

The Official Launch

What About Kuching 2019 & the 6th Borneo International Beads Conference

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Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry Sarawak

Draft Speech

I am thrilled to be here this morning to officially launch the third edition of What About Kuching or now better known as WAK.

With very humble beginnings three years ago, this fabulous celebration of arts, culture and lifestyle is indeed growing from strength to strength; a testimony to the wonderful community behind this movement.

Driven **BY THE COMMUNITY FOR THE COMMUNITY**, WAK is a true partnership between the public and private sectors and exemplifies our cohesiveness as Sarawakians and patriots of Sarawak.

It is a gargantuan effort to put together such an intense festival with so many groups involved. This year WAK 2019 is jam-packed with a programme comprising **56 collaborating groups; 99 different events and over 315 daily events over 30 days!** No longer can anyone say that there's nothing to do in Kuching.

At this rate of growth, the WAK movement will place Kuching as **THE DESTINATION** of choice for festivalgoers each October. This will be a great boon to our tourism industry and become the ideal **BIG** platform for our creative communities to shine.

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ABOUT KUCHING

About Kuching Sdn Bhd (Company No. 1243790-T)
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WAK is also strategising to expand its reach to regional cities with the hope of attracting creative communities to come and join forces with our local talents to elevate current standards and foster greater networking.

The Sarawak Government through my ministry is pleased to be the MAIN SPONSOR of WAK 2019 and will continue, to our best ability, to contribute towards the growth of this impressive effort. I am confident that WAK will be able to gain even greater momentum in the years to come, towards its main aim of becoming the top regional platform for arts, culture and lifestyles, akin to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

Today's joint launch of WAK 2019 and its anchor event, the 6th Borneo International Beads Conference or BIBCO bears testament to this cohesiveness, which results in many such effective collaborations.

BIBCO

I have been brought to understand that BIBCO has gained its place as a top beads conference globally since its inception in 2010. Now in its 6th edition, BIBCO 2019 once again brings together some of the most prominent and esteemed personalities from around the world to share, discuss and learn the fascinating culture, meaning, history, beauty and the technical intricacies of beads.

Economically, beads are worth MONEY! In the old days, beads were used as a currency. Even today, collectors pay high prices for rare antique beads. But it is not only the old and ancient beads that fetch high prices; high value baubles like the beautifully created Murano Glass Beads are much sought after the world over.

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It is this potential to develop a lucrative artisanal beads industry that the Sarawak Government has been a strong supporter of BIBCO all these years. Refining bead making, bead working and beading skills as well as the combining of traditional skills with beads, result in very sought-after handicrafts with global appeal.

Currently we have approximately 1,500 persons in Sarawak occasionally making handicrafts for sale including a significant percentage of bead crafters. Most of these crafts persons are only able to supplement their agrarian profession with their creations, and only a handful is actively deriving a decent income from this pursuit professionally.

These professionals work hard, are committed, and they understand the business eco-system and are always looking to further develop their skills and craftsmanship. As minister for Arts and Culture, I would like to see more of these artisans taking on this career path and will endeavour to my best ability to create greater opportunities for them to be successful.

As have been highlighted to me by our BIBCO director, Mdm. Heidi Munan, it is imperative that we commence charting the way forward by having:

- **Product-focused training** – although handicraft agencies like Sarawak Crafts Council and Kraftangan Malaysia are already active in this area, there is still much greater room to improve on this. Events like BIBCO brings a wealth of new skills and ideas into the beading scene, a great platform for skill and knowledge transfer and exchanges.

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- **Product development** – via events like BIBCO, handicraft agencies as well as our local crafts persons themselves can better expose themselves to even greater creativity by networking with international designers and master crafts persons themselves. The many showcases at BIBCO open up a plethora of ideas, which has and will continue to encourage greater innovations.
- **Branding** –it is my sincere hope that through this congregation of creative minds, a unique Sarawak brand can be established and developed. This is how we will carve out a place in the market. After all, we have the tradition, we have the skills, we have committed crafts persons. Given a better platform, they will do extremely well in the future and my ministry will continue to facilitate this to our best abilities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the WAK team and all the collaborators including Craffthub and BIBCO for coming together and showcasing not only our creative talents but also our exemplary Sarawakian spirit of togetherness.

I am looking forward to attending as many of the events as possible, and meeting as many of the talented individuals and teams as I can this coming month. I urge everyone to plan and book your flights, bus, boat tickets and come to Kuching to immerse yourselves in a month filled with fabulous arts, culture and lifestyle.

It is my greatest pleasure to now officially launch the 3rd What About Kuching and the 6th Borneo International Beads Conference.

Thank you.

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