

'COUNTDOWN FEST SHOWED BEAUTY OF OUR DIVERSITY'

PM: Such celebrations will strengthen Malaysia's standing internationally

MOHAMAD AL AS
KUALA LUMPUR
alas.yunos@nst.com.my

THE prime minister has described the Visit Malaysia 2026 (VM2026) Countdown Festival on Wednesday night as reflective of the beauty of cultural diversity and the spirit of togetherness among Malaysians in welcoming guests from around the world.

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the celebration served as an early catalyst for the VM2026 campaign.

He expressed hope that such celebrations would continue to foster unity and strengthen Malaysia's standing internationally.

"May such events continue to strengthen harmony and national unity, and open a new chapter in positioning Malaysia as a friendly, inclusive and respected tourism destination on the global

stage," he said in a social media post.

Anwar attended the VM2026 Countdown Festival in Bukit Bintang here on Wednesday night, ushering in the new year alongside thousands of people at Pavilion Kuala Lumpur.

The event featured an integrated showcase of pyromusical fireworks display, laser projections and iconic 3D anamorphic visuals, creating a symbolic moment in ringing in 2026.

The celebratory atmosphere was further enlivened by the appearance of Wira and Manja, the sun bear mascots of VM2026 — symbolising Malaysia's identity, warmth and uniqueness as a world-class tourism destination.

The New Year's Eve celebration also featured a variety of cultural and entertainment performances that reflected the diversity of local talent.

Among the artistes were Shila Amzah, Aina Abdul, Belle Sisoski, Vanessa Reynauld, Kidd



Members of the public holding placards as they usher in the new year during the Visit Malaysia 2026 Countdown Festival in Jalan Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur, on Wednesday.
NSTP PIC BY HARI ANGGARA

Santhe, The Kuans and KLP48, alongside a fusion of traditional and contemporary music elements.

The countdown celebration was part of a wider VM2026 festive programme that began on Dec 26, with events held across the Klang Valley.

Meanwhile, Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing called on Malaysians to showcase their famous hospitality and friendly spirit to welcome international visitors during VM2026.

He said the government had implemented various initiatives to make the campaign a success and urged citizens to cooperate in setting the best example, including prioritising cleanliness in public areas.

"I received complaints and have sought explanations from the relevant agencies. They in-

formed me some members of the public have been less than friendly and even appeared irritated when tourists asked for help.

"I urge everyone to work together to prove that our country is a very welcoming nation and that our culture must reflect a warm attitude towards tourists from all over the world," he told reporters after welcoming international visitors at Kuala Lumpur International Airport Terminal 1 (T1) earlier yesterday.

He said VM2026 promotional efforts were progressing well and have been met with encouraging feedback from locals and international tourists alike.

Earlier, Tiong was joined by Tourism Malaysia chairman Datuk P. Manoharan at Terminal 1, where they welcomed tourists arriving in the country with special gift bags.

The event featured cultural performances and an appearance by Wira and Manja.

Separately, Tourism Malaysia announced that the VMY2026 calendar featured more than 300 programmes and events throughout the year — highlighting the country's art and culture, heritage and multi-ethnic diversity through various celebrations and festive traditions.

Key events include the VM2026 Chinese New Year Festival, the VM2026 Aidilfitri Festival, the VM2026 Deepavali Festival, the VM2026 Christmas Fest, as well as showcases of unique local celebrations like the Kaamatan and Gawai festivals.

"Malaysia aims to attract 43 million international visitors in 2026, as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen the tourism sector as a key driver of national economic growth," said Tourism Malaysia.