



## MEDIA INFO

### THE GAWAI DAYAK FESTIVAL IN SARAWAK

The Gawai Dayak festival is a significant event that celebrates the end of the rice harvesting season in June. Despite progress in major cities, for many of the Sarawakians living in the interiors, rice-growing is still a major source of income. At this time, much of the hard work that goes into rice harvesting has been done. The next planting season will only begin in September, and so June is a month of rest and reward for those who had laboured over their rice fields.

The Gawai Dayak festival, officially celebrated yearly on 1 June in Sarawak, is both a religious and social festival. *Gawai* means ritual or festival and *Dayak* is a collective name for the tribes of Iban, Bidayuh, Kayan, Kenyah, Kelabit, Murut and more.

The festival is also an extended thanksgiving celebration before the new farming season begins. For the Dayak community, it is a time to make amends for past differences and to rekindle old friendships or form new ones. As Malaysians treasure strong family ties, this festival means family reunions, paying respects to the elderly and making visits to friends and relatives.

Preparations for the festival begin early with the brewing of *tuak* (rice wine) and traditional delicacies like *penganan* (cakes from rice flour, sugar and coconut milk). On Gawai eve, glutinous rice is roasted in bamboo.

The celebration starts on the evening of 31 May with a ceremony called *Muai Antu Rua* to cast away the spirit of greed, and to ensure that the spirit of bad luck will no interfere with the good celebrations.

Two children or men, each dragging a *chapan* (winnowing basket), goes from room to room in the Iban longhouse to collect unwanted articles in the baskets. The items are

then tossed to the ground from the end of the longhouse to ward off the spirit of bad luck.

Around 6pm, the offering ceremony known as *miring* will take place amid music and drum beats. The feast chief will thank the gods for the good harvest, ask for guidance, blessings and long life as he sacrifices a cockerel. Dinner will then be served, while everyone talks and mingles awaiting for midnight.

At the stroke of midnight, a gong is sounded and the longhouse chief will lead everyone in drinking the *Ai Pengayu* (tuak for long life) at the same time wishing each other 'long life, health and prosperity' (gayu-guru, gerai- nyamai).

The celebration then gets merrier with some dancing, music and poetry.

The following day, several activities may be lined up including cock-fighting, blowpipe demonstrations and *ngajat* (dancing) competitions. On this day, the homes of the Dayaks will be open to visitors. In the longhouses, a practice called *masu pengabang* takes place where guests will be served with tuak by the host before they can enter the longhouse.

The Gawai Dayak festival may last up to several days, with visitors being welcomed into the homes of the Dayaks throughout the festival.

In Sarawak's capital city of Kuching, the festivities and celebrations of the Gawai Dayak commence a week before with the World Harvest Festival. This year's World Harvest Festival will be celebrated from 23 until 24 May at the Sarawak Cultural Village, near Kuching.

Among the highlights are the performances from invited international and local cultural troupes from Sri Lanka, Latvia and India, the staging of a theme play on a legendary Iban warrior entitled "Simpang impang II", an ethnic beauty pageant "Miss Fair & Lovely WHF 2009", a unique event where the finalists of "WHF 2009 Iron Man" compete in activities such as lifting rice in gunny sack, blowpipe shooting, etc.

Other highlights include international cultural concerts from the invited cultural troupes as well as Sarawak local troupes. During the day, the groups will conduct workshops and jamming sessions at SCV ethnic houses and perform at Dewan Lagenda.

Other than that, there will also be Food & Craft Fiesta where invited international and local chefs/craftspersons demonstrate and showcase their skills and specialties, workshops and jam sessions.

There will also be open houses in all the three longhouses (Iban, Bidayuh, Orang Ulu) where guests are treated with traditional cuisines.

Some notable places in Sarawak to visit during the Gawai Dayak festival are The Skrang River, The Lemanak River, Batang Ai and Annah Rais.

Gawai Dayak is one of the best times to visit Sarawak and experience the colourful festivities and diverse cultures of Malaysia.

**Ticketing Information:**

Tickets will be on sale at Sarawak Cultural Village (SCV) and Sarawak Tourism Board Visitor's Information Center at RM60 (adults) and RM30 (children 6-12 years old). Dinner tickets are RM150 but must be pre-booked by calling SCV.

For more information, contact:  
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