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PRESS RELEASE

Penang Hill Biosphere Reserve (PHBR): Malaysia's 3rd UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has officially announced the listing of Penang Hill Biosphere Reserve (PHBR) as the nation's latest biosphere reserve under the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme following the 33rd Session of the Man and the Biosphere Programme International Coordinating Council (MAB-ICC) which was held in Abuja, Nigeria from 13 September 2021 to 17 September 2021. This prestigious accolade is the third UNESCO biosphere reserve to be declared in Malaysia; after Tasik Chini in Pahang and Crocker Range in Sabah.

The PHBR encompasses the three major ecosystems, namely the terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems; and spans over an area of 12,481 hectares covering Penang Hill, Penang National Park, Penang Botanic Gardens, Teluk Bahang Dam, Ayer Itam Dam, 6 permanent forest reserves which are Bukit Kerajaan Forest Reserve, Teluk Bahang Forest Reserve, Laksamana Forest Reserve, Penara Hill Forest Reserve, Highlands Forest Reserve and Pantai Acheh Forest Reserve as well as several water catchment areas on Penang island.

According to UNESCO, biosphere reserves are "learning places for sustainable development". The MAB Programme which was launched by UNESCO in 1971 aims to promote environmentally sustainable approaches to economic development that are both socially and culturally relevant. At present, there are 714 biosphere reserves in 129 countries, including 21 transboundary sites under the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

The core area of the PHBR with a total size of 5,757 hectares is a protected site to carry out biodiversity conservation works as well as research and educational activities. Meanwhile, the transition area which is connected to the core area by the buffer zone encompasses human activities within the PHBR including human settlements, commerce and recreation.

Apart from being home to thousands of endemic biodiversity, the PHBR is extraordinary as it is located within minutes-drive from the heart of the city where the George Town UNESCO World Heritage site is located. The PHBR will act as a core green lung for Penang Island where sustainable economic activities can be carried out hand-in-hand with environmental conservation efforts.

The initiative to nominate the Penang Hill Biosphere Reserve (PHBR) kickstarted in 2016 and was coordinated by Penang Hill Corporation (PHC) in collaboration with The Habitat Group, academics from Universiti Sains Malaysia and various state and federal government agencies together with the immense support from the Penang State Government and the national focal point, the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources (KeTSA). After years of intense research, the nomination dossier was finally submitted for evaluation in September 2020.

“I would like to congratulate the team and all the partners who have worked diligently in achieving this prestigious recognition by UNESCO. Apart from fostering the harmonious relationship between man and nature, the PHBR also paves the way for Penang Hill and its surrounding areas to become a world-class learning site to explore and illustrate methods of conservation and sustainable development. We hope to generate innovative and green approaches; thus, bringing us closer to achieving the **Penang2030** vision and to make Penang a shining example in conservation works and sustainable economic development in Malaysia.” said Chief Minister of Penang Y.A.B Tuan Chow Kon Yeow who is also the Chairman of Penang Hill Corporation.

Penang State Executive Councillor for Tourism and Creative Economy, YB. Yeoh Soon Hin also welcomes the recognition by UNESCO and sees its benefits for the state’s tourism sector. “Penang is indeed unique as we now have both the UNESCO George Town World Heritage site and the PHBR located within the island. The PHBR will open a whole range of opportunities for the tourism industry whereby visitors can enjoy and learn about the natural landscapes and historic structures scattered all over the island from Penang Hill to Teluk Bahang. This can instil a deeper sense of appreciation towards our natural gems and to invoke awareness on the importance of conserving these treasures.” he commented.

“PHC is truly thankful to the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, federal and state agencies, the academics, The Habitat Group, and all who helped make this possible. We will continue working closely with our stakeholders and partners to conserve and preserve our biodiversity and heritage treasures. The listing of PHBR will spur better research studies on the understanding of our rich biodiversity and sustainable development. We hope to engage in knowledge sharing with members of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves to integrate best practices aligning with the objectives of the Penang State Government and the MAB Programme.” said Dato’ Cheek Lay Leng, Penang Hill Corporation General Manager.

With the listing of PHBR, there is more work to be done. PHC will work together with all relevant agencies, stakeholders, academics and partners in developing guidelines and actions that adopt the best practices for sustainable development and management of the PHBR site.

For enquiries, please contact Penang Hill Corporation at 04-828 8880 ext 324/211/344 or email corpcomm@penanghill.gov.my

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About Penang Hill Corporation

Penang Hill Corporation was established in 2009 through an enactment passed by the Penang State Legislative Assembly. Its main focus is to manage the funicular system, maintain and develop Penang Hill as a major ecotourism destination with the vision to make Penang Hill the hill resort of choice in Malaysia and the region.

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