



MEDIA INFO

REGATTA CELEBRATION DURING WATER FESTIVAL MONTH

The Water Festival Month will kick off on April 12 in Lumut, Perak with exciting games and events lined up for the public. For the rest of the month, it will be celebrated in various ways nationwide in Pahang, Kedah, Terengganu, Selangor, Penang and Malacca. All sorts of water-based activities are being organised throughout the month including games like log-walking and duck-catching. Jet ski, canoe and kayak races are also the norm, as are diving, snorkelling, boat parades, cultural performances and concerts. For those who prefer to keep their feet dry, the white sandy beaches shaded by palm trees offer a respite from the sun. The closing ceremony of the festival will be celebrated in Kuala Perlis, Perlis on May 10.

For a Water Festival that's a little different than your typical water-based races, head out to Sabah on April 13 for the **Semporna Lepa Regatta**, an annual event that pays tribute to the beauty of the traditional boats of Sabah.

The regatta is now into its 10th year and showcases the beauty of the *lepa*, a type of boat used by the Bajau Pala'u community in Sabah known for their seafaring skills and bravery.

The *lepa* is a single masted sailing boat made from *Ubar Suluk* or Red *Seraya* wood. It typically measures five metres long and 1.5 metres wide and has a house structure built on it from sago palm leaves. The boats are often decorated with beautiful and unique carvings and colourful sails that display the brave spirit of the Bajau Pala'u people.

The regatta will feature about 22 *lepas*, all decked out in colourful and decorative sails and flags, with ethnic music and dances performed on board, vying for the most beautiful *lepa* title. Other events scheduled for the day include traditional Bajau performances, tug-of-war and various water sports races.

To the Bajau people, the *lepa* is not just a fishing vessel, but is also their main means of transportation and shelter. It is also where the Bajau celebrate major events like weddings and where cultural performances are held.

Some Bajau families spend their entire lifetimes on the boats, making their homes in the *lepa*, coming ashore only for their food and water supply or to bury their dead. However, this lifestyle is fast disappearing as more and more Bajaus are coming ashore and building their homes on the mainland.

Today, only a handful of Bajau people continue the practice and lifestyle of their forefathers – all the more reason for the Semporna

Lepa Regatta to be held then, as a means of acquainting the modern generation with the culture of the past.

The Nusalalung Village, otherwise known as Bum-Bum Island, in Semporna has been the major producer of the *lepa* and the Bajau people there are known as mastercrafts of the trade.

During special ceremonies, decorative flags and banners of various colours are put up and sets of traditional musical instruments are brought out to be played on board. The combination of the *lepa*, traditional cultural performance and traditional music is quite a remarkable sight. Tourists can witness all this at the Semporna *Lepa* Regatta this April.

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