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Fiesta time

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THE Langkawi International Festival of Arts (Lifa) returns to Langkawi for a week-long celebration of the island's arts and legends, in conjunction with the second Malaysia International Arts Month.

Following the successful inaugural Lifa in 2000, the festival is set to be a standard feature in the island's calendar every two years. Jointly organised by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism Malaysia and Langkawi Development Authority, this year's event will be held from Oct 5 to 11, 2002, under the theme 'Arts and Legends'.

'The festival is to promote Langkawi as one of the top tourist islands in the world via folk arts, folk songs and many other types of arts,' says Fisool Musa, assistant secretary of Culture and Arts Policy, Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism Malaysia. 'In 2000, the festival was more a visual arts exhibition, featuring photos and paintings. This year, we have broadened the scope of arts to include dance, music, visual arts, crafts and so on.'

The week starts off with a gala opening at Dataran Lang, launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Langkawi is most famous for its legend of Mahsuri, a village maiden who was sentenced to death for a crime she did not commit. But visitors can also take a peek at the legends of various other countries performed by multinational participants in a cultural extravaganza that Saturday night. There will also be a traditional Malaysian dance, the Joget Lambak, as well as a performance by songbird Siti Nurhaliza.

Other events lined up for the week include an international legendary treasure hunt, folk songs and poetry renditions, a traditional village banquet and folk theatre, which includes a Wayang Kulit (shadow play) performance.

The treasure hunt will introduce various international cultures to participants by bringing them through several checkpoints around the island. Visitors can also spend an evening at Mahsuri's village at Ulu Melaka, where they will be treated to a theatre presentation by local school children, evening tea, cultural presentations and demonstrations of paddy husking, traditional food preparation and fashion.

Throughout the week, one can visit the Langkawi Craft Complex for a whole variety of activities. These include craft-making demonstrations of the Kelantanese kite, traditional flutes and drums, Malay tops, shadow puppets and bird traps; a craft bazaar and exhibition of the Mek Mulung, Jikey and Kuda Kepang, among others; a Malaysian traditional games competition, such as the congkak, sepak raga, rumah batu and blowpiping; a martial arts demonstration, a bird-singing competition, an international flower arrangement competition, as well as natural dye demonstrations.

There are even activities lined up for children, such as the Fairytales - fairytale presentation by children from different countries - and an international art competition, international traditional games and international story telling competitions.

Hotels, shopping complexes and other public areas have been roped in to add to the festivities with international cuisine promotions and cultural performances.

And to close the week with a bang, there will be a procession of international legendary weddings, complete with a wedding reception at Dataran Lang, performances by popular singers as well as a fireworks

display.

`We want to welcome tourists, both foreign and local, to this festival,' says Fisool. `In the future, we hope to make the festival as famous as LIMA (Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace show). LIMA is also held every two years, so with LIMA and Lifa held on alternate years, we want to give people something to look forward to in Langkawi every year.'