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Let your hair down and celebrate!

CHRISTMAS IS COMING ... and Hari Raya is still filling hearts with happiness, while the New Year is just around the corner.

December is a joyous season when people of all faiths and racial background take time off to enjoy themselves.

The season too coincides with the long school holidays and the year-end Mega Sale Carnival, creating a wonderful mood for vacationing and shopping.

If you haven't planned what to do, check our compilation of a selection of places and happenings, from the north right to Sabah and from the south to Sarawak, that will help you get into the revelry mood.

KUALA LUMPUR:

WHAT is Malaysian-style year-end celebration without taking the Federal capital as the focal celebration point?

Besides long established party points like the Dataran Merdeka, Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC), Bintang Walk and Bangsar, the festive mood is felt on the streets too.

Counting down to the year-end bash, the city is ushering in the Yuletide season by lighting up big trees along Jalan Raja, Jalan Kuching and Jalan Bukit Bintang, while decorative lights adorn lamp posts along many roads.

Parts of Kuala Lumpur have been transformed into fairylands, both outdoor and indoor, especially with shopping complexes and hotels joining in to enchant patrons with Christmas decorations, including trees decked with colourful ribbons, glittering ornaments and theme gardens.

One of the most eye-catching ensembles is the Suria KLCC's giant Christmas tree which stands at 33 metres. It is decked with 2,170 purple baubles of various sizes and 300 pieces of 4.7cm ball clusters and lighted with 600 white bulbs.

Come New Year's Eve, the celebration in the city takes on a different mood with its jam-packed open New Year parties.

For years, Dataran Merdeka has been a favourite spot for city folk, who will gather as early as 9pm to usher in the New Year against the backdrop of a brightly-lit Sultan Abdul Samad Building.

But if one prefers to do the countdown with a more modern landmark as the backdrop, the world's tallest building, the Petronas Twin Towers, is the place to be.

This year, the action at the twin towers begins from 9pm with singer Noraniza Idris, before other artistes, including Reshmonu, the five-piece band NRG, Corzie, Yassin, Dayang Nurfaizah, Poetic Ammo, Ella and M. Nasir bring the party to a crescendo.

For a little more crush and hype, try Bintang Walk, encompassing the stretch where Starhill, Lot 10, KL Plaza, JW Marriot and The Ritz-Carlton are.

The street party even spills over to the other side of Jalan Bukit Bintang, where Sungei Wang Plaza and BB Park are.

Or hop over to the happening Bangsar where the hip-hop party is celebrated on Jalan Telawi.

But what is auld lang syne without the fireworks. At the stroke of midnight, the skies will be filled with stunning displays of fireworks fired from various party points scattered around the city.

As far as vantage points go, Menara Kuala Lumpur holds the best view of the city's skyline. For those who want to celebrate with a view, the tower is extending the operation hours at the Observation Deck until 1am for revellers to have a spectacular view of the Klang Valley, the Straits of Malacca, Genting Highlands and, of course, the fireworks and pyrotechnics in the celebrating city below.

#### GENTING HIGHLANDS:

OVER at Genting - City of Entertainment, Fantastica!, the RM17.5 million spectacular circus show sizzles and mesmerises audience of all ages.

Deemed the new age circus, Fantastica! combines gymnastics and acrobatics, high-tech music and choreography which showcases human agility and discipline at its best.

More than 50 performers, including a number of world-class gymnastics and acrobats, trampolinists and clowns from Russia and China, are in the spotlight in a show that takes its audience into the mind of a child, expressing the child's version of happiness, melancholy, anxiety and euphoria.

The cast includes a tenor and soprano who perform live from Nov 28 for six months.

Resorts World Bhd executive vice-president Lee Chong Yan said: "Everything about Fantastica! has been conceptualised, designed and executed exclusively for this production. The orchestral music is entirely original, written from scratch and recorded by world-class musicians."

It is Genting's most expensive production to date and marks the first time a production of this magnitude has been staged at Genting Highlands Resort.

Fantastica!, which was conceived four years ago, has a custom-built stage, costing about RM2 million, enhanced with multimedia effects, spectacular 3D animation and state-of-the-art lighting.

Fantastica! is staged at The Pavilion, First World Plaza.

Other events at Genting: Herman's Hermits Live in Genting concert (Dec 20); Astro Kids Talents Quest 2003 (Dec 21); Eliza Chan Christmas Eve Concert (Dec 24); Wayang Tinggi CNY Album Showcase (Dec 28); Andy Lau Live in Genting concert (Jan 2 & 3); Dances of the Dynasties (Jan 9-16); and David Gates Asia Tour concert (Jan 17).

Tickets are available at all Genting sales offices, Genting Onehub centres and through the [www.genting.com.my](http://www.genting.com.my). For enquiries, call 03-27181118.

#### IPOH:

THE New Year will see Ipoh promoting its own flower, the bougainvillea in a big way. Adopting the concept of the Pasadena Rose Parade, Ipoh will showcase the 'Bougainvillea Float' for the first time with 25 vehicles beautifully decorated with colourful blooms parading at the Dataran Ipoh Greentown from 8.30am on Jan 4.

Ten brass bands will join the parade.

Other events include an exhibition and sale of bougainvillea and Mini Landscape Contest, aimed at promoting the use of the city's flower in landscaping.

After the float procession, a Bougainvillea Auction will be held at the Stadium Indera Mulia Ipoh.

To herald the New Year, a 'Count Down 2004' show will be held at the Dataran Ipoh on New Year's eve at 8.30pm.

Audiences will be entertained by two singers from the De Bougainvillea Group, Aishah and Hanim. Also expected to perform are artistes Disco Veloo and Felicia Phuah. There will also be recital of poems and presentation of music using unplugged guitars, with performers expecting to pay tribute to former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

#### KUCHING:

THE year-end sees the community joining the 'Love-in-a-Box' project, organised by the Sarawak Economic Development Corporation's (SEDC) tourism and leisure division. Now in its fourth year, the project concept is simple: ask the more affluent members of the community to share with the less privileged by sending presents to children, mainly in rural and urban villages.

Each year's Love-in-a-Box starts in late October. Volunteers under the SEDC's supervision man stalls in the larger shopping centres, collecting toys to be channelled to where it is most needed.

This year, the organisers encouraged the targeted recipients to send 'wish lists', with each child filling a form to indicate what he or she would most like as a festive present. Most don't ask for toys or luxuries but new shoes, school bags or a set of school uniforms.

In the foyer of Holiday Inn Kuching, a few unlikely Christmas elves are at work, manning the Christmas Charity Gingerbread House.

In its 10th season, the house collects donations for worthy purposes by encouraging patrons to record their names on a tile or any part of the house for a donation.

#### KOTA KINABALU:

ABOUT 1,000 carollers from 16 groups gathered and sang at the 'Amazing Carols by Candlelight' event at the Sutera Harbour Marina, Golf & Country Club last Saturday as a prelude to the Christmas celebration.

There were also a puppet show for children, jumble sale, food bazaar and special sales of candles and soft toys. The beneficiary of this charitable activity was the Sabah Thalassaemia Society.

Now in its fourth year, the annual charity project is organised by Sutera Harbour Resort every December to benefit the less fortunate.

Other year-end activities lined up at the resort include charity sales and 'Feed the Fish and Save the Sea for a Better Tomorrow' campaign. Guests may purchase breadcrumbs to feed the fish at the resort's Watersports Centre. All proceeds go to the Sabah Thalassaemia Society.

Children can look forward to a big Christmas Party tomorrow at the resort's club and on Christmas Day at the Pacific Wing of the resort. Both parties are open to children between six and 12.

#### PENANG:

THE Esplanade will reverberate to the dance beats from all over the world when troupes from Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, India, Indonesia, Mauritius, New Zealand, Russia, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines entertain the crowd partying 2003 away.

Over at Gurney Drive, revellers will be treated to an entertainment extravaganza 'Sama-sama Samsung Countdown Carnival', sponsored by Samsung Malaysia Electronics (SME) Sdn Bhd.

The mega concert, jointly organised by the State Government, is expected to draw more than 80,000 party-goers. They won't be disappointed as on the cards are top local draws, including Too Phat, Jason Lo, Naked Breed, Deanna Yusof, Island, Singletrackmind and the Instant Cafe Theatre featuring Jo Kukathas, Patrick Teoh, Rashid Salleh and Maya Abdullah.

At the Seberang Perai Municipal Council field on mainland Penang, the New Year 2004 concert on Dec 31, organised by Penevents Sdn Bhd, will feature performances by 60's singer L. Ramlee, Siti Nordiana, Achik Spin as well as an assortment of presentations such as Chingay, dragon dances and fireworks display after the countdown.

#### JOHOR BARU:

DOWN south, some 20,000 people are expected to converge at the Dataran Bandaraya Johor Baru to experience the countdown to 2004.