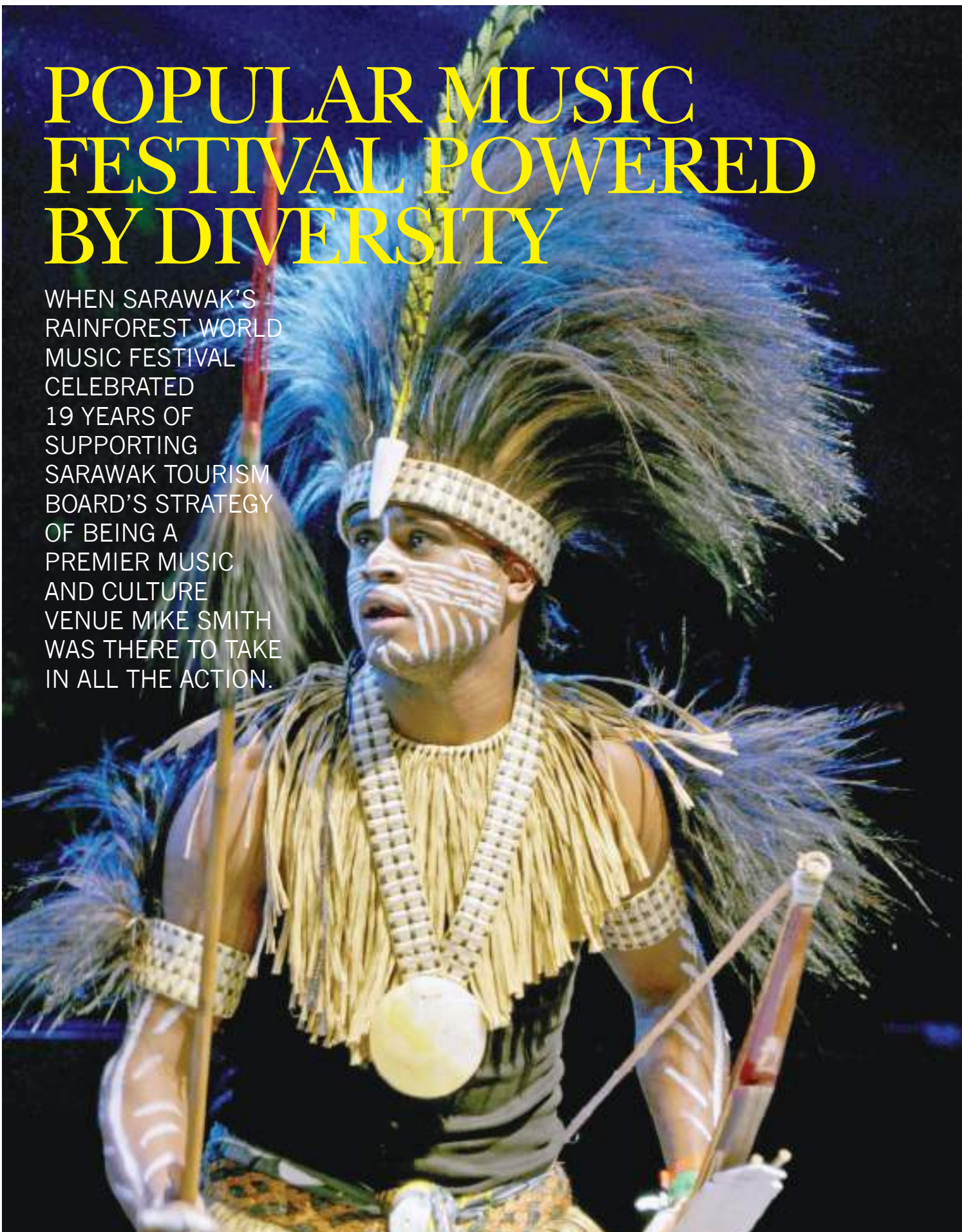


# POPULAR MUSIC FESTIVAL POWERED BY DIVERSITY

WHEN SARAWAK'S  
RAINFOREST WORLD  
MUSIC FESTIVAL  
CELEBRATED  
19 YEARS OF  
SUPPORTING  
SARAWAK TOURISM  
BOARD'S STRATEGY  
OF BEING A  
PREMIER MUSIC  
AND CULTURE  
VENUE MIKE SMITH  
WAS THERE TO TAKE  
IN ALL THE ACTION.





**K**uching is the main gateway for overseas tourists to enter the Malaysian state of Sarawak on the Island of Borneo. Many come to explore Sarawak's natural wonders, adventure tours and diverse culture, but I headed first to Damai Puri Resort and Spa, 32 km from Kuching. Situated below the majestic Mount Santubong it hosts musicians, dancers, media and guests during the Sarawak's Rainforest World Music Festival (RWMF) allowing all to mix, mingle and party in an intimate setting.

### AN INTIMATE SETTING

The beauty of the RWMF is that you can get close up and personal with the artists; be it at meal times, during afternoon workshops or by the pool. Evening performances are on the outdoor Jungle and Tree Stages. After the traditional tribal Miring Ceremony to open the festival, a spectacular repertoire by 17 sape players (the iconic instrument of the festival) got the show on the road.

The night continued with visually stunning and dramatic performances from Naygayiw Gigi Dance Troupe from Australia and India's Unique Arts Academy who entertained with music, dance and amazing energy.

Credit to artistic director Yeoh Jun Lin for the diversity of the 25 acts assembled from five continents. As she said "We cater to the audience and give them what they want, plus we give them what they don't know they want. They don't care; provided it's good!"

### PARTY THE NIGHT AWAY!

Irish music transcends borders just like its pubs and beer! Teada's fiddler, flautist, drummer and a glamorous dancer got the crowd swaying and in the mood to party.

Doldrums are defined as a state or period of stagnation or depression. Dol Drums played by Dol Arastra Bengkulu from Sumatra were anything but! The pulsating action packed percussionists kept the revellers bopping away and ready for more.

Krar Collective was my favourite act of the opening night. Great Ethiopian vocals from the classy Genet Assefa, a bizarre lyre (krar) and rhythmic drum beat made this band a thrilling experience with its clever mix of gentle songs, blues and soulful rock.

The evening closed with Auli a powerful Latvian band with seven bagpipes and mighty drums playing lively medieval music.

### THE LIVING MUSEUM

The Sarawak Cultural Village, known as a 'living museum', where all the festivities were held, was set up to preserve Sarawak's cultural heritage. You can see traditional houses and chat to the friendly residents representing the major ethnic tribes.

In addition to great musical works RWMF caters to diverse tastes. As well as being an accomplished musician Alena Murang has a passion for art and spent seven hours drawing a massive 20metre mural 'Tree of Life Doodle Wall'. Inspired by the Dayak Tree of Life design seen on the walls of longhouses festival goers were encouraged to add their images reflecting nature and music.

It isn't called the rainforest for nothing and sure enough the heavens opened at the start of the evening performances on Day 2, which was a pity because many of the crowd fled for cover during sape master Matthew Ngau and "poster girl" of the 2016 festival Alena Murang's duet. Still the younger members of the audience lapped it up as the field turned to mud.

### CHINESE FOLK ROCKERS

When the rain



stopped, the crowd returned, the music began. Vocal Sampling impressed with their delightful a cappella. Producing sounds of an orchestra just by their voices they played a mix of Cuban songs and fun takes on Frank Sinatra and a superb version of Hotel California.

Shanren, the 'mountain men' from Yunnan in China, pumped up the adrenaline factor with a mix of folk fusion, urban rock, reggae and what I can only describe as Chinese punk with pogo dancing! Tremendous fun, enormous ability and brilliant at managing the crowd!

Pat Thomas is nearly 70, but you wouldn't guess it from his mesmerising show with The Kwashibu Area Band, which brought Day 2 to its climax. Afro beat, soulful dance music, trap drums, simply a top band complementing the 'Golden Voice of Africa'.

Syria is a troubled country and rarely represented positively so it was a pleasure to witness Broukar playing Arab music accompanied by a spectacular Whirling Dervish dancer on Day 3.

### MIND BLOWING DEEP THROAT!

One of the stars of RWMF 2016 was Violons Barbares. This perfectly balanced, friendly band contains two fiddlers and a drummer providing powerful diverse sounds from instruments and



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vocals matched with a terrific sense of humour. Mongolian Dandarvaanchig's amazing throat singing and horse head fiddle playing goes so well with Bulgarian Dimitar Gougouv's exciting gadulka fiddling and French drummer Fabian Guyot's improvisations. In particular the sounds created to represent galloping horses was inspirational and unforgettable.

Having seen Chouk Bwa Libete doing their sound check I was keen to see them in action and this colourful, emotional band with strong vocals, compelling drums and a spellbinding ritual dancer didn't disappoint.

Adding to the mystery was the supping of 'something' from a bowl at the front of the stage and a dramatic fall by lead singer Jean Claud Sambaton Dorvil after appearing to be possessed. Voodoo music from Haiti at its best and the final act of a magnificent festival! Next it was time to explore Kuching.

### INTRIGUING KUCHING

Kuching has much to offer including a lovely Esplanade along the Sarawak River, well preserved colonial buildings, intriguing kampongs, and backstreets filled with traditional craftsmen, antiques and souvenir shops.

In my opinion, the best views of Kuching are from the river on the MV Equatorial 1.5-hour sunset cruise. There is a short, but photogenic cultural show, but of



course the main attraction was the sunset which was absolutely stunning with the DUN making a beautiful foreground.

There are interesting day trips from Kuching to see orangutans and a longhouse with connections to former head hunters. That was where we were off to next.

### MAGNIFICENT PRIMATES

Semenggoh Wildlife Centre is 25km from Kuching. First impressions at Semenggoh weren't great with busloads of tourists gathering and some rather sorry looking crocodiles in an enclosure near the less than impressive entrance. However, things rapidly improved as we walked through the jungle to encounter these magnificent primates.

Several orangutans came down to lunch on the fruit provided. This rehabilitation centre has over 20 orangutans and helps orphaned or injured orangutans prepare to be re-released back into the rainforest. Make sure you check feeding times as you can't get in any other time!

### KEEP YOUR HEAD!

My first impressions of Anna Rais Longhouse located an hour's drive from Kuching were not good either! Perhaps a dozen large buses were in the car park and hundreds of tourists milling around often intruding into private areas for selfies. Not surprisingly the 2,000 residents of the

ethnic Bidayuh tribe kept out of the way behind closed doors.

What did catch my attention was the lovely art work on some of the wooden buildings, apparently drawn by Lutherans who helped convert the villagers to Christianity.

### THE HEADHOUSE

The most sacred part of the village is the Headhouse. This is not where the village chief lives, but is actually where the trophies from earlier head hunting expeditions are on display!

Optional extras at the village include watching a traditional welcome dance and taking lunch. The simple chicken dish cooked in bamboo over a wooden fire with

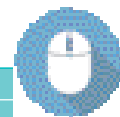
a glass of the tuak, low alcohol rice wine, was excellent.

### A DIFFERENT SCENE

What a difference an hour makes! By the time I was done the village was deserted and the villagers approachable. Go when the tour buses have left and the children have returned to the village from school.

Kuching is an interesting city in its own right, but perfect to visit when the Rainforest World Music Festival is on. There are good day trips for an extended stay and, of course, it is the gateway to Sarawak with endless opportunities for adventure travel! ❖

## Packet Guide



**Sponsor:** - Sarawak Tourism Board - [www.sarawaktourism.com](http://www.sarawaktourism.com)

**Airline:** - Malaysian Airlines - [www.malaysianairlines.com](http://www.malaysianairlines.com)

**Hotel:** - Damai Puri Resort and Spa - [www.damaipuriresort.com](http://www.damaipuriresort.com)

**Hotel Kuching** - Harbour View Hotel - [www.harbourview.com.my](http://www.harbourview.com.my)

**Restaurant Kuching** - [www.chinahouse.com.my](http://www.chinahouse.com.my)

**Annah Rais Longhouse** - [www.longhouseinborneo.com](http://www.longhouseinborneo.com)