardjiono, who is also Central Java provincial ad-

ministration secretary.

Henky said the success of festival like the Borobudur festival could not be judged merely from the amount transactions. Some of programs, like the Borobudur Travel Mart (BTM) held concurrently in neighboring city of Surakarta on June 15, might become fruitful in the future.

Some 44 participants from Malaysia, Thailand, China and Hong Kong comprised travel writers and representatives from media and tourism industries took part at the BTM, with a goal of improving opportunities among tourism sectors from the participating countries. "That's why the Borobudur festival is a long-term oriented program. We're not only after the present benefits but also future opportunity," said Henky.

The success of the festival could also be seen from great number of visitors.



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Local painters display their work in paddy fields around Borobudur Temple, Central Java. The unique exhibition managed to attract visitors wanting to take a close look at the artwork (photo left). Dancers perform a traditional show for an audience near Borobudur (photo above). Apart from the official Borobudur International Festival 2003, several events have also been organized by local residents, such as the Lima Gunung (Five Mountains) and Kampungan (Village) festivals.

committee estimated that over 400,000 visitors came.

"The visitors contributed a lot to the amount of direct transactions they made with local merchandisers, for souvenirs, travel services or food, which might also reach similar amounts of transactions that we recorded from the festival's exhibitions," Henky said.

He also praised the presence of the Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization Francesco Frangialli at the opening ceremony where he presented of a plaque to President Megawati for her strong support and commitment toward tourism in Indonesia.

Also present at the festival's official opening ceremony was director and representative of United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Indonesia Steven Hill, who read out a written speech by the Director General of UNESCO Koichiro Matsuura.

"I consider their presence a great success because it is not an easy task for people to

come to the country at this particular time. It takes an extra effort to be able to do so," Henky said.

The Borobudur festival itself, according to him, was part of a bigger program to promote tourism in the province which started last year and focused more on nature and cultural aspects, two sectors considered as the province's strength in the tourism industry.

A number of tourism packages were prepared ahead of the festival, including the recently introduced Sosebo package which offers a unique experience while traveling the routes from Surakarta to Borobudur. Other packages include religious-themed ones, like to sacred places of Rembang-Demak-Kudus.

"So the Borobudur festival is basically a part of our large tourism promotion. At this particular step, we set up the products to sell them and after that we'll focus more on networking, starting with ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and then Asia and

Asia-Pacific countries. They are strong markets. Through the festival we invited them to see our potential, interests," Henky said.

"Making them come to the festival was not easy since they (ASEAN member countries) are not free of problems. Singapore, for instance, was facing the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) problem. Once it was declared free from SARS, they confirmed their participation at the festival," he said.

He said the organizing committee approached the countries to take part in the festival last year. "We did it through their travel exhibitions in Britain for example, or in Berlin.

We also participated in travel seminars held in Malaysia, or Singapore. We persuaded them to come to Indonesia, and Central Java in particular," Henky said.

But he believed the success of the provincial administration's plan would very much depend on the active participation of related parties.