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**CULTURE DESIGNED FOR TOURISM
THE SARAWAK CONTEXT****Denis Hon**

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CULTURE DESIGNED FOR TOURISM THE SARAWAK CONTEXT

by

Denis Hon

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MOTIVATIONS FOR TOURISM

1. Tourism is a confrontation between the traveller and a foreign environment. What is it in that environment which draws him there? People are motivated to travel for a number of reasons. It may be related to physical relaxation and rest, sporting activities and medical treatment; a desire to visit friends or relatives or simply to get away from one's normal surroundings; to seek personal improvement and development such as travelling for educational purpose and in pursuit of a hobby; or to see and learn about foreign lands and their cultures.

Tourism is probably the outcome of the combination of all these motivations, but the latter, that is the curiosity to see foreign countries, to see how the other side lives and to learn about their culture has always been a universal and significant factor motivating people to travel.

2. Culture expresses itself in numerous ways and among these are the tangible artistic expressions of man such as architecture, sculpture, carvings, handicrafts, paintings, music, dances and songs. It is these which contribute towards cultural tourism which today is one of the most attractive and

remunerative sector of the tourism industry. Cultural tourism has been the backbone of the European tourism industry and is also being used to advantage by a number of Asian countries. Consider the magnificent temples of Angkor Wat in Cambodia, the beauty of the Taj Mahal in India and the Borobudur in Indonesia which never fail to attract foreign visitors.

THE SARAWAK CONTEXT

1. In Sarawak, it can generally be considered that the following constitute the cultural resource which is being used for purpose of tourism promotion:-

- (a) the indigenous communities with their distinctive lifestyle, beliefs, festivals, music and dances;
- (b) the rich variety of artefacts and handicrafts; and
- (c) the architectural heritage as shown by the number of interesting historical buildings, monuments and sites in the State.

Efforts to promote Sarawak as a destination to visit focus on these elements of culture. The tour programme marketed by tour operators or the hoteliers normally include a longhouse visit to experience the ethnic lifestyle; a stop at the Karyaneka handicraft centre and the Sarawak Museum and a tour of the city which brings the visitor face to face with Kuching's old world charm — its quaint old shophouses, its temples and historically interesting buildings and monuments.

Sarawak's cultural resource together with its natural heritage i.e. the National Parks with their fauna and flora and natural wonders comprise the main tourism products being publicised and marketed.

2. Presently, there is a low level of awareness of Sarawak and its tourism products overseas. The State is off the main airline routes and outside the tourism belt. However, there is an increasing appeal in destinations off the beaten track, unspoiled and unsullied by the effects of urbanisation and commercialization. This appeal is reinforced by the desire to look for safer holiday destinations in the wake of terrorism which has caused an outflow of tourists from the traditional holiday spots in Europe. Sex as a motivation for travel which we cannot possibly offer, is being slowly deemphasized and the flesh spots of the world do not command the attraction they have enjoyed in the past before the AIDS scare. The prospects for the tourism industry is good with forecast in the strengthening of the major economies and the liberal policy of countries such as Japan, Taiwan and Korea which encourage outbound travel by their citizens. Japan, for example, sets a target of ten million Japanese abroad by 1990. Not all those intending to travel will of course be motivated by the lure of seeing and experiencing foreign lands and cultures but a substantial number will be. To cash in on the situation, there is a conscious need to consider how fully we can exploit our cultural resource for the benefit of the tourism industry.

THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

1. Sarawak has more than twenty-four ethnic groups each possessing its own distinctive lifestyle and culture. The Iban longhouse is a unique concept of living and the Iban *ngajat*, the *Tolak Bala* of the Bidayuh