

MEDIA INFO

THE LIVING MUSEUM OF SARAWAK

The Sarawak Cultural Village, tucked away in the serene and tranquil area of Damai Beach just out of Kuching in Sarawak, is aptly called a living museum.

It is a seven-hectare sprawling area located at the foothill of the legendary Mount Santubong, fronting the South China Sea.

It is definitely a name befitting the place, as this is where visitors can learn all there is to know about Sarawak without having to travel from one town to another.



The entrance to the Sarawak Cultural Village. Source: Sarawak Cultural Village

Visitors can get a comprehensive glimpse of how the ethnic tribes in Sarawak live in the longhouses, what their homes are

traditionally made from, their staple diet and also other delicacies like *jala* cakes or *tebaloi* made from sago.

Not only can they find out what the ethnic tribes of Sarawak like to eat but they also get a chance to taste it, and if lucky, they might get to try cooking it.



Traditional Sarawak dancers will welcome you at the entrance of the Sarawak Cultural Village

There is a real community of families in this living museum as the staff live in the village. Yes! Some of them actually live in the mock up longhouses.

The Sarawak Cultural Village has won 10 major awards, including a PATA Gold Cultural, ASEANTA Classic Award, ASEANTA Best Cultural Preservation Effort Award, a Tourism Malaysia Award, an MTV Grand Prix Award and a Hornbill Tourism Gold Award.

Officially opened in February 1990, the village attracts 70,000 visitors annually from all over the world.

THE GRAND TOUR

There are seven authentic ethnic houses built around a man-made lake, which exemplifies the inclination of Sarawakians to build their dwellings alongside rivers or along the coastal areas.

Each house represents a major ethnic group in Sarawak - the Bidayuh, Iban, Orang Ulu, Penan, Melanau, Malay and Chinese.

The Bidayuh, or known also as the Land Dayak, welcomes visitors with enchanting dances to their longhouse.

The house, with bamboo floors, comes complete with the conical "*panggah*" or headhunter warrior unit that is out of bounds for children and women of the tribe.

Before entering the longhouse, you would first have to enter the ritual house which functions as a community hall, fortress and also the place to store hunted heads.



A Bidayuh longhouse made predominantly from bamboo.

Source: Sarawak Cultural Village

Head hunting is something the tribes in Sarawak decades ago share in common and it was a symbol of the warrior's strength and bravery. The heads were placed above the fireplace in the middle of the house. The fire was believed to prevent the head's spirit from bringing harm to the living.

Climbing up the notched log into the Iban longhouse built of axe-hewn timber tied with creeper fibre can be as intriguing as unraveling the lifestyle of the tribe.

The Sea Dayak, long ago known as headhunters, were fearless hunters. Fortunately, this practice has long been abolished. Visitors, however, can still view real skulls hung from the poles of the Iban longhouse.

In the Iban longhouse, you can see the women weaving the traditional pua kumbu using the *ikat* (tie) method and the *sungkit*. Some of the other women may be busy stringing together bead necklaces or other accessories.



Beads are not only limited to the Iban but is used by the other tribes as well. It is believed that the beads protect the living from the evil spirits of the other world.

The nomadic Penan's hut is rustic against the "jungle". Watch the Penan use the blowpipe with a hard wood dart as ammunition. Visitors can take potshots too. The hut is also the place to get authentic *Tongkat Ali* (extracts from this plant is said to be an energy booster) roots!

The Penan are semi-nomadic people and would move from one place to another when the food resources in the area had diminished.

At the "Rumah Orang Ulu, some 15 to 20 metres above the ground, enjoy the sounds of "*sape*" (traditional guitar) and listen to the origins of it.

An Orang Ulu man, whose wife was very sick, one day dreamt that the music of the *sape* had healing powers. When he awoke the next morning, he started work constructing the *sape* according to his dream.

When it was ready, he began playing on the string instrument for his wife and voila! She was healed. Nowadays, the healing music is still played on the *sape* and the legend is told to the younger generation.

Other than that, the *sape* is played to accompany the traditional dance.

Meanwhile, at the tall and massive Melanau house, learn how the Melanau differ from most other Borneo people - they prefer to eat sago than rice!



The Melanau longhouse

Here you can see an actual mini sago processing factory. Watch how the women spend hours in front of the clay oven making sago cakes and also learn how the sago is processed from the tree.

Up in the longhouse, learn about the sickness images which are statues to resemble whatever illness you may have. During the olden days, the sick would visit the “doctor” who would transfer your

illness to the statue. The statue would then be put on a boat and pushed down the river symbolising the illness being taken away.

Next is the traditional Malay house on stilts and in contrast, the Chinese farm house built at ground level.

In the Malay house, there is an actual “*pelamin*” (dais) which is where the bride and groom sit on during their wedding ceremony to receive well wishers and blessings from family and friends.

The focal point of the Chinese house is the household shrine where a print or statuette of the god revered by the family is displayed, surrounded by joss sticks, candles, little cups of tea and other seasonal offerings.

In fact, each house has its unique characteristics and comes alive with villagers garbed in their traditional clothes performing their household chores, rituals, ceremonies, playing traditional games, singing, dancing and children playing around.

It is indeed an experience to walk from house to house listening to the storyteller unravel the tale behind each door.

CULTURAL SHOW

At the end of the walkabout, visitors have yet to be fascinated once again with the cultural show at the village's 400-seat theatre.

Young and exuberant village artistes put up dazzling multi-cultural performances that leave lasting impressions of the rich heritage of wonderful Sarawak.

This is the best time to learn more about the tribe's dances such as the *ngajat lesong* (war-like dance) for the Iban, the *Rajang*

Be'uh, usually performed for the harvest season by the Bidayuh and the famous *alu-alu*, which uses bamboo poles to make the pulsating beat by the Melanau tribe.

If you are lucky, you may get the chance to see a lion dance performed by the Chinese, normally during the Chinese New Year as a symbol of peace and prosperity.

The vastness of Sarawak, a land with a multitude of culture, has been cleverly weaved at this village by the deep blue sea.

GETTING THERE

Sarawak Cultural Village is a 40-minute drive from Kuching, five-minute walk from Holiday Inn Resort Damai Beach and Holiday Inn Damai Lagoon Resort and a six-minute walk from Damai Golf course.



A magnificent view of legendary Mount Santubong from the Sarawak Cultural Village

A wide range of transport is available from Kuching, that is, city/Damai shuttle, taxi, local tour agents. Entrance fee is RM45 for adults and RM22.50 for children (six to 12 years).

Opening hours is 9am to 5.15 pm while the cultural show is at 11.30am and 4.30pm daily.

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