



SARAWAK

A SUSTAINABLE LIVING ART

HANDICRAFT

Sarawak
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SHOWCASING SARAWAK LIVING CRAFTS



First and foremost, I humbly offer my thanks on behalf of Sarawak, to Her Majesty the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tunku Hajah Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah for graciously

stunning designs and intricate details, as well as metalworking with brass and silver, highlighting the creativity and artistry of our local craftsmen.

In recent years, Sarawak has taken significant strides in revitalising our local crafts industry, resulting in the resurgence and thriving of traditional handcrafted products like *Songket* and *Keringkam* textiles, as well as Orang Ulu beadwork. And I can proudly say that these crafts are now attracting more people who are interested in learning them, ensuring their preservation for future generations.

leading the Malaysian contingent at the 2023 edition of the London Craft Week, where Sarawak has been given the honour of showcasing some of our artisans and their precious crafts. Thank you, Your Majesty, for placing Sarawak under the spotlight among other esteemed Malaysian artisans, thus further showcasing Sarawak's crafts to the world. Truly, Your Majesty's passion for local crafts and for helping local craftsmen is inspiring, infectious, and admirable.

The recognition of Kuching as a World Craft City by the World Crafts Council International (WCCI) in 2019 is a testament to Sarawak's dedication to preserving and showcasing our handicrafts. Kuching's inclusion as the first city in Malaysia to receive this distinction puts it in the same league as other renowned cities such as Jaipur (India), Isfahan (Iran), and Jogjakarta (Indonesia).

Crafts, in their various forms, serve as a beautiful expression of a community's identity and history. In Sarawak, a region with a rich diversity of cultures, the traditional crafts are nothing short of spectacular. From forest-based crafts like woven baskets and woodcarvings to intricate textiles that narrate the story of its people, each craft represents our unique identity and heritage.

To honour the craftsmen who have contributed to this rich cultural heritage, 22 craftsmen have been listed as 'Living Legends,' 13 artisans as 'Young Masters,' and six 'Emerging Communities of Crafts.'

The beauty and skill of Sarawak's crafts are evident in the clay and ceramic works with

For lovers of traditional crafts wherever you are, I invite you to come to Sarawak and experience our amazing culture and heritage represented through our beautiful and intricate craftworks.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE DATUK PATINGGI TAN SRI (DR)
ABANG HAJI ABDUL RAHMAN ZOHARI BIN TUN DATUK ABANG HAJI OPENG
Premier of Sarawak



CELEBRATING SARAWAK'S PRECIOUS CRAFTS

Such an honour for Sarawak to be given prominence in the London Craft Week 2023. I hereby would like to humbly express my gratitude to Her Majesty

the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tunku Hajah Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah for this wonderful opportunity.

Sarawak crafts have gained significant attention from the overseas market, thanks to their distinctiveness and ingenuity. The naming of Kuching as a World Craft City by the World Craft Council in 2018 further cemented the region's reputation as a world-class producer of exquisite crafts. I firmly believe that the preservation of our traditional crafts is crucial for safeguarding the cultural heritage of our region.

The recognition of Sarawak's *Songket* weaving under the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2021 is a testament to the uniqueness and importance of Sarawak's traditional crafts. The use of 'hide thread' technique, which makes the seam on the outside and

inside look neat, allowing both pieces to be worn, is a prime example of the intricate and ingenious methods used by Sarawak's craftsmen.

Pua Kumbu and *Keringkam* are just as beautiful and culturally significant. The designs and symbols woven into *Pua Kumbu* have deep meaning and reflect the beliefs of the Iban people, while *Keringkam* showcases the meticulous skill of Sarawakian Malay embroiderers.

Wooden crafts like the *Sape* and *Terabai* are still being produced, along with lifestyle and household products, and traditional games like *Gasing* and *Congkak*. Natural fibres like rattan, bamboo, pandan leaf, bemban, nipah palm leaf and sago leaf are commonly used to make baskets, mats, hats, bags and even musical instruments.

The list goes on.

As you flip through this brochure, take a moment to examine these exquisite handcrafted items and appreciate the skill and creativity that went into making them. These pieces are more than just beautiful objects to admire; they are a testament to the rich cultural heritage of Sarawak and the skilled artisans who bring them to life. Let us celebrate and support the preservation of these treasured crafts, ensuring that they continue to be cherished for generations to come.

THE HONOURABLE DATO SRI HAJI ABDUL KARIM RAHMAN HAMZAH
Minister of Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts Sarawak (MTCP)



I N T R O D U C T I O N

Sarawak is a treasure trove of unique and diverse crafts made with a varied range of materials sourced locally. The region's rich cultural heritage and a diversity of 31 major ethnic groups have given birth to a stunning array of crafts, each with its own distinct character, meaning, and purpose. These crafts are a vital aspect of Sarawak's cultural identity and have been passed down from generation to generation. However, many of these crafts are in danger of becoming extinct as modernisation and globalisation take hold. To address this, initiatives are being put in place to preserve these dying art forms, ensuring that they are not lost forever. In addition to their cultural significance, these crafts also provide a significant source of income for the skilled craftsmen who continue to create them. The new generation of artisans is also stepping up to keep these traditions alive, learning from the masters and innovating to ensure that the crafts continue to thrive.

The handicrafts in Sarawak can generally be classified into four main categories. Sarawak's **TEXTILES** are deeply rooted in heritage and reflect the rich cultural diversity of the region. They are made using traditional techniques, such as hand-weaving (a time-consuming technique that involves creating fabric by interlacing threads on a wooden loom) and natural dyeing (colouring fabrics using a variety of natural materials to create vibrant hues). The combination of these techniques creates textiles that are also eco-friendly and sustainable. Often adorned with beautiful patterns that tell the story of the people, the fabrics of Sarawak are a feast for the eyes, featuring intricate patterns and vivid colours in iconic pieces like the *Pua Kumbu* of the Iban folk, as well as elegant embroideries of Sarawak's Malay community namely the *Songket* and *Keringkam*. Some of these pieces cost as much as RM10,000 or more a piece.

The **FOREST-BASED CRAFTS** include woven crafts such as basketry, which is practiced by various indigenous communities here, including the Iban, Bidayuh, and Orang Ulu. Plant fibres such as rattan, bamboo, and bemban are used, with varying weaving techniques and patterns that often have cultural and symbolic significance. Forest-based crafts also include woodcarving, with examples like the world-famous Orang Ulu lute called *Sape*, the traditional Iban war shield known as *Terabai*.

The **CERAMICS** of Sarawak are known for their beautiful designs and intricate details. Products that fall under this category include vases, earthenware, cooking, and cooking pots. Clay and ceramics are also used to make beautiful beaded accessories. For instance, the beadmakers of Long Tuma in Lawas are known for their beautiful beads, made using clay sourced from the Sungai Lawas riverbed. Indigenous pottery of the

TEXTILES

Kelabit and Iban, made using the hand-mould technique, has significant cultural and historical importance in Sarawak. Discovered in archaeological excavations dating back up to a millennium, Sarawak's traditionally produced indigenous pottery is a declining art form. However, pottery-making remains a thriving industry in Sarawak, with artisans continuing to create unique pieces from intricately patterned bowls to elegantly crafted vases using new techniques while incorporating traditional elements into their designs.

Finally, **METAL** working is an essential handicraft in Sarawak, with Sarawak's artisans using brass and silver to create exquisite jewellery, bowls, and other valuable crafts that have stood the test of time. Great examples include the traditional Iban ladies' attire heavily adorned with accessories made from silver, traditional Malay wedding adornment *Gajah Olen*, as well as brassware.

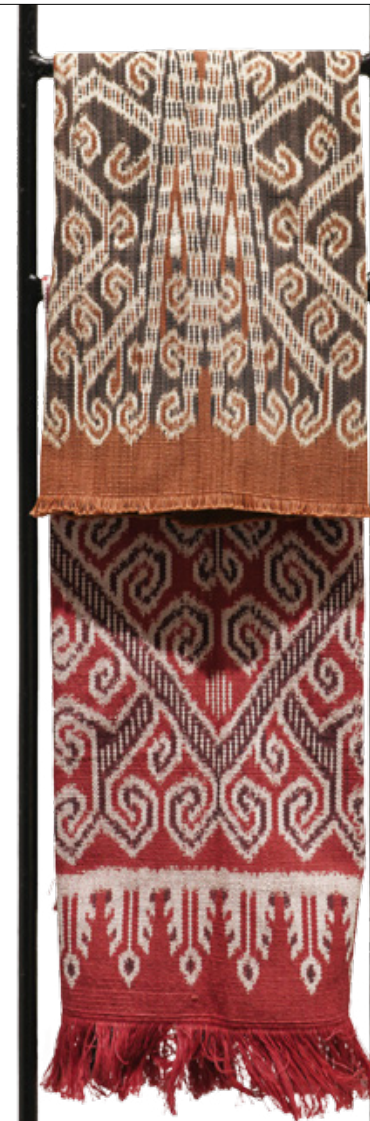
Sarawak is truly committed to preserving and promoting its rich heritage of crafts. Not only do these crafts represent the unique cultural identity of the Sarawakian

people, but they also offer a crucial source of livelihood for local craftsmen while simultaneously boosting the region's cultural tourism.

To promote and ensure the preservation of this cultural heritage, organisations such as the Centre for Technology Excellence Sarawak (CENTEXS), as well as establishments like the Sarawak Craft Council (SCC) Gallery, the Songket & Keringkam Gallery, and the Heritage Central Gallery have been set up. SCC is a government platform established to help commercialise and market the handicrafts of Sarawak. Also, Juma'ani Pavilion in Petra Jaya showcases a captivating array of woven crafts transformed into exquisite, fashionable modern wear fusing the rich and unique cultural heritage of Sarawak.

Meanwhile, the esteemed Borneo Cultures Museum in Kuching plays a critical role in showcasing a diverse range of traditional crafts, from textiles to ceramics and jewellery, providing visitors with a unique opportunity to learn about Sarawak's cultural heritage and to appreciate the incredible artistry of local craftspeople.

Sarawak boasts a rich history and cultural heritage in textile production. The earliest evidence of this dates back to prehistoric times, with fragments of 40,000 year old textiles discovered at the Niah Caves. Today, Sarawak is home to a range of traditional and modern textiles, each with its own unique style and significance.



PUA KUMBU is a beautiful and culturally significant textile created by the Iban women of Sarawak. Using a traditional backstrap floor loom and the ancient warp ikat technique, the women weave intricate and mesmerising designs into the cotton textile. The cloth's designs and symbols hold deep meaning, representing the supernatural world and the beliefs of the Iban people. In recent times, *Pua Kumbu* has undergone a remarkable transformation from its traditional roots, with the textile being used to create fashionable clothing items like dresses, shoes, bags, and table runners. *Pua Kumbu* is also still being produced traditionally by people like Bangie ak Embol, who was awarded Master Weaver of *Pua Kumbu* by Kraftangan Malaysia in 2000.

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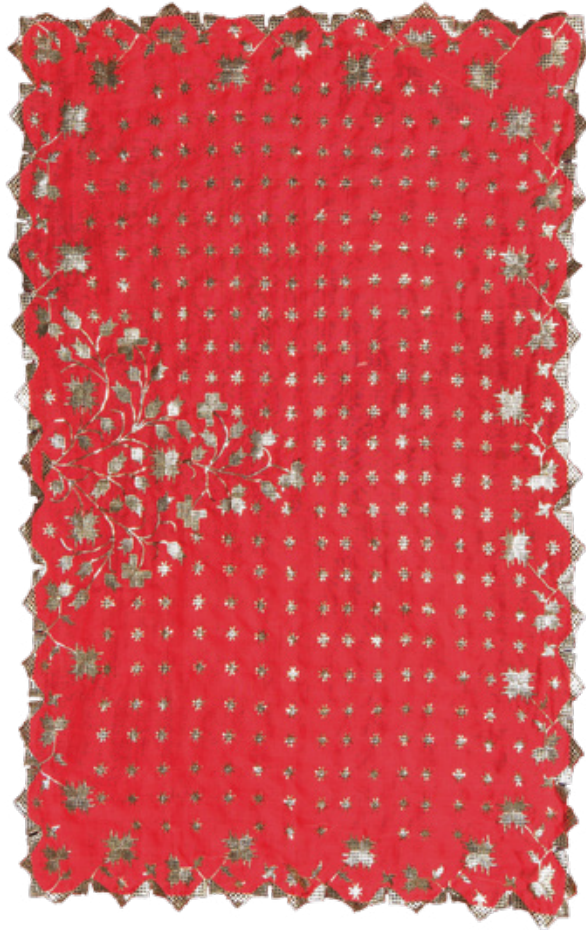


Centre for Technology Excellence Sarawak (CENTEXS)



Sarawak Craft Council (SCC)

KERINGKAM is another traditional craft that is meticulously made by Sarawakian Malay embroiderers using gold- or silver-plated threads and a special needle. The process can take months to complete, and the finished product is often used as a luxurious head covering for special occasions. *Keringkam* used to be a luxury afforded only by the rich and important, but now it is more accessible to the public. Until recently, the art of *keringkam* embroidery was in danger of disappearing entirely. Salbiah Muhi, who was awarded the Master Weaver Craft 2022 to appreciate her knowledge and high expertise, is one of very few original *keringkam* embroiderers left. Fortunately, there has been a growing interest among the new generation of artisans in this precious art, thus safeguarding and securing a bright future for the craft.



SARAWAK SONGKET is a traditional hand-woven textile of the Malays, elaborately woven with gold and silver yarns. Sarawak *songket* distinguishes itself from its West Malaysian counterpart through the counting technique used and the language that is spoken. The motifs of the *songket* are usually inspired by natural phenomena such as flowers and ocean waves and feature geometrical patterns of the Islamic belief. Weaving a piece of *songket* can take at least two months, depending on the intricacies of the motifs. Despite its time-consuming process, Sarawak *songket* has taken on a new life as modern fashion accessories, with designers blending traditional artistry with contemporary fashion. This heritage is kept alive by artisans like Ramtiniwaiti Ramlee, founder of Seri Gedong Songket who was named Craftsperson of the Year 2022 at the Young Weaver Awards, and Dayang Norsalam binti Pengiran Parsih, who continue to pass on their skills and knowledge to the next generation of weavers.

Sarawak's textiles are a testament to the region's rich history and cultural heritage. From the traditional *Pua Kumbu* and *Keringkam*, to Sarawak *Songket*, these textiles showcase the skill and creativity of Sarawak's artisans. Whether as a sacred cloth, a luxury head covering, or a stylish fashion accessory, Sarawak's textiles are a vital part of its cultural identity.

FOREST-BASED CRAFTS

With a large stretch of untouched Bornean rainforests being home to Sarawak's indigenous population, it's no wonder that most ethnic crafts are born of the jungle. The diverse communities here have relied on the forest's resources for centuries, giving birth to a rich tradition of forest-based crafts. These crafts are not just beautiful, but also hold cultural significance to this day. But beyond that, forest-based crafts are also an essential source of income for many indigenous communities in Sarawak, providing them an opportunity to showcase their unique culture and traditions, and share their craft with the world.



WOOD - For centuries, the indigenous communities of Sarawak have relied on this versatile natural material to create tools like the wooden pestle and mortar, weapons for hunting such as the Penan blowpipe (**Sumpit**), and decorative pieces for festivities. Today, skilled woodcarvers continue to produce contemporary works of art in a wide range of forms, many of which are sold as souvenirs. The **Sape** of the Orang Ulu has become a symbol of Sarawak's rich cultural heritage. This boat-shaped lute, crafted from a single block of wood, was once considered sacred and used in healing rituals and ceremonies. Today, it has gained worldwide recognition, thanks to Sarawak-based international Sape players who play them on stage around the world. The **Terabai**, an oblong wooden shield that was once used by the Iban as protection against their enemies during warfare, is today primarily used for decorative purposes and is often seen on stage during traditional dance performances. The Kenyah and Kayan also have their version of the wooden shield, called **Keliau** and **Kelembit** respectively. These days, various handmade woodcrafts including lifestyle and household products such as jewellery boxes, figurines, curtain rods, and other home decor items are still being produced by in Sarawak, along with wooden kitchen utensils like salad spoons, serving plates, bowls, and trays, as well as traditional games such as **Casing** and **Congkak**. The Kenyah ladies used to practise the wearing of **Belaung Bituk**, a set of traditional wooden earrings, originally crafted from brass.



NATURAL FIBRES

Natural fibres sourced from the jungles of Sarawak are commonly used by the indigenous artisans to create a wide range of crafts, most notably basketry and handwoven crafts. **RATTAN** is a flexible and durable vine commonly used to create baskets, mats, and furniture. **BAMBOO** is lightweight, strong, and versatile, making it ideal for making items such as hats, bags, and baskets. Certain species of bamboo are also used to create musical instruments such as *Suling* and *Bas* of the Lun Bawang people, *Keringot* nose flute of the Penan, and *Pratuonkng* of the Bidayuh. **PANDAN** leaf is especially popular for creating intricate items such as placemats, table runners, and coasters. **BEMBAN** is used for making sturdy baskets and bags, while **NIPAH** palm leaf is known for its water-resistant properties, making it perfect for creating hats, and bags. **SAGO** leaf, extracted from the sago palm tree, is also used in weaving to make a variety of products, including bags and hats.

One of the most iconic crafts in the natural fibres category is the *Terendak* - a cone-shaped sunhat of the Melanau whose vibrant and striking colours from deep reds and oranges to bright greens and yellows, are achieved using natural dyes. Today, it is a popular decoration in homes, hotels, restaurants, and offices. *Terendak* has even influenced the architecture of many buildings throughout Sarawak.

The *Tikar Bergerang* is a fascinating example of a Sarawakian Malay heritage handcraft. This mat is made by slicing Pandan leaves into thin strips, and then weaving them together to form a delicate and intricate lace-like design. Traditionally, the *Tikar Bergerang* was reserved for important occasions such as weddings, prayers, and funerals. The process of making a *Tikar Bergerang* is time-consuming and labour-intensive. The Pandan leaves must be carefully sliced



to ensure that they are thin and uniform in size. Artisans like Ngot binti Bi, who was awarded Master Weaver by Kraftangan Malaysia in 2014, have an expert eye for design, with a high level of skill and attention to detail to weave such intricate patterns on the *Tikar Bergerang*. The end result is a lace-like hollow designs that are unique to each *Tikar Bergerang*. Today, the *Tikar Bergerang* continues to be highly valued as a work of art and a symbol of the rich cultural heritage of the Sarawakian Malay.

The Penan, the once largely nomadic tribes of Sarawak, are known for their awe-inspiring weaving skills. The Penan have woven their way into the hearts of people around the world with their mesmerising handcrafted bags, clutches, totes, and purses. Rattan has been used for centuries to make **PENAN WOVEN CRAFTS**, which usually feature natural hues with black motifs or vice versa, showcasing the Penan's understated artistry. But nowadays, the Penan have infused their art with a burst of colours and patterns ranging from the traditional to the modern – from bird motifs to zig zag patterns. To this day, the Penan have kept their rich heritage alive by continuing to make bags and baskets the traditional way. These exquisite works of folk art serve as a testament to their unwavering commitment to preserving their culture while still embracing change.

Handwoven bags are among the most popular items created through weaving. Over time, the bags have been modernised and further elevated by exploring different shapes, designs, and hardware, while keeping elements of traditional hand weaving skills that have been honed for generations. Other hand-woven crafts also include fly swatters, food covers, and figurines. More traditional ones are *Tambok* (Bidayuh cylindrical carrying basket), *Ajat* (Penan drawstring bag), *Lavong Tepo* (Orang Ulu men's headgear), *Ketapu Tunjang* (handwoven Iban headgear), *Ba'* (Orang Ulu baby carrier), *Bubu* (fish trap that today doubles as home décor) and so many more.





TREE BARK - This material has been used by the indigenous communities in Sarawak over centuries to create a wide range of products. Tree bark is harvested from the forest and then processed until it becomes soft and pliable. Skilled artisans then use the material to create vests, hats, folders, purses, and small souvenirs. The products are known for their unique texture and earthy colours, which range from light beige to dark brown. One of the most interesting applications of tree bark material is as a canvas for painting. The smooth and slightly rough texture of the bark provides an interesting background for traditional and contemporary artwork. This unique material has become increasingly popular among artists in recent years, who appreciate its eco-friendliness and rustic aesthetic.



CERAMICS

Evidence found in caves point to ceramics being an ancient craft in Sarawak, with pottery and other ceramic artefacts being discovered from as far back as the Neolithic period. The production of ceramic-based crafts remains vibrant in Sarawak, where some artisans have adopted modern production methods while others prefer to preserve traditional techniques. Regardless of their approach, these craftsmen are keeping their heritage and traditions alive.



BEADS - The tradition of making **CERAMIC BEADS** by hand is kept alive and well in places like Kampung Long Tuma, Lawas. Here, beads are made using clay sourced from the banks of the Lawas River, carefully shaped by hand before being intricately carved, baked, hand-painted, and glazed. They are sold throughout Sarawak, in specialty craft stores as individual pieces, as well as in souvenir shops as ready-made **BEADED ACCESSORIES** like necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and many others. Traditional beaded accessories are still being produced and sold widely, such as the *Pangieh* and *Sombon* necklaces of the Bidayuh tribe, the *Tango Ngepan* of the Iban, and the *Kabo* of the Orang Ulu. These days, modern beaded accessories also include lanyards, bags, and other items.



POTTERY - Sarawak boasts a unique style of pottery that can be divided into two categories: Chinese-style wheel thrown pottery and hand-moulded pottery produced by indigenous tribes like the Kelabit and Iban. The former was brought to Sarawak in the 19th century by early settlers, mainly the Teochew, who initially created utility ware like water jars and cooking pots for storage and brewing. The latter includes clay cooking ware and storage vessels like the **PERIUK TANAH** of the Iban folk, which are crafted by hand using lumps of clay or coils without a wheel, then fired in open pyres and slowly cooled to avoid cracking. Today, **SARAWAK POTTERY** incorporates traditional Dayak designs and colours onto clay vessels, not just the usual flower vases and pots but also candle holders, decorative jars, coffee mugs and even ashtrays, giving them a unique Sarawakian look that makes them popular souvenirs and gifts. Traditional **HAND-PAINTED PLATES** can typically be found in longhouses but are now popular as souvenirs or decorations. These ceramic plates are hand-painted with traditional motifs and then baked at a high temperature.



SCULPTURE - In addition to traditional pottery, Sarawak is also home to a growing **CERAMIC SCULPTURE** scene. Local artists have been experimenting with new techniques and styles to create contemporary pieces that feature abstract designs and modern forms. These sculptures are popular with collectors and art enthusiasts both locally and internationally. From experimental forms to traditional motifs, ceramic sculpture in Sarawak remains a dynamic and exciting art form that celebrates the region's rich cultural heritage while also embracing the future.

METAL-BASED CRAFTS

Although not as prevalent in Sarawak as other forms of handicrafts such as weaving and woodcarving, metal-based crafts are still of significant importance in the culture and traditions of local communities. Skilled artisans in Sarawak continue to create exquisite metal-based handicrafts to this day, and cultural activities such as dance and pageants, on top of traditional themed weddings and festive celebrations ensure that metal-based crafts remain in demand.

One notable metal-based handicraft in Sarawak is the traditional **BIDAYUH BRASSWARE**, which includes intricately designed vessels, bowls, and plates. Others include jewellery and accessories, such as the Bidayuh's metal belts known as *Perik* or *Porik*. The traditional costume of Iban women is heavily adorned with silver, including the *Sugu Tinggi* headdress, *Sementing Ringgit* coin chain belt, *Lampit* belt buckle, *Gerunchung* anklet, and *Buah Pauh*.



A *Keringkam* is worn on the shoulder/back of the bride to complete the *Gajah Olen* bridal attire.



The **GAJAH OLEN** of the Sarawak Malay community, is a stunning traditional attire worn during weddings. This magnificent outfit features an array of metal elements, including a majestic *Mahkota* (crown), a *Kepih Dahi* (forehead accessory), *Kepih Sanggul*, *Bunga Tajuk*, *Pedakak* (a five-tiered necklace sewn onto a blouse), *Gelang Aluk* (bangles), a striking gold or silver belt with a large *Pending* buckle, and a *Geronchong Kaki* (anklet) among them.

C O N C L U S I O N

In summation, Sarawak crafts are a true embodiment of the region's identity and cultural heritage. The exquisite craftsmanship of artisans and their mastery of both traditional and modern techniques make Sarawak's crafts stand out in the world. From the vibrant hues of *Pua Kumbu* textiles to the intricate details of basket weaving, woodcarving, and beading, each craft tells a story of Sarawak's rich and diverse cultural history.

But what makes Sarawak crafts truly remarkable is their sustainability. The use of locally sourced materials and environmentally friendly production processes ensures that these craft traditions can continue for generations to come. It's a testimony to the region's commitment to preserving its cultural heritage while embracing sustainable practices.

Furthermore, Sarawak crafts are not just objects; they're a living art form that reflects the artisan's personality, culture, and experiences. Each piece of craft is a unique work of art that tells a story and carries meaning. It's this intangible aspect of Sarawak crafts that makes them so special and worthy of preservation.

And let's not forget about the positive impact Sarawak crafts have on the community. The production of crafts provides a livelihood for local artisans, contributing to the state's economy. Moreover, the promotion and preservation of these crafts through exhibitions and events create opportunities for cultural exchange and awareness-raising, creating a deeper appreciation of Sarawak's cultural heritage.

The collection of Sarawak's handmade crafts displayed at the London Craft Week is merely a glimpse of the region's vast array of stunning crafts. As such, we warmly welcome you to visit Sarawak to fully immerse yourself in the breadth of our exquisite crafts, ranging from the traditional to the contemporary.

