

Telling our story to the world

PM launches VM2026 with tribute to Malaysia's global footprint

MELAKA: Visit Malaysia 2026 (VM2026) has been launched with a powerful reminder of the nation's roots, as Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim hailed Panglima Awang as proof of Malay navigational genius.

The Prime Minister paid tribute to the explorer, also known as Enrique de Malacca, describing him as a testament to the brilliance of Melakan sailors and the greatness of the Malay and Muslim Sultanate.

Speaking at Encore Melaka last night, Anwar said Panglima Awang was recognised as a key interpreter and crew member in Ferdinand Magellan's global expedition in the 1500s.

"Magellan himself wrote about him. Panglima Awang showed Melakans were capable navigators and reflected the greatness of the Malay and Muslim Melaka Sultanate," he said.

Anwar said Melaka was once the region's trading hub, attracting global entrepreneurs and forging ties with Chinese emperors as well as the Siamese kingdom of Ayutthaya.

"Melaka was a great Islamic

civilisation. Hence, we need to reconstruct history and history must not be written by colonists and the West.

"It must be written by Malaysians, from our perspective, and with the recognition that we had a civilisation," he said.

He added that Melaka's cultural exchange was epitomised by the legendary figure of Hang Li Poh, the Ming dynasty princess whose marriage strengthened ties with China.

"And today, Chinese actress Fan Bingbing represents her symbolically in modern times," he said.

Anwar also stressed that tourism has a dual role in driving economic growth and strengthening the unity of Malaysia's diverse communities.

"Tourism drives economic growth, but more importantly, it is a symbol of national unity. The success of this launch reflects the cooperation between the Federal Government, the state and the people," he said.

Earlier, Tourism, Culture and Heritage Minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing said Malaysia's cultural and natural diversity had



Rich heritage: Anwar flanked by Melaka Chief Minister Datuk Seri Ab Rauf Yusoh and Tiong watching a performance during the launch of VM2026 at Encore Melaka. - AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star

always been its strength, embodied in the slogan "Malaysia, Truly Asia".

"In a world where cultural identity is often diluted by globalisation, our diversity is not a weakness but a strength.

"It's this richness of cultures, traditions, cuisines and communities that makes Malaysia unique

and welcoming," he said.

Tiong said VM 2026 must translate into benefits for the people.

"When visitors come to Malaysia, their spending must not only benefit hotels, restaurants and airlines.

"It must also reach families in rural homestays, artisans in small workshops, hawkers along our

streets and young entrepreneurs creating digital content around our culture.

"Only then does tourism truly become the people's economy," he said.

He added that Malaysia's heritage extended beyond culture to nature, noting that Unesco had recognised the reforestation project at the Forest Research Institute Malaysia.

Reaffirming that "Malaysia, Truly Asia" remains deeply ingrained in the nation's identity, Tiong said VM 2026 will showcase Malaysia as more than its heritage cities.

"We are also a green, smart and welcoming nation. This campaign is not about words on a stage, but about delivery. From global sales missions to regional collaborations, from digital innovation to community-based tourism pilots, the work has already begun," he said.

The launch drew over 150 representatives and delegates from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, underscoring Malaysia's growing profile in global tourism.