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News: Sunset Edition

Tourism sector in Malaysia's Johor state plans to cash in on 'Bigfoot' fever

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By PAULINE JASUDASON | Associated Press
January 5, 2006

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia - Reported sightings of a "Bigfoot" in southern Malaysia's jungles could be used as a tourist draw, officials said Thursday, as they planned another expedition to track the mythical beast.

Malaysian media have been gripped by "Bigfoot" fever since some fish farm workers reported seeing three giant human-like hairy beasts in November at the edge of the Endau Rompin National Park forest in Johor state. They also claim to have seen a gigantic footprint, which they photographed and gave to local newspapers.

Johor Tourism Action Council general manager Abdul Jabar Tahir said no plans have been made yet on how the story could be used to attract tourists to the state.

But, he said, the purported sightings could benefit Malaysia's tourism industry.

"It will be good for us," he told The Associated Press. "The national parks officials must do more fact finding, but like the Loch Ness monster, this can bring some good for our country."

A team from the Johor National Parks Corporation _ which manages the Endau Rompin reserve _ conducted a one day expedition last week to survey the area where the beasts were allegedly sighted.

The team, led by park director Hashim Yusoff, found no physical evidence but recorded more reports of sightings from interviews with Aborigine villagers who live on the fringes, one of Hashim's aides told AP on condition of anonymity because she's not authorized to speak publicly.

A second expedition was being planned for early February, she added.

"This is a boon for Johor. The news has put the state on the international tourism radar. We must maximize benefits from the publicity generated," Johor Tourist Guides Association chairman Johnny Leong was quoted as saying by the New Straits Times daily.

The Times also quoted Hashim as saying that media organizations from around the globe had called him to seek information, and one paranormal research group from Singapore had offered to help track the elusive creature.

"They all want to know if Bigfoot is for real," he was quoted as saying. Hashim was in a meeting Thursday morning and unable to take telephone calls.

"Bigfoot" is a popular name given in the United States to giant hairy creatures walking on two legs. Sightings of such beasts are reported in many parts of the world but never confirmed.

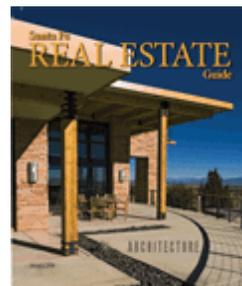
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