

Malaysians to get long-awaited taste of normalcy soon

KUALA LUMPUR: Life for Malaysians is expected to return to normalcy after almost two years of living under the Covid-19 pandemic when the nation transitions to the endemic phase on April 1, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob.

The transition phase will be “temporary” because it has to be confirmed by the World Health Organisation.

Under the transition phase, said Ismail Sabri, operating hours will no longer be limited – the ever-popular

mamak eateries, for instance, can operate round the clock.

This will also allow Muslims to break fast at eateries during Ramadan, he said, adding that the usage of face masks will remain mandatory.

“Also, registration with the MySejahtera application remains mandatory although it will not be necessary for open spaces which are not crowded,” he added.

However, the MYSJTrace function must be used at indoor places with many people.

Other relaxations that will be effective from April 1 include the removal of the 50% capacity limit for event venues.

Ismail Sabri said this includes weddings, which are currently only allowed to fill up 50% of the venue’s occupancy.

“However, organisers are encouraged to continue imposing physical distancing rules,” the Prime Minister added.

He said there will also be no limit on the number of attendees in mosques and houses of worship.

It is up to the respective state, said Ismail Sabri, to decide whether to impose a limit on the number of attendees in mosques, as Islam comes under the prerogative of the respective state rulers.

The Prime Minister also said there will no longer be a limit on the number of workers allowed to travel interstate, whether fully vaccinated or boosted.

This, he said, will be of significance for the economic sectors as it will grant freedom of movement to workers.

Ismail Sabri said the government believes it is a good time to start moving to the endemic phase because of the high vaccination rate.

Despite a surge in Covid-19 cases due to the Omicron wave, the percentage of severe infections is at a low 0.7%, he said.

“The number of Covid-19 patients that require treatment and observation in intensive care units is currently at 42% of the capacity, which is under control,” the Prime Minister added.

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Borders to reopen on April 1

PM: MyTravelPass no longer required to enter country

KUALA LUMPUR: In about three weeks, Malaysia will reopen its borders and those wanting to visit the country will no longer need to apply for the MyTravelPass.

All travellers have to do is download the MySejahtera application and fill in the pre-departure form under the “Traveller” section, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob.

“The reopening of the country’s borders was one of the much-awaited announcements among the rakyat.

“We believe that the reopening of the borders on April 1 will not only bring freedom for the rakyat to travel abroad but also allow those from other countries to visit Malaysia,” he said at a press conference in Parliament yesterday.

Visitors and Malaysians who have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19 will no longer have to



Regulated test price good for sustainable tourism, says industry

PETALING JAYA: A standardised price for the Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) test will let tourists factor the cost into their budgets prior to travelling, tourism industry players noted.

With Malaysia to reopen its borders on April 1, they also called for hassle-free travel procedures for tourists.

“Tourists want to know how much they have to spend to visit Malaysia, including (the cost) of the RT-PCR test and insurance coverage. These are common questions.

“Standardise the price so nobody can take advantage of the pricing,” said Malaysian Tourism Council president Uzaidi Udanis, adding that RM159 for the gold standard RT-PCR test would be ideal.

Free to travel: Under the new rules, visitors and Malaysians who have been fully vaccinated will no longer have to quarantine when they arrive.
— IZZRAFIQ ALIAS/The Star

quarantine when they arrive.

They must, however, undergo a RT-PCR test two days before departure and a professional rapid test (RTK-Antigen) upon arrival.

"They can do the RTK test at the airport or at a health facility outside, but it must be done within 24 hours," said Ismail Sabri.

As for travellers who have not been fully vaccinated, he said the entry procedures will be explained by Health Minister Khairy Jama-

luddin today.

"The country wants to provide comfort to travellers and not complicate their travel process," the Prime Minister added.

As for Malaysians, he said those with valid documents are free to travel to any other country that had reopened their borders to visitors.

For countries that had yet to fully open their borders such as Singapore, Malaysians could use the

Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL) method, he said.

He added that the country is also in the midst of implementing the VTL initiative with Thailand, Brunei and Indonesia.

The country's borders have been shut since March 2020, while entry of foreign workers has been frozen due to the pandemic.

Ismail Sabri noted that the reopening of the borders will help

revive the country's economy, especially the tourism industry which was badly hit by the pandemic.

Some 98.7% of Malaysia's adult population are fully vaccinated, while 64% have received their booster shots.

Although the country's daily cases have shot past the 30,000 mark due to the recent Omicron outbreak, 99% of the infections are mild or asymptomatic.

He noted that the RTK-Antigen test price had already been lowered and self-test kits are also now available, though it would be tough for the government to regulate the open market for the Covid-19 test.

Citing the Langkawi travel bubble as an example, Uzaidi said the multiple testing requirement is a hassle for tourists.

Uzaidi, who is also Malaysian Inbound Tourism Association president, suggested that doing one test before arrival and another during the stay would be more practical.

On the business front, he said the announcement would help market Malaysia internationally and enable the tourism industry to recover and contribute to the economy.

Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents president Datuk Tan Kok Liang also said the tourism industry could be rebuilt to further contribute to Malaysia's economic recovery.

Tan, in a statement, noted that the closure of international borders and travel restrictions resulted in a loss of RM90bil in tourism receipts in 2020. The losses widened to RM165bil in 2021.

"With a firm date, the industry can now begin marketing and promotional activities, and recall tourism workers to work in stages. The multiplier effect of tourist spending will invariably boost local economies and many subsectors of the tourism industry," he said.

'Jom mamak' may liven up the nights again

GEORGE TOWN: Night owls will be glad to know that their regular Indian-Muslim stalls will be allowed to open round the clock when Malaysia starts its transition into the endemic phase from April 1.

Malaysian Muslim Restaurant Owners Association Penang chairman Noor Mohamed Abdullah said its members are more than happy to cater to these patrons.

This category of customers would include those who work night shifts or those winding down for the day, he said.

"We expect 60% to 70% of those in this category to return," he said.

But he urged restaurant operators to continue practising standard operating procedures as Covid-19 cases remain high.

"We expect 60% to 70% of those in this customer category to return."

Noor Mohamed Abdullah

"We welcome the government's allowance to operate without time restrictions, but it is very important for everyone to be vigilant at all times," he said.

Under the government's "Reopen-

ing Safely" plan, business hour limitations will be removed, which means that the ever-popular mamak restaurants are allowed to resume their 24-hour operations.

Malaysia will also reopen its borders effective April 1.

Penang Tourist Guides Association chairman Chin Poh Chin said international travellers would prefer to come in small groups and expect personalised engagement from trained local guides.

"We expect the young people to be the first to arrive. They are eager to travel. It will begin with those from neighbouring countries such as Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and China.

"They would expect us to provide better services, including monitor-

ing the health of all participants and keeping track of their whereabouts at all times," she said, adding that mass tourism would be a thing of the past.

Chin said food, especially hawker and street fare, would remain a top draw among travellers.

As for accommodation, she said tourists would prefer resorts or homestays, with fewer outings but more activities within their groups.

"Although Penang is well known in the international tourism market, all the relevant authorities and players should continue to ramp up promotions to attract tourists.

"We need to ensure that international travellers go through smooth procedures and experience warm hospitality upon arrival," she said.