

Birding Festivals as Ecotourism Experiences: The Labuan Bird Fest 2026

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Note: This report on the Labuan Bird Fest 2026 was originally prepared for the Sabah Birdwatchers Association (Persatuan Pemerhati Burung Sabah) and has been adapted (with permission) for a wider audience.



Ecotourism Experiences

Birdwatching events and festivals offer unique opportunities for bird enthusiasts, nature lovers, and curious individuals to immerse themselves in the fascinating world of avian observation. These gatherings celebrate the diversity of bird species, promote avitourism and conservation efforts, and foster a sense of community among birdwatchers of all experience levels.

These festivals are organised to attract certain segments of the population and are usually targeted at specific interests, such as avian conservation, the arts, exhibition and public interest in birdwatching. By attracting local and regional participants, successful festivals serve strategically not only to foster a sense of community, but also to generate income and boost local economies, thus becoming an invaluable tool for promoting tourism and placing a region on the map for prospective niche markets.

Birdwatching avitourism is a sector of ecotourism, an industry that continues to grow in popularity worldwide. A large number of birdwatchers become Avi-tourists, travelling to wildlife areas, both in their own countries and abroad, with the specific intention of increasing the number and diversity of the species they observe.

Beyond dedicated festivals, avitourism thrives through organised birding tours, seasonal competitions, and educational exhibitions.

Labuan Bird Festivals and Events

The two-day Labuan Bird Fest 2026 from 15-16 August 2026 was an ongoing effort to introduce the world of avifauna to the community. The Labuan Bird Fest attracted more than 4,000 visitors, thus exceeding the initial target of 1,000 visitors.

Labuan Bird Fest 2026 came in various forms, each offering a distinct experience for participants:

- **Birding Festival:** The two-day celebration centered around birdwatching activities, often held in locations known for their diverse bird populations. These festivals include, photography and video contests, and social events.
- **Bird Fair:** This medium-scale event featured exhibitions, podcast, and vendor booths showcasing the latest birding equipment.
- **Labuan International Bird Race:** Competitive event where teams of birdwatchers attempt to identify and record as many bird species as possible within a specified time frame and area of Labuan Island (99 km²). Bird races are exciting and challenging, encouraging participants to hone their identification skills, especially outside the migration season which only left the resident species.

Throughout the two days of the event, the excitement was felt starting with the Flag Off of the International Bird Race participants as well as various unique competitions such as fruit carving, nest box design, bird voice imitation, and bird customisation.





Pictures by the Labuan Avian Group