

## **Exotic Malaysian Culture Takes Centre Stage In Paris**

**Bernama**

**April 13, 2015**

**From Abdul Muin Majid**

PARIS, April 13 (Bernama) -- Place du Palais Royal in central Paris exploded in a multitude of sounds and colours as Malaysia's vibrant culture came to the fore at Malaysia Cultural Week (MCW) Paris 2015 launched by Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on Monday.

Organised for the first time in France, the show ( April 13-17) is one of strategies to further elevate Malaysia's profile as it vies to be a member of the executive board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) for the 2015-2019 term.

UNESCO has its headquarters in Paris.

Muhyiddin, delivering his opening speech on a sunny spring day in Paris, noted that Malaysia was fortunate in that its people were of multiethnic and multireligious origin.

He told foreign guests gathered at the event that a century of living together in a closely knit society had contributed to the blending and forging of a unique culture which was diverse yet harmonious and vibrant which Malaysia was proud to share with the world.

"To this end, Malaysia Cultural Week Paris aims to bring people of different backgrounds, race and creed together to celebrate the diverse cultural heritage of Malaysia," said Muhyiddin, who is Education Minister.

Throughout the duration of the cultural event, the French as well as visitors to this country will get to savour Malaysia's exotic and multi-faceted culture encompassing music, fashion, dance, arts, crafts and food.

Malaysia welcomed 169,973 visitors from France in 2014, up from 145,108 in 2013. The target for 2015 is 180,000 visitors.

The MCW Paris follows similar initiatives organised in other major cities including London, Istanbul and Washington.

Muhyiddin arrived in the French capital Monday morning in efforts to ramp up support for Malaysia's bid for membership on the UNESCO board.

In his speech, the deputy prime minister spoke at length about Malaysia's tourism sector, saying that the Southeast Asian nation of 30 million was well on track to achieve the goal of being a top tourist destination in the world.

He cited Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2014 survey which listed Malaysia as one of the top

10 countries to visit.

In addition, CNN Travel had ranked Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur as the fourth best shopping city in the world, after New York, Tokyo and London.

Muhyiddin said five sites in Malaysia were listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites - Melaka City, Georgetown in Penang, Mount Mulu National Park in Sarawak, Kinabalu Park in Sabah and Lenggong Valley in Perak.

"These accolades bear testimony of Malaysia being a premier tourist destination," he said, adding that the only way to experience Malaysia in its fullest was to visit the country itself.

He used the MCW platform to also shine the spotlight on Malaysia's economic prowess, stating that the country was constantly challenging itself to become a high income economy and attain developed nation status by 2020.

The Malaysian government's Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) had borne fruit, citing the the World Economic Forum's World Competitiveness Yearbook 2014 in which Malaysia was ranked 12th among 60 countries.

The World Bank, he said, had ranked Malaysia 6th on the ease of doing business among 189 countries.

"We will not rest on our laurels but will instead continue to strengthen and improve ourselves on all developmental fronts, be it education, trade finance, technology and other areas," he vowed.

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