

# TOURISM TRIVIA

By ANNA VIVIENNE

RECENTLY, Sarawak celebrated Gawai Day or Gawai Dayak. When I was in Miri, Sarawak, during the Gawai month of June, I was informed that Gawai starts on the eve of June 1, where most Iban longhouses begin with a ceremony called 'Muai Antu Rua'. On that day glutinous rice is roasted in bamboo ('ngelulun pulut'). In the longhouse, new mats are laid out on the 'ruai' (a common room for the entire longhouse).

Around 6pm, the 'miring' or the offering ceremony will take place. Before the ceremony, 'gendang rayah' (ritual music) is performed.

Dinner is served at the ruai. While

waiting for midnight, the folks gather and mingle at the ruai and generally celebrate, eating and drinking.

On the day itself, the homes of the Dayak are open to visitors. In the longhouses, there is a practice called 'masu pengabang' where guests will be served 'tuak' by the host before they enter the longhouse. Christian Dayak attend a church mass to thank God for the good harvest. Gawai Dayak celebrations may last several days. Visitors are welcome to the homes of the Dayaks during the festival. You can time your visit to Sarawak for your tourists at this time as they will be able to see more of the Dayak culture then.

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Rambutan is one of the most common fruits in Sabah. This hairy round or oblong fruits hang on woody stalks.

As the fruit is hairy, it gained its name from the word 'rambut' or hair. It is usually greenish in colour, turning yellow or red when it ripens.

To eat the fruit, you have peel or cut the skin. The pearly white flesh of the fruit varies in quality and taste. A good rambutan is said to have firm and juicy flesh. Rambutan is usually eaten fresh and raw, or added to fruit salads or made into jams.

You can see clusters of rambutans in the residential compounds during the fruit season. In fact some of the fruits just dry up on the trees, as the market is literally flooded with rambutan at this time.

Langsat fruits are also available during this season, but they are not available in great profusion. This fruit, smaller than the duku, is pale and grows in clusters. The skin exudes latex or sap even when it is mature; this makes it less welcome than duku.

And of course there is the king of fruits, the durian. The fruit is round or oblong, and is green when it is young. When it ripens it gets a tinge of bronze.

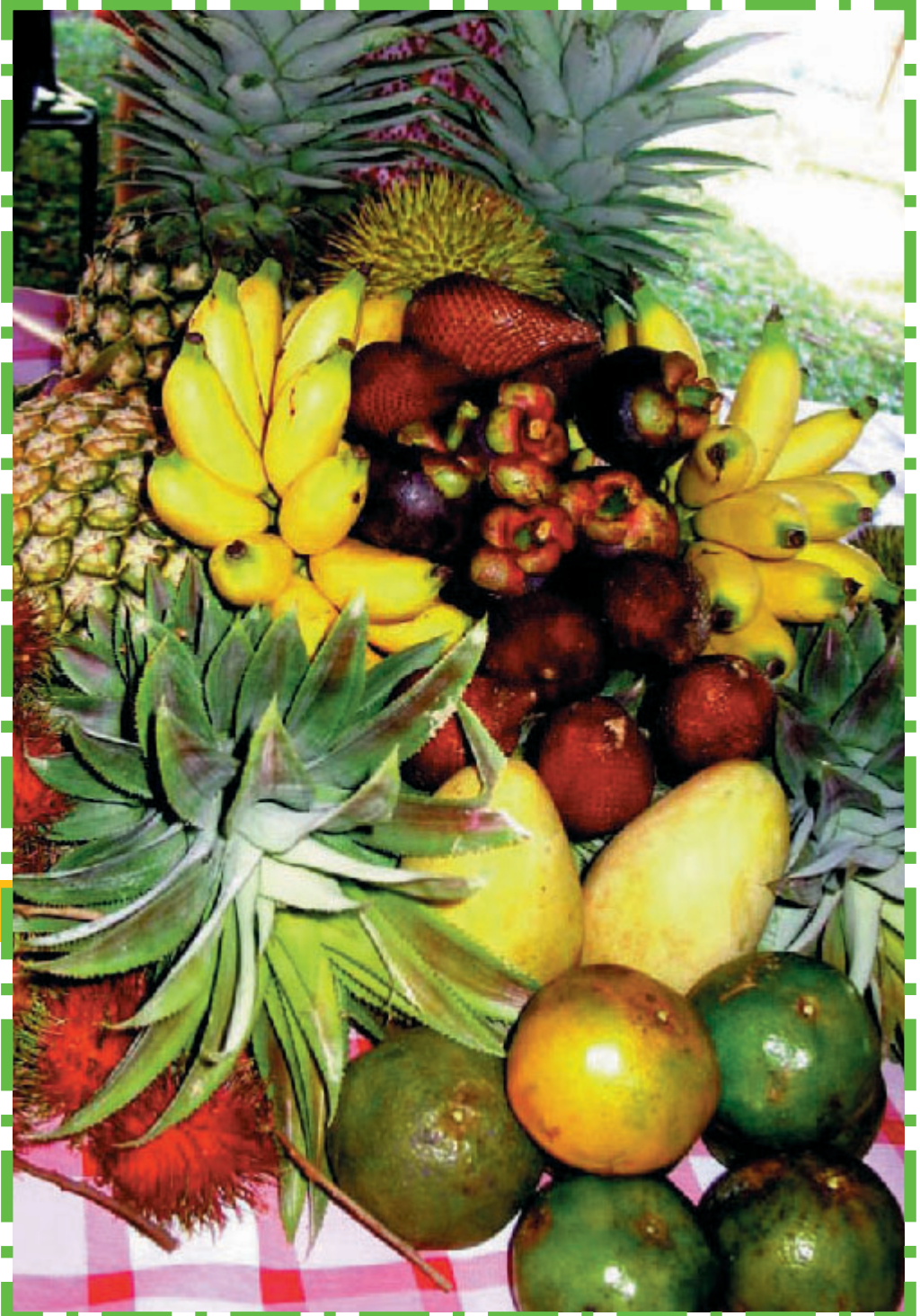
This fruit may sport sharp spikes but that does not deter enthusiasts from enjoying the custard-like aril which is whitish-cream to orangey yellow in colour.

A ripe durian produces a very strong smell: so strong, in fact, that it is prohibited in most hotels and airplanes in Malaysia.

Besides being eaten fresh, durian is also produced into various traditional products such as durian cake, durian ice cream and the fermented tempoyak which is eaten with the ulam or traditional salad.

Durians can be seen being sold in most roadside stalls and markets during the fruit season.

The Star fruit is oval in shape with five ribs or angles which give it a star shape



when cut. When unripe, the fruit is green but when it matures it turns yellow or orange. It is juicy when eaten ripe but sometimes it is quite sour.

And of course there are the various types of bananas available alongside the seasonal fruits. The Pisang emas is the short and sweet, while Pisang rastali and Pisang Tanduk are often made into banana fritters. The most expensive banana in Sabah is the Pisang berangan. It is believed that one banana of this variety is equivalent to a full traditional meal nutrition for a day.

The Mangosteen is round in shape. The skin, light green when it is young, eventually turns to reddish or dark purple when it is ripe.

It takes about 15 years to grow a mangosteen tree before it is matures enough to produce any fruit.

The flesh in the fruit is snowy white and nicely arranged in segments. To eat the fruit, you have to cut the thick, soft cortex.

The mangosteen is also called 'the Queen of Fruits' as it is believed to be cool in nature and to neutralise the heat from other fruits, such as durian.

Papaya varies in size, shape, colour and taste. The outer skin is smooth and always green, and turns yellow when it is ripe. It is

believed to be laxative in nature.

Ciku looks similar to a kiwi fruit except it has smooth, non hairy skin. Ciku is granulated and yellowish to pinkish brown in colour when it is ripe. It can be oblong or round in shape.

Ripe ciku is soft and sweet, but before it gets ripe it is hard with milky sap. It is normally eaten fresh.

When the skin is peeled, it will reveal light chocolate coloured flesh which is then sliced into pieces.

If you are going towards Sindumin or Lawas in Sarawak, you will see watermelons being sold along the road from Papar right down to Beaufort. Watermelon is the best choice to quench your thirst on a hot sunny day.

Watermelon has a herbaceous stem and tendrils, and creeps on the ground. The fruits are large, round and green until they mature. Some people tap on the fruit to find out how ripe it is.

These and many other fruits will be available all over Sabah come September, so if you are involved in 'fruit tourism' you can time the arrival of your tourists during these months.

A little innovation always comes in handy when you are promoting tourism products in the state.

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