

Borneo Eco Tours' CSR efforts win another award

KOTA KINABALU: Borneo Eco Tours' (BET) corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts won another endorsement when the company was announced the winner of the Wild Asia Responsible Tourism Awards 2014 in Singapore.

The award presentation on Oct 31 this year, held in conjunction with ITB-Asia, paid tribute to responsible tourism organisations around the globe in six categories.

Borneo Eco Tours emerged winner in the 'Best in Community Engagement and Development' category.

BET's non-profit foundation, Borneo Ecotourism Solutions & Technologies (BEST) Society, was also named finalist in the Most Inspiring Responsible Tourism Initiative category.

After 23 years of operation, the latest achievement of this Malaysian-Borneo based company is a testament of its extensive CSR commitment pioneered by founder, Albert Teo.

In 1996, the company provided technical assistance to Bavanggazo Longhouse, Kudat in the area of tourism business. Bavanggazo Longhouse has since then evolved to become a major tourism attraction in Kudat, promoting unique Rungus culture while the villagers earn extra income through traditional dance and sales of handicraft.

BET and Sukau Rainforest Lodge (SRL) contributes RM12 (around RM50,000 per year) for every guest who stays at its 20-room award winning Sukau Rainforest Lodge to its non-profit foundation, BEST Society (www.bestsociety.org), for community and environment projects.

BEST Society has since raised a total of RM1,223,782.99, including RM536,210.91 raised internally and spent RM999,378.23 in CSR initiatives as of July this year.

A total of 65 acres of riverine land were rehabilitated in through BEST's Kinabatangan Wildlife Corridor Rehabilitation Programme, KWICORP.

Through BEST Society, BET and SRL launched a multitude of charity-based and poverty eradication community projects, especially in Kinabatangan, from 1996 onward. These included medical camps and water tank projects.

In 2006, BEST Society decided to shift its emphasis on capacity building projects instead of charities and welfare. These comprised a series of entrepre-



Albert Teo (centre) receiving the award.

One of the rewarding outcomes is the birth of a few local entrepreneurs such as the manufacturer of Virgin Coconut Oil, one Ronnie Onginjan and a group of 10 organic farmers in Sikuati.

Another inspiring example, three community leaders from Kudat were sponsored for a social entrepreneurship vision trip to Sukau Rainforest Lodge in 2006.

In 2010, Samuel bin Mojun, one of the leaders, started his own longhouse lodge 'Tindakon Daxang' at Jerongkongon beach.

Technical support is available to help potential small entrepreneurs like Samuel through BEST Society.

Internally, over the last 14 years the company initiated leadership development for the staff who are mainly locals.

In addition, skills and leadership training for their career advancement with annual budgets included. The company is proud to witness the progress of several rank and file members who rose from the ranks, including taking up supervisory position.

BET and BEST Society are currently developing its most ambitious community-based project yet with another NGO, Sabah Society - Camp Lemaing at the foothill of Mt Kinabalu to create employment opportunities for local Dusun people.

Construction work began in August 2013 using mainly bamboo and river stones with initial seed funding of RM70,000 from Sabah Credit Corporation. The cost is expected to increase to RM250,000 by the time it is completed.

The marketing and operation will be undertaken by BET and BEST Society.

The project is expected to raise RM50,000 per annum for the community