

Book commemorates festival's amazing 15-year journey

KUCHING: Looking at where the Rainforest World Music Festival (RWMF) is today, it is fascinating that it all started as an idea bandied about over coffee some 15 years ago among a group of friends who are traditional music enthusiasts.

That is just one of the interesting facts about the festival that readers can gather from the newly launched book, *Rainforest World Music Festival – The Sarawak Success Story*.

The book itself is a product of passion, stemming from the pride of Sarawakians in the international event.

It started as a survey on the 15th edition of the festival last year carried out by UCSI University in collaboration with the state Tourism Ministry and Sarawak Tourism Board.

Given six core objectives, the survey team garnered more than 1,200 responses, spending a total of 525 manhours of research and compilation.

With Gracie Geikie, Lai Wan Yee and Soo Aie Lee as authors, the book's preface explains that with the rich statistical findings from the survey, it has been decided that it would be ideal to weave the information into a story-type book while capturing the "essence of the RWMF" throughout its 15-year journey.

"The book captures views and memories of festival goers, business vendors, local musicians, hospitality and tourism operators, stakeholders, the general community and how the event had an impact on their respective businesses and lives," it said, adding that the book

would not only be a useful resource information for event management students but for all festival goers and fans as a keepsake.

Indeed the book is a rich resource of information with interviews with many people who have been touched by the event from one way or another. From the operator of small businesses to the volunteers who return year after year, their views help readers understand just what is so special about the event.

One of the highlights in the book is certainly its survey findings. For instance, last year almost 70% of festival goers visited Kuching just for the event and more than half of the crowd were women.

Besides that, a visitor spent an average of RM773.66 during RWMF and it generated RM17mil in direct economic impact throughout the three days it was held.

The findings have been cleverly spread out in the book making them easy to understand. The book's design and use of graphics as a whole also deserves a nod.

All considered, the publication is a story of how music can transcend all human boundaries and when tapped with respect and care, can yield significant wealth both in terms of economics and in enriching the human spirit.

The launching of the book yesterday was timed to coincide with the start of this year's RWMF and indeed, it is the must-have for every festival goer to not only remember the event by but also to share it with the rest of the world.