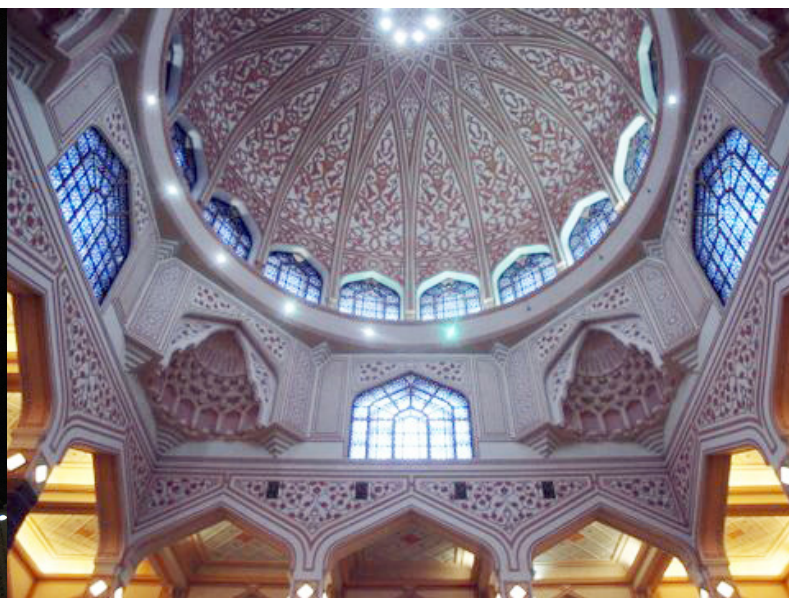


# HANDBOOK FOR U.S. HOST FAMILIES OF *Malaysian Participants*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Malaysian Culture Quiz .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Foreword .....	7
Handbook Objectives .....	7
Overview .....	8
Brief Outline of the History of Malaysia .....	8
Geography .....	9
Climate .....	9
<b>Community Life.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Diversity of Malaysia .....	10
Culture.....	10
Generalizations and Stereotypes .....	12
Culture and Perception .....	13
Celebrations and Holidays.....	14
<b>Personal Life .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Collectivism/Group Affiliation .....	16
Direct versus Indirect Communication .....	16
Concept of “Face” .....	17
Meeting & Greeting Etiquette.....	18
Personal Space .....	18
Privacy .....	19
Sense of Time .....	19
Religion.....	19
Muslim Students .....	20
Buddhist Students .....	22
Hindu Students.....	22
Religion in Your Household .....	23
Personal Hygiene.....	23
Sensitive Subjects .....	24
<b>Family Life .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Respect for Elders and Authority .....	26
Family Roles.....	26
Household Chores .....	27
Family Togetherness .....	27
Showing Affection .....	27
Parental Guidance .....	27
Food.....	28
<b>Teenage Life .....</b>	<b>30</b>
Peer Relationships & Dating.....	30
Social Events & Parties .....	30
Clothing & Appearance .....	30
Transportation.....	31

<b>School Life .....</b>	<b>32</b>
Daily Schedule .....	32
Classes & Schoolwork.....	32
Teacher-Student Interaction .....	33
Extracurricular Activities .....	33
School Environment .....	33
School Uniform and Dress Code.....	34
Parental Involvement .....	34
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Appendix A – References.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Appendix B – A Guide to Malaysian Cuisine .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Appendix C – YES Cultural Tips Sheet .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>43</b>

# MALAYSIAN CULTURE QUIZ

---

Take this quick true/false quiz to find out how much you already know about Malaysia and Malaysian culture.

1. **T or F** Malaysia is a young country with a long, diverse cultural history.
2. **T or F** The way that a Malaysian person communicates is most likely to be very straightforward and direct.
3. **T or F** In Malaysia, religion is often tied to a particular ethnic group.
4. **T or F** Buddhism is the official religion of Malaysia
5. **T or F** To a Malaysian student, the term “saving face” would have the same meaning as it does in the U.S.: protecting one’s own reputation in a situation of potential embarrassment.
6. **T or F** It is less common for Malaysian teenagers to date than it is for U.S. teenagers.
7. **T or F** It is common in Malaysian households to have a live-in helper or maid.
8. **T or F** There are many elective classes in Malaysian schools.
9. **T or F** Malaysians generally value the good of the whole as more important than the good of the individual.
10. **T or F** A Malaysian student is likely to want his or her own space and to be left alone the majority of the time.

## ***Malaysian Culture Quiz Answers***

- 1. T or F** Malaysia is a young country with a long, diverse cultural history.

**True.** The modern day country of Malaysia was founded in 1948. However Malaysia's diverse cultural heritage developed throughout centuries of trade and various forms of leadership. See page 8 for more details.

- 2. T or F** The way that a Malaysian person communicates is most likely to be very straightforward and direct.

**False.** Malaysian communication style would be on a more indirect end of the communication spectrum. Communication with Malaysian exchange students might be frustrating for US Families. See page 16 for more information.

- 3. T or F** In Malaysia, religion is often tied to a particular ethnic group.

**True.** Malaysia is often described as having three distinct ethnic groups: Malay, who are all Muslim by law; Indian, who most commonly practice Hinduism; and Chinese, who are often Buddhist or Christian. However, Malaysian diversity is very complex with many layers. Visit page 10 for more information.

- 4. T or F** Buddhism is the official religion of Malaysia

**False.** The official religion of Malaysia is Islam. Visit page 19 to read more.

- 5. T or F** To a Malaysian student, the term "saving face" would have the same meaning as it does in the U.S.: protecting one's own reputation in a situation of potential embarrassment.

**False.** The concept of "face" is treated a little differently in Malaysia than in the U.S. "Face" is something that can be given to others as well as earned and this might affect interactions between you and your students. Visit the section on page 17 to read more.

- 6. T or F** It is less common for Malaysian teenagers to date than it is for U.S. teenagers.

**True.** In Malaysia, teenagers are more likely to spend time together in large groups. Boys and girls might spend time together in these large groups, but dating in the U.S. sense of a boy and girl going out alone together would most likely be considered inappropriate behavior in Malaysia. See page 30 for more information.

- 7. T or F** It is common in Malaysian households to have a live-in helper or maid.

**True.** Many households in Malaysia have maids to do housework. As a result, Malaysian students, especially boys, may not have experience doing household chores as many U.S. students are expected to have. See the section on page 27 for more information.

**8. T or F** There are many elective classes in Malaysian schools.

**False.** Many Malaysian exchange students feel overwhelmed by the amount of choice there is available in U.S. schools. In general, it is not common for Malaysian students to have a wide variety of different classes in school to choose from; most everyone takes the same subjects. Visit the page 32 to find out more.

**9. T or F** Malaysians generally value the good of the whole as more important than the good of the individual.

**True:** When compared to U.S. culture, Malaysian culture would be considered more **collectivist**. Collectivism tends to value the good of the whole as more important than the good of the individual: “One generation plants the trees and another gets the shade.” Learn more about collectivism in the section on page 12 and page 16.

**10. T or F** A Malaysian student is likely to want his or her own space and to be left alone the majority of the time.

**False:** The way household space is divided in Malaysia is different than it is in the U.S. Americans often have their own private space and don’t go into each other’s rooms unannounced. Malaysian students have their own space (a room), but it is likely to be openly shared with everyone in their family. Your student is also likely to “hang-out” in family areas like the kitchen or living room. See page 18 for more information.



# INTRODUCTION

---

## *Foreword*

Thank you for volunteering to welcome a student from Malaysia into your home, family and community! The coming months will present many wonderful learning opportunities for both you and your student.

## *Handbook Objectives*

This handbook is dedicated and directed toward you as the host family of a student from Malaysia. You are one of the indispensable ingredients required for an international exchange program to be successful.

By being aware of the cultural differences and by learning how to deal with these differences, you can make a positive impact on your student's experience and on your student's relationship with your family. This handbook is designed to help you learn about both the Malaysian *and* U.S. cultures through understanding the major differences between the two cultures. It is organized according to the following topics:

- **Community Life** – Malaysian life is very community-centered; this section will explain how your Malaysian student perceives community and how you can help with the adjustment process into your community.
- **Personal Life** – Your Malaysian student's core values and private customs will affect how you relate to each other. This section discusses basic communication styles, religions, personal hygiene and sensitive topics.
- **Family Life** – Family plays a central role in community activities and personal life. Learn how your Malaysian student may think about and communicate with his or her family as well as strategies for integrating your student into your own family.
- **Teenage Life** – The way teenagers interact is affected by culture. This section shows Malaysian expectations for social life with his or her peers.
- **School Life** – School and study in other countries varies widely. In this section, you will learn how to help your student adjust to the education environment in the U.S.

In familiarizing yourself with this handbook, it may be helpful to focus first on areas of special interest to you and your family. While your student is here, we encourage you to refer back to the handbook as a guide for topics and situations that arise.

Throughout the handbook, you will find helpful tips indicated by a light bulb icon. Quotations from previous host parents of Malaysian students offering advice and examples of their experiences are indicated by the speech bubble icon.



Please keep in mind that each student is unique and your student may not match all of the cultural information in this handbook. This is not a book of answers; rather, this book is intended to be a guide that provides you tools and suggestions to help you and your student learn from each other during your experience together.

Above all, we hope you enjoy yourself as you and your family members join together with your Malaysian student on a journey of self and cultural discovery.



## ***Overview***

Malaysia is a relatively new country—it gained its independence in 1957—but the people of Malaysia have been around for centuries. Since its independence, Malaysia has become one of the most successful industrializing countries of the Asian Pacific region, yet it continues to retain a strong rural society with several indigenous communities (King, 2008). According to the US Central Intelligence Agency (2011), the population of Malaysia is estimated to be 28.7 million. Much of what you can expect from your student will depend upon where your student lives in Malaysia (e.g., urban or rural) and your student's ethnic background.

Malaysians take great pride in their country's rich diversity of ethnicity, culture and religious beliefs and the peaceful coexistence of these diverse ethnicities in modern times.

## ***Brief Outline of the History of Malaysia***

- 9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> Century: Buddhist Kingdom
- 13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> Century: Hindu Kingdom
- 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> Century: Conversion to Islam
  - By this time the area that is now Malaysia was a cosmopolitan center for trade and commerce in the region
  - This made it very attractive as Europeans began to explore the area
  - Early Chinese and Indian migration begins
- 16<sup>th</sup> Century: Portuguese invade; beginning of European Expansion
- 17<sup>th</sup> Century: Dutch take over the Portuguese
- 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> Century: British slowly gain control and establish protectorates over the Malay sultanates on the Malay peninsula
  - 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Large-scale Chinese and Indian immigration begins
- 1941 – 1945: Japanese occupation during WWII
- 1948: The territories on the peninsula became the Federation of Malaya
- 1957: Independence
  - First Prime Minister: Tunku Abdul Rahman
  - 1963: Singapore, Sabah & Sarawak (Borneo) join the Federation → Renamed Malaysia
  - 1965: Singapore leaves Federation
- 1948 – 1989/90: Various Communist uprisings around the country; ended with peace agreements in 1989 & 1990
- 1991: The Malaysian government sets the goal for Malaysia to be a fully developed country by the year 2020

(Bindloss & Brash, 2008; CIA World Factbook, 2011; King, 2008; Hooker, 2003; Richmond et al, 2009)

## Geography

The country of Malaysia is literally half way around the world from the United States. It is located just north of the equator and south of Thailand and Vietnam. Malaysia consists of two main regions: peninsular Malaysia, which is south of Thailand, and a portion of the island of Borneo which is just north of Indonesia. The two regions are separated by the South China Sea. Together the two regions are slightly larger than the state of New Mexico according to the CIA World Factbook (2011). There are 13 states and 3 federal territories; the capital of Malaysia is Kuala Lumpur, which is also the largest city. It is located on the western side of peninsular Malaysia.



CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/my.html>



**Malaysia is 16 hours ahead of U.S. Pacific Standard Time. Subtract one hour during Daylight Saving Time.**

## Climate

Given its close proximity to the equator, the climate in Malaysia is relatively the same year round. Malaysia has a hot, humid, tropical climate with temperatures ranging from 20 C (68 F) at night to 30 C (86 F) or higher during the day. Rainfall in Malaysia does not vary greatly throughout the year; it typically will rain for short lengths of time almost daily for the duration of the year, but will rarely ever rain all day. Particular regions of Malaysia do experience a monsoon season (Richmond et al, 2009).

Your student may not be used to cold temperatures and will most likely not be used to stepping outside into the cold. If you live in a climate with cold, wintery weather, your student will probably need advice as to how to dress properly and s/he may need to borrow or purchase warm clothes. If you live in a hot climate, your student may not be accustomed to the coldness of air conditioned places.

# COMMUNITY LIFE

---

## ***Diversity of Malaysia***

Malaysians are very proud of their unique diversity of ethnic groups. Your student's cultural practices will largely depend upon the ethnic group with which s/he identifies. For this reason, you may find that some of the topics in this handbook are organized according to specific ethnic groups.

The three main ethnic groups in Malaysia are: Malay, Chinese and Indian. The terms *Malay* and *Malaysian* are sometimes mistakenly identified. The term Malaysian describes all citizens of Malaysia. The term Malay refers to a distinct ethnic group in Malaysia. Malays make up a majority of the total population. Ethnic Chinese and Indian populations have a long history in Malaysia; their migration can be traced back as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively. There are many other ethnicities living in Malaysia as well, including an indigenous population of about 10%. Some of the other ethnicities in Malaysia include: Kadazans, Bajaus, Muruts, Portuguese, Sri Lankans, Melanaus, Indonesians and Bangladeshis among others.

The official language of Malaysia is *Bahasa Melayu*, also referred to as *Malay*. Many Malaysian students speak English from studying it in school. Other languages spoken are Cantonese, Mandarin, Tamil, and many more. In fact, some students attend private schools where Mandarin is primarily spoken. It is not uncommon for a student to be fluent in three or more languages.

Islam is the official religion of Malaysia, but Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity as well as others are freely practiced. Religion in Malaysia is generally tied to particular ethnic groups. The Constitution of Malaysia states that, by law, all ethnic Malays are Muslim. While there are other ethnic groups who are Muslim, many ethnic Chinese are Buddhist or Christian and many ethnic Indians are Hindu.

Though Malaysians are free to practice their cultural traditions, there is sometimes tension between members of different ethnicities. We encourage you to discuss the diversity in your community with your student.

## ***Culture***

Understanding your student's distinct culture and how it relates and contrasts to your own is a key to a successful hosting experience.

### **What is culture?**

Culture is a set of behaviors, values and beliefs created by groups of people, giving them a sense of community and purpose. You can belong to any number of cultures, for example: workplace culture, faith culture, generational culture or geographically defined culture. Many times we follow rules of culture without really knowing we are doing so.

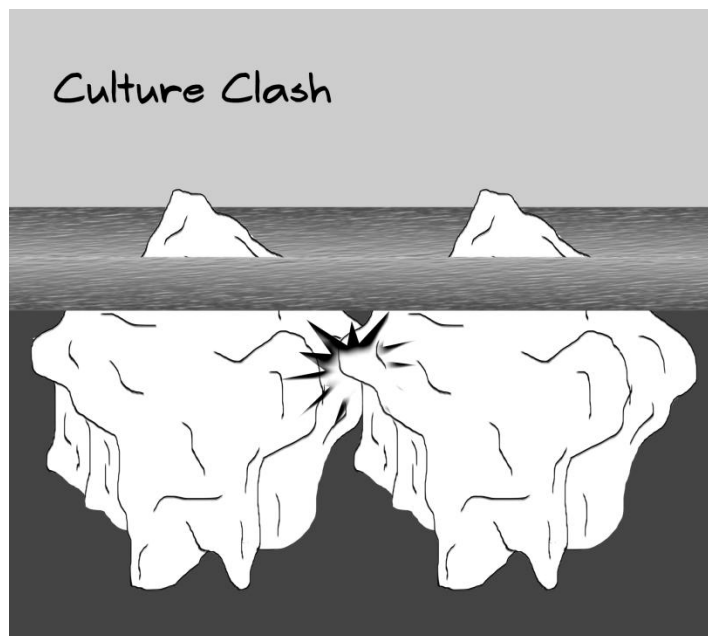
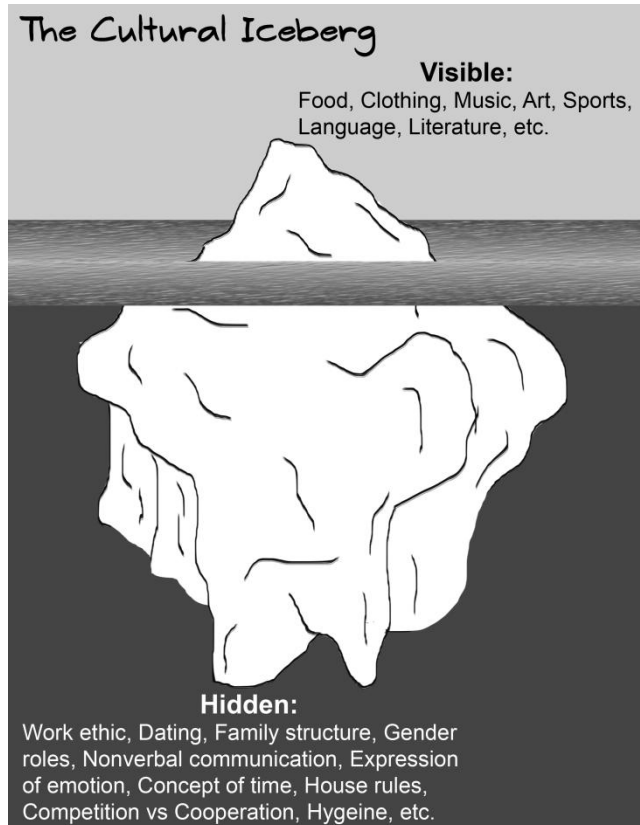
## The Cultural Iceberg

One way to understand the various parts of culture is by thinking about culture as if it were an iceberg.

The iceberg shows that some elements of culture are above the surface of the water and are visible. We are aware of these aspects of culture because they are reflected in our **behaviors**. Other aspects of culture lie under the water line and are invisible. These aren't obvious to us and include our **values, norms and beliefs**.

The visible and invisible parts of culture interact with each other in ways that you probably don't normally stop to consider. For example, a common nonverbal behavior such as waving good-bye is visible, but what that gesture means is invisible. In one culture it could mean "good-bye", in another "come here", and yet another "go away."

When two cultures, like two icebergs, collide, the real clash usually occurs not in those visible differences but rather below the surface where values, beliefs and thought patterns conflict.



During the hosting experience you and your hosted participant may feel uncomfortable with a situation but don't quite know why. Chances are good that you are experiencing cultural differences "below the surface of the water." Being aware of this dynamic and the potential for learning what exists within it are a huge part of the cultural learning process.

You may be wondering, "How can I learn about myself through contact with someone different from me?" It is most often through the contrast between the two, that new awareness and knowledge arise. In other words, you may not be aware of your own values, beliefs, and customs until you come into contact with someone whose values, beliefs, and customs differ

from your own. The goal of this handbook is to help you build awareness of your own and your participant's culture in order to help you both have a more enjoyable and educational hosting experience.

## Generalizations and Stereotypes

To help you along in this process of mutual discovery, which the hosting experience presents, it is often useful to begin by considering **cultural generalizations**.



**Cultural generalizations are defined as the tendency of the majority of people within a culture group to share certain values, beliefs and behaviors.**

**Generalizations do not apply to all people within a culture group, and so should be used only as a guide to beginning conversation and developing understanding with your participant.**

An example of a cultural generalization is the strongly held **U.S. American value of individualism**. U.S. Americans tend to like to do things themselves and see themselves as responsible for their own lives. These things are reflected in popular expressions such as “pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps” or “the buck stops here.” But this doesn’t mean that all Americans value individualism in the same way and to the same degree. Rather, on average, most Americans hold this value and their culture views this as a positive.

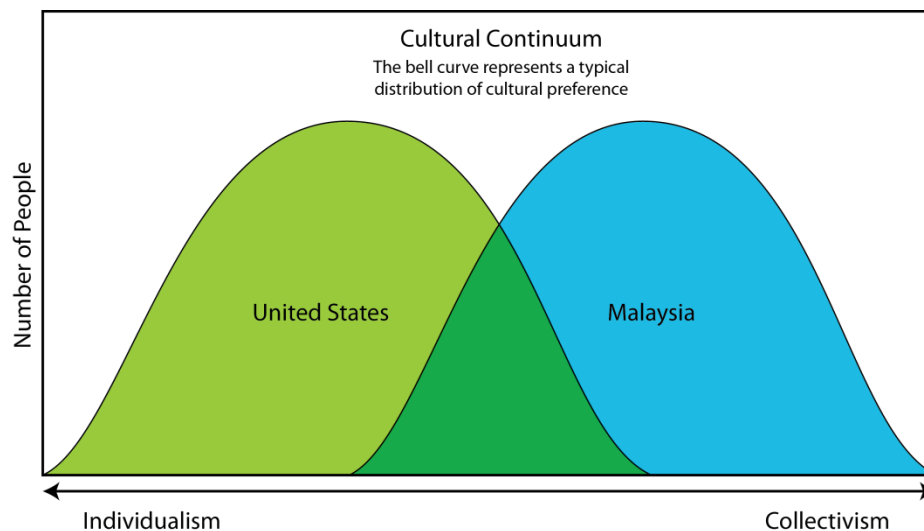
By contrast, Malaysians generally value **collectivism**. Collectivism tends to value the good of the whole as more important than the good of the individual: “One generation plants the trees and another gets the shade.”

In a culture that tends to be more collectivist, the interests of the group, whether it be family, classmates or community, are typically given priority over those of the individual. People from such cultures tend to avoid confrontation and do not directly reveal negative feelings as we might in the U.S. Maintaining harmony within a group is very important in a collectivist culture. There tends to be more emphasis on family relationships in these cultures.



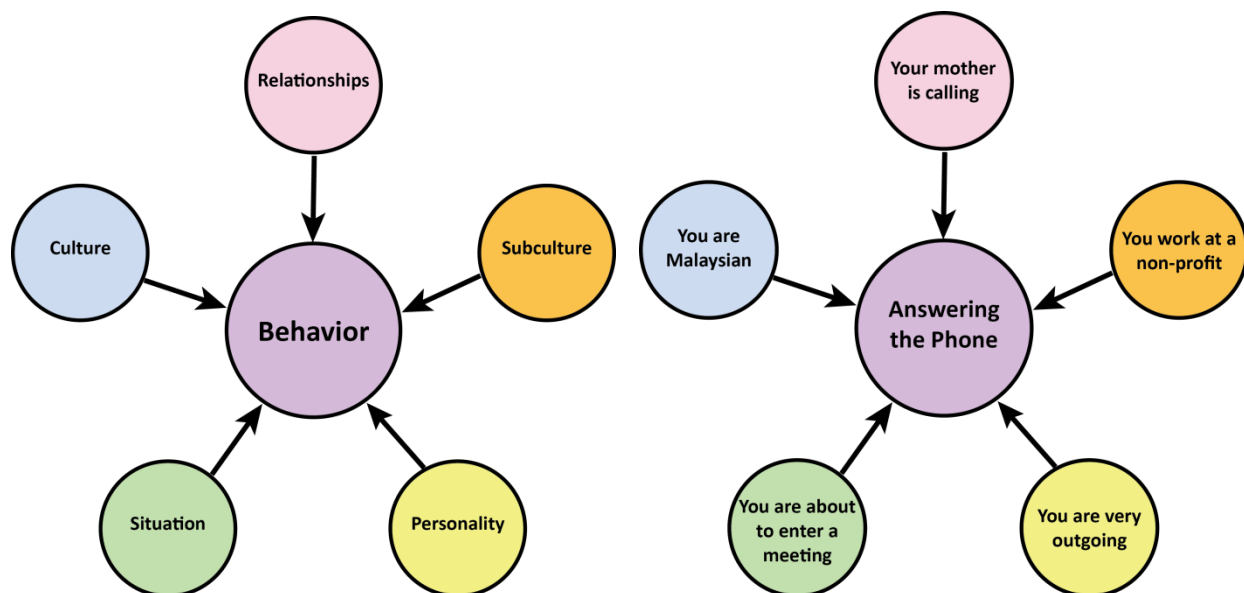
**Cultural generalizations should not be confused with cultural stereotypes, which are fixed ideas or exaggerated beliefs about every individual in the culture group. They are often negative in nature and untested.**

An example of a **cultural stereotype** would be “U.S. Americans are materialistic.” To better understand the difference between cultural generalizations and stereotypes, please refer to the continuum figure that follows. On the left side, **individualism** is displayed as a U.S. value, and the right side shows the Malaysian value of **collectivism**.



We see that only a small portion of each population sits at the extreme ends of this continuum. The majority of each population sits somewhere in the middle, with some from each culture tending more toward individualism and more toward collectivism. This graph also exemplifies the difficulty in quantifying values. Values can only be expressed in a way that is general with room for flexibility.

It is also important to keep in mind that culture is not the only factor influencing behavior. See the following chart for examples. On the left we have the general factors that might influence behavior at any given time. On the right the chart is filled in with an example of a person deciding whether or not to answer a phone call:



People can differ in many other ways, such as their likes and dislikes, personalities, and life experiences. The situation at hand can also have an impact on how people behave. In the example above, a Malaysian person may decide to answer the phone call at work, and his/her coworkers would probably not object or think it inappropriate, which does represent strong family ties that are generally characteristic of Malaysian culture. However another person, even another Malaysian, might make a different decision as influenced by any of the other factors above. For this reason, we emphasize that cultural generalizations should only be a starting point for exploration and discussion on how your cultural values may be similar to or different than those of your student.

## ***Culture and Perception***

**Culture shapes your perception in the same way that different colored glasses change what you see.**

For example, if you were to look at a yellow car while wearing a pair of blue-tinted glasses, the car would appear green. However, if you were to view the same yellow car through pink-tinted glasses, it would appear orange. Similarly, you and your student may see the same situation with two different “cultural lenses” or sets of values, norms and beliefs. If you are not aware of the color of each other’s lens, in other words, the cultural context of a given situation, conflict and misunderstandings are more likely to occur.



**When misunderstandings occur, seek clarification by exploring cultural differences that may be at play. You don’t need to change, just explain! A little flexibility goes a long way.**

## ***Celebrations and Holidays***

Celebrations and holidays are deeply imbedded in Malaysian culture. Public holidays include both religious and national holidays. It is likely that your student will experience homesickness during Malaysian holidays, especially if the holiday is not typically celebrated within your community. This will probably be your student's first time to celebrate a holiday without his/her natural family. The following is a list of holidays on which your students is most likely to become homesick or wish to call home; it is not necessarily a complete list of Malaysian holidays.

### **Birthdays**

Birthdays in Malaysia are very small and humbly celebrated. Most families do not give gifts to each other on their birthdays. Some families might take their children out to eat for their birthday.



**Ask your student what s/he is accustomed to doing on his/her birthday.**

The major Malaysian holidays that your student may wish to celebrate are listed below. Some holidays may be very important to your student and s/he may feel it necessary to call, or e-mail his/her family on these days. This might also be an opportunity for your student to share his or her traditions with you.

### **National Holidays**

- *Independence Day* – August 31st  
Commemorates the date that the Federation of Malaya gained independence in 1957 from the British.

### **Muslim Festivals**

- *Ramadan* – Based on the Lunar Calendar, dates vary each year  
A month-long period in which Muslims, who wish to practice, will fast from sunrise to sunset. During this time, Muslims do not eat or drink anything, including water. Families typically break the fast each day after sunset and eat once more in the morning before sunrise. Your student may wish to participate in this fasting. (See Religion for more details.)
- *Hari Raya Aidilfitri* – Immediate three days following Ramadan  
A three-day celebration which is the largest and most important holiday of the year for the Islamic community. Families give gifts to friends and neighbors and host large gatherings to mark the end of the holy month of fasting.
- *Hari Raya Haji* – Date varies according to the lunar calendar, generally in the fall  
This holiday is practiced to remember the readiness of the biblical/Quranic figure Abraham to sacrifice his son. In Malaysia, some Islamic communities slaughter a cow or goat in commemoration and will share the meat with family, friends and charities.



*One host Mom woke up before dawn to cook for a Muslim boy at Ramadan because she thought she had to. I told her it was perfectly fine to expect him to cook for himself since the rest of the family did. I reminded her that he was here to experience American culture and if she expected her kids to cook for themselves, then she should expect the same from him.*

– AFS-USA Support Staff



**If you're hosting a Muslim student they will most likely want to contact home during these holidays, especially Hari Raya Aidilfitri. Please communicate with your student in advance and decide which method of contact will be most convenient.**

## Christian Festivals

- *Christmas* – December 25th
- *Easter Sunday* – Date varies between March 22<sup>nd</sup> - April 25<sup>th</sup>.

## Buddhist Festivals

- *Wesak Day* – Varies according to Lunar Calendar  
*Celebration* in the honor of Buddha's birthday. Buddhist families observe this holiday by spending time with family and friends and also by: meditating, giving to charity, eating vegetarian food and "bathing" the Buddha.

## Hindu Festivals

- *Deepavali* – Five-day celebration sometime in October or November  
Known as the "Festival of Lights," this is an important family holiday for Hindus. Hindus go to the temple together, wear new clothing and participate in traditional rituals. The rest of the holiday is spent with family and friends sharing special treats and visiting.
- *Thaipusam* – Falls on the full moon in the Tamil month of Thai (Generally January or February)  
A Hindu religious holiday that is celebrated in the honor and worship of Lord Murgan. Some Hindus take vows and make promises to Lord Murgan. In certain areas of Malaysia, Hindus shave their head and participate in large festivals.



**Most Hindu exchange students will only observe Deepavali and not Thaipusam while in the U.S. They may wish to contact their families on both of these important holidays.**

## Chinese Festivals

- *Chinese New Year* – depends on the Chinese calendar, usually in January or February  
Chinese New Year is a fifteen day celebration, welcoming the arrival of spring. Chinese families will spend time together and hold a traditional family dinner. The color red is seen everywhere during the celebration of the New Year as red is a symbol of prosperity.
- *Lantern Festival* – Starts on the first day of the Chinese calendar, usually in August or September  
Celebrates the arrival of autumn.



**Many large cities in the U.S. celebrate Chinese New Year. If your student wishes to observe this holiday you may be able to find a temple nearby that is holding a celebration.**



## PERSONAL LIFE

---

This section deals with core values and private customs. Understanding the core values and customs that underlie your student's cultural development can help you have a successful exchange experience. This chapter gives you some tools to understand and communicate with your student. Effective communication includes awareness and understanding of the other person, regardless of their cultural background.

### ***Collectivism/Group Affiliation***

A Malaysian student will generally see themselves in the context of a larger society. American teens are brought up to "think for themselves," while Malaysian students are brought up to put the well-being of the group over that of the individual. Whether it is their ethnic group, religious affiliation, or family, Malaysian's sense of group affiliation is deep rooted.

As a host parent of a Malaysian student you may perceive your student is making a negative comparison to your community or your family when s/he speaks about her country. This is probably due to your student's strong sense of group affiliation. Understanding where this attribute stems from is the first step to cultural understanding.



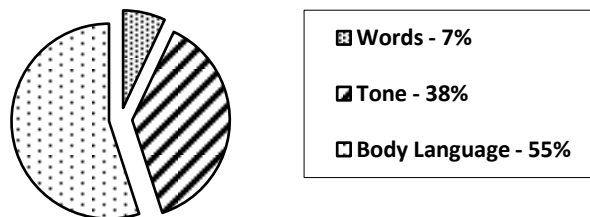
*Our student was very respectful at all times to adults. Her teachers loved having her because she was a very hard worker as a student. However, the feeling from my viewpoint was that she felt she was much better than us. Try to underscore for your student that our ways may be different but neither is "better", just different.*

– U.S. Host Family

### ***Direct versus Indirect Communication***

In a collectivist society, consensus-seeking and non-confrontation is considered an important value. This value can clash with the American value of direct communication. As Americans we are often open regarding our feelings and thoughts. Your student may feel that if s/he is open with her feelings with you, s/he might appear disrespectful.

One study by Dr. Albert Mehrabian (1981), breaks down language in the following way:



Malaysian culture is more indirect and highly dependent on non-verbal communication such as body language, eye contact, tone of voice, and the use of silence. Your student may be more indirect in asking for things, letting people know if they are hungry or needing something. We recommend that you ask your student if s/he needs anything, and that you be as specific as possible when asking. For example, you might ask your student "Are you hungry for breakfast?" Your student may say "no" even if they are hungry because s/he does not want to trouble you. A more specific way to ask this question might be, "Would you like toast or cereal for breakfast?"

### Examples of Malaysian Nonverbal Communication:



- Sulking or retreating into a bedroom is an acceptable way to communicate that someone is unhappy.
- “Maybe later” usually means no.
- Lack of eye contact or down-turned eyes may mean something is wrong.
- Silence or one-word answers may mean everything is not okay.

(Keep in mind, in the first few weeks these behaviors may also reflect shyness or a language barrier.)

If both parties have an awareness of these different communication styles, it will help with cultural adjustment and to avoid misunderstanding.

As a host parent, you may want to look for non-verbal cues that your student is unhappy, such as lack of eye-contact or a longer-than-usual silence. Don't be afraid to ask questions and bring things up with your student. If your student's communication seems like s/he is not telling the full story, recognize that it may be that s/he is trying to be polite rather than what may be perceived as being dishonest.



**Give your student a way to communicate in a nonverbal manner. For example, put up a calendar or a grocery list that they can quietly add to.**



*One interesting observance I had was my student would repeatedly say they didn't want something to eat when asked but really she was hungry. It was customary in Malaysia to say no. The host typically asks several times and each time getting a “no” then finally the person says “yes”. I would ask once, get a “no” and not ask again and she would be hungry. We discussed this after it kept happening. So then I would say... “do you mean ‘no’ or do you mean the Malaysian ‘no’”? It can't be said enough...just talk. Ask things in different ways. Look for behavior that appears too polite. It may mean they don't understand or that they aren't saying what they really mean or want.*

– U.S. Host Family

For example, pointing with the index finger or foot is rude in Malaysia. Facial expressions, gestures and body language can mean a lot. Learn to read subtle signs for easier communication. Your student may be offended if you point at a member of the family or at an animal.

## Concept of “Face”

Your student will likely have a strong sense of social sensitivity that encourages considering the feelings and reputations of others. This sensitivity is highly valued in Malaysian society where individual actions and behavior often reflect the individual's family and community. In the U.S. we are familiar with the term “saving face,” which means saving your own reputation from harm or embarrassment. In Malaysia and other more collective societies, the concept of “face” is understood in a broader sense, not just as something an individual saves for him/herself, but as a give and take between people; “face” is something you can give as well as have. The website, Kwintessential (2010) explains the concept of “face” in a Malaysian context in the following way:

*Face is a personal concept that embraces qualities such as a good name, good character, and being held in esteem by one's peers. Face is considered a commodity that can be given, lost, taken away, or earned. On top of this face also extends to the family, school, company, and even the nation itself.*

In Malaysia, a trustworthy person would have good face, and would save the face of others as a sign of respect. The concept of having face is intended to prevent damage to relationships and to preserve the reputation of the other party. However to an American, this sort of behavior may appear dishonest. It is similar to the concept of telling a “white lie” in order to avoid unnecessarily hurting someone’s feelings.



#### **Example of saving or having face**

*You explain to your Malaysian student that the children in your family are expected to clear their place, scrape their plates and load their dishes in the dishwasher. You then ask your teenager to show your student how to do this. The teenager breezes through, showing your student quickly what to do, but without explanation. The next few nights you notice that your student isn’t putting his/her dishes in the dishwasher. When you ask why, your student says “I guess I don’t understand.”*

In this example, your Malaysian student chose to take the responsibility for not understanding the task at hand rather than blaming your teenager who never showed him/her how to open the dishwasher, thereby saving face for the host sibling.

Keep an eye out for this kind of behavior. If you ever feel that your student is not being completely honest with you, consider whether the concept of face may be playing a role. Talking with your student about this cultural difference between Malaysia and the U.S. can be a great opportunity for learning. Just be aware that a direct approach to discussion may be uncomfortable for your student at first. As time goes on, your student may become more comfortable with a more direct form of confrontation.

## ***Meeting & Greeting Etiquette***

Greeting friends with a friendly “good morning” or “how are you” is similar in Malaysia, but Malaysians don’t generally acknowledge strangers with a direct hello. Americans may perceive this as unfriendly. Help your student understand that it is considered polite to recognize or at least make eye contact when meeting new people.

Greetings in the form of hugging or embracing are generally not part of the Malaysian culture. Shaking hands is more appropriate. In addition, most boys and girls do not touch when greeting; sometimes there are religious reasons behind this custom (see Religion). If you have a child of the opposite sex, you may want to explain this before your student arrives to avoid an awkward moment. Your student will likely be very uncomfortable with public displays of affection (see Family Life for more detail).

## ***Personal Space***

Sense of space (physical distance) for your student may be very different. Thinking about your family and friends and what your typical space needs are, consider the following: are you huggers, kissers, or hand shakers? What household items do you share as a family? Is there anything that each person in the family considers his/her own? Is it a household rule to ask to borrow an item that belongs to someone else before using it or is anything in the house fair game for any family member to use? These aspects of life can be very tightly linked to culture and vary between families in the U.S. and throughout the world.

At first, your student may be cautious about physical contact, particularly with the opposite sex. Let your student be the guide and ask him/her if s/he is uncomfortable with physical contact. Over time your student will probably adapt to your family’s culture. In the beginning, it is best to give your student some physical distance that is comfortable for him/her.

## ***Privacy***

The way household space is divided in Malaysia is different than it is in the U.S. Americans often have their own private space and do not go into each other's rooms unannounced. Malaysian students have their own space (a room), but it is openly shared with everyone in their family. Parents' rooms in Malaysia aren't typically open to the rest of the household. Early on, you will need to be clear with your student on how your space is divided. Your student is also likely to "hang-out" in family areas like the kitchen or living room. If your student does not spend much time in his/her room, it may be because s/he is unaccustomed to being alone and s/he may feel isolated in his or her separate room. Make sure your student knows that giving each person his/her personal space is typical in the U.S. and is not a reflection of his/her role in the family.



*Oh my, all space in our house belonged to the Malaysian. He had trouble catching on to how we divide our personal space here at home, but after two months, he was able to navigate it fine.*

*– U.S. Host Family*

Regardless of how you divide your space in your household, be prepared to provide a separate space for privacy and prayer. This will give your student time to unwind and practice his/her religion (see Religion Section).

## ***Sense of Time***

Sense of time varies with each student, but generally Malaysians are more relaxed about the concept of time. In most cases, the pace of life is slower in Malaysia than it is in the US. Set clear time limits and expect your student to meet them.



*I forgot about Malaysian time – ALWAYS LATE for everything. Tell him to be ready at 10:00 am, and at 9:55 am he jumps in the shower. Make time management a priority early on.*

*– U.S. Host Family*

## ***Religion***

As you get to know your student, it is important to understand some of the basic information about your student's religious beliefs and how those beliefs will interact with life in the U.S. While we expect students to adjust to our culture in the U.S. as part of their exchange experience, it is very important that we respect our students' need for his/her personal religious observances. As with most religions around the world, the way an individual practices his/her religion may vary based on levels of observance.

Talk to your student about his/her beliefs and practices. Be mindful that your student may not be used to explaining his/her religion because s/he comes from a country where most people already know and understand it. Explaining the reasons behind religious practice is a good learning experience for students but may take study and time.

The following provides a very basic introduction of information and tips regarding Malaysian students who are Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu.

## Muslim Students



*Islam literally means having peace with God, peace and submission to the will of Almighty God (Allah). It provides a constant balance between spiritual and the material life of the individual, as well as the community... Islam is not only a “religion”, but it is a way of life symbolized by mercy, forgiveness and peace – with God, with oneself, and with the creations of God through submission and commitment to the guidance provided by God.*

– Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat



**Followers of Islam are called Muslims.**

### Practices of Islam

Muslims are guided by the Five Pillars of Islam: professing there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet; praying five times each day; giving money to the poor; fasting during the holy month of Ramadan; and making a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia at least once in a lifetime. Check the Yes Cultural Tip Sheet in the Appendix of this book for more information.



*Islam has various denominations so rules and observance may vary. Inquire about them, they will be happy they have something to teach you and it will be very enlightening.*

– U.S. Host Family

The following are some of the observances of Islam your student may practice:

### Modest Clothing

Both men and women are expected to wear modest clothing. In Malaysia, Muslim women typically cover their shoulders and knees with brightly colored, light clothing, and many cover everything except their hands and feet. Men generally cover themselves between their bellybutton and knees.

### Headscarf

Female students may wear a hijab (headscarf) to cover their hair. The headscarf may be removed when in the company of all women or children, or when only close family are present.



*She was always very modest in her clothing. She always wore a head scarf when leaving the house and when we had male visitors.*

– U.S. Host Family

### Dietary Restrictions

- Pork is forbidden
- Other meat may be eaten but only if prepared “halal.” Halal is a method of preparing the food in a special way. Often “kosher” prepared meats are acceptable substitutes for halal meat.
- Most seafood can be eaten.
- Alcohol is forbidden.

When purchasing or preparing food for your Muslim student, it is Important to be mindful of the ingredients included. For example, food cooked in bacon fat or cooked with wine are prohibited forms of food and cannot be consumed by your Muslim student.



**Gelatin products, such as jelly beans, marshmallows or Jell-O, may be a restricted food because it contains gelatin derived from pig.**



*We did not change the food we served, but always made certain he knew of pork products in foods. We also had other food if pork was part of the meal.*

*– U.S. Host Family*

### **Prayer**

Muslims traditionally pray five times a day. There is flexibility for the number of prayer times during periods of travel. The time of day will vary depending upon the geographic location of the moon and the direction of the sunset. Muslims pray in the direction of Kaaba, which is a holy structure located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Generally, prayer is observed at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and night. Your student may need help with finding the right direction to face for prayers. The website [www.islamicfinder.org.my](http://www.islamicfinder.org.my) is a good resources for the times and direction of prayer.

Prayer spaces should be clean, private and pet-free with easy access to a bathroom. Before each prayer, Muslims cleanse their face, ears, hands, part of their head and their feet with clean water; this practice is called ablution. This can create issues with wet U.S. bathrooms. (See Personal Hygiene Section.)

Men generally attend Friday prayers at a mosque. The time for Friday prayer will depend upon the geographical location and the lunar calendar. Friday prayer is often early in the afternoon before school is finished.



**If your student wishes to attend Friday prayer, you can help by assisting him in finding the closest mosque and arranging for the means to visit. This may be especially important during the major religious holidays.**



*The most conscious element was that of accommodating a Muslim person in our house. Simply ask what space or items they may need to feel comfortable and accommodated - especially as it relates to their religious practice.*

*– U.S. Host Family*

### **Ramadan**

Ramadan is a holy month for Muslims and is based on the Islamic lunar calendar. During this month, all Muslims, with some exceptions, are required to fast. The timing of Ramadan varies each year. You can find out the date and time on [www.islamicfinder.com.my](http://www.islamicfinder.com.my).

Those who fast do not consume food or water during daylight hours. You may need to arrange a means for your student to eat early in the morning before sunrise and late in the evening after sunset

The end of the fasting period is celebrated with a large feast called Eidfitr. This great celebration is the most significant festival and holiday in Malaysia. (See Holidays Section.)

### **Gender Differences**

A very important and respected part of Islam is the recognition of the differences between women and men. There is very little physical contact between Muslim women and men. By contrast, in the U.S., we are accustomed to men and women openly displaying affection between each other, such as greeting with a hug. Even though we see this as a cultural difference between the U.S. and other countries, for many Muslims, it is a religious difference, and female students may feel very uncomfortable being hugged or touched by other males.



*Let the female [Muslim] student be the guide in this case and if you notice problems ask her if she is uncomfortable with male physical contact or if she is having any problems with it.*

*– U.S. Host Family.*

*Our Muslim student was much more respectful and modest. She was not at all interested in boys.*

*– U.S. Host Family*

## **Animals**

Islam identifies the saliva of dogs as unclean and instructs observers to refrain from coming in contact with it. Your student may not be used to being around dogs as observant Muslims would most likely not keep dogs as family pets. Contact with swine and pig by products are treated in the same way. Extra ablutions, or washing, would be the response to coming into contact with an unclean substance.



*Our Muslim student's life is COMPLETELY different, as she described it. However, she let us know that she was willing to live as we do, while in our home. The biggest example is that we have a dog. We discovered that dogs are taboo among Muslims because they consider them unclean. Initially, our student said she'd be fine with a dog as long as she didn't have to touch it or come in contact with its food. By the end of her stay, she was walking the dog!*

*– U.S. Host Family*



**Buddhist Temple**

## **Buddhist Students**

Many Chinese Malaysians are Buddhist. The observance of religion for Buddhists varies greatly. Observing a vegetarian diet, chanting, or burning incense are examples of Buddhist practices that your student may wish to observe. Ask your student whether s/he would like assistance finding a Buddhist temple or community center to visit in order to connect to Buddhism in your community.



*Both of our students had dietary differences - the Buddhist did not eat beef; the Muslim did not eat pork. We established from the beginning that we would not serve these to them, but we did not change our eating habits. When we had one of these meats, we always made sure there was an alternative for them. We took them grocery shopping with us to help with this.*

*– U.S. Host Family.*

## **Hindu Students**

Many Indians in Malaysia are Hindu. Cows are considered sacred in Hindu tradition and so, Hinduism forbids the consumption of beef. Many Hindus eat lamb, chicken and seafood. The consumption of pork is also uncommon in Hinduism and some observe a vegetarian diet. Hindu temples are the houses of worship, but families may have dedicated places for prayer in the home. Your student may like assistance locating a Hindu temple near your community.



**Hindu Temple**

## ***Religion in Your Household***

You may invite your student to join you and your family in your religious observances, and your student may be willing to participate in some of your family's religious community activities as part of his/her cultural exchange experience. However it must be understood that community members should not use the exchange to attempt to proselytize or convert the student.

Your student may find it difficult to express the fact that s/he does not want to participate in religious services because of the indirect communication style that is the norm in Malaysia. The family should respect the student's choice not to participate, and under no circumstances should a student be forced to attend religious services.

## ***Personal Hygiene***

Practices related to hygiene and grooming vary around the world. The way we dress, bathe, use the toilet and do our laundry is all influenced by culture and the environment in which we live; these customs are largely unspoken and taken for granted. As such, the differences between your routines and those of your student may not be immediately apparent and could cause conflict. It is important to have a conversation with your student regarding these issues as soon as possible to speed up the adjustment process.

## ***Water and Bathing***

Probably due to the hot and humid climate, most Malaysians bathe at least twice a day. Even if you do not live in a climate that is hot and humid, your student may not feel really clean if s/he showers less than s/he is accustomed to doing. A typical bathroom in Malaysia has a shower, sink and toilet in close proximity with a common drain in the floor. It is not uncommon for the entire bathroom to get wet during use because there is no partition between shower and the rest of the bathroom. Water is also used after each toilet use (see "Toilet" section that follows). In Malaysia's climate, a wet bathroom will dry quickly. Since this is not the case in much of the US, water use in the bathroom could be a source of cultural difference.

Explain to your student what is expected in your home bathroom. You may need to provide your student with additional towels and explain whether certain areas must remain dry. If showering more than once each day would be considered excessive where you live, be sure to talk to your student about when s/he should shower and how long each shower should be.

## ***Washing for Religious Practice***

Regular washing is required for Muslims before each of their five prayer times. In the process of washing, your student may have a tendency to splash water given that it is common in Malaysia for water to be splashed all over the bathroom, even leaving standing water all over the floor.



*Washing for prayer caused some difficulty as bathroom floor was left soaking wet. Student was reluctant to use bathtub to do this. Student showered more than once a day and wasn't active, so [this] was considered excessive.*

*– U.S. Host Family*





## Toilet

The typical toilet in Malaysia is a form of bidet. A person uses water, usually through a hose near the toilet instead of toilet paper, to clean him/herself after each use of the toilet. Your Malaysian student may or may not be accustomed to using toilet paper. You may need to have a frank discussion about the use of the toilet and how much toilet paper to use. Keep in mind: this is a sensitive subject for just about anyone but especially for your teenage student!



**Islam requires cleansing with water after use of the toilet.**

## Menstruation

The topic of menstruation is a sensitive topic that your student is probably not used to discussing openly. Keeping that in mind, you may want to initiate a discussion with your student about how to dispose of sanitary napkins and tampons early in the stay. For example, typically, in Malaysia, sanitary napkins are disposed of by wrapping the napkin in newspaper. You may need to show your student how she is expected to dispose of a sanitary napkin while in the U.S.

It may be a good idea for you to talk about tampons (which are not used in Malaysia as prevalently as in the U.S.) with your student especially if she plays sports or attends gym class. Muslims observe certain rules related to menstruation. For example, menstruating women do not pray, and sanitary napkins must be washed before disposal.

## Laundry

Due in part to the humid climate, it is common in Malaysia to change clothing more than once each day. In Malaysia, small loads of laundry are commonly run daily, and dryers are very uncommon. Your student may be unused to or surprised by waiting to wash laundry weekly as is more common in the U.S.

Undergarments are considered very private articles of clothing and may not be included in communal wash. Your student may prefer to wash undergarments separately from other clothing. A mesh bag for undergarments can help to separate them if the student does not want to wash them by hand.

## *Sensitive Subjects*

There are certain subjects which are sensitive and should be brought up gently. If your student brings up the following subjects, feel free to engage your student in conversation but recognize, just as with certain topics in the U.S., that these may be topics which can cause your student to feel uncomfortable:

- Politics – This subject is sensitive in many cultures; try not to judge or negatively compare.
- Race – Malaysians are proud of their diverse country and believe it is positive to identify and respect each distinct ethnic group
- Body Image – as in the U.S., this can be a sensitive subject.
- Skin Complexion – as in the U.S., it is impolite to comment on a person's skin color.
- Religious Practices – each person is able to practice their own religion; do not question the student's choice to practice a certain religion.
- Masculinity – concepts of what is masculine are different for every culture.
- Sex – your student comes from a society that heavily censors TV and movies that include sexual content.
- Homosexuality – Same sex relationships are not as openly accepted in Malaysia.



*I wanted to ensure my student was comfortable in my home so we both decided that if there was some area of discussion that we found difficult or disturbing, we would stop and make a joint decision to amend our discussion or continue at a later date.*

*– U.S. Host Family*

The overt identification and discussion of a person's social status is acceptable in Malaysia. (See Collectivism/Group Affiliation Section.) This is an example of a subject that may be considered sensitive in the U.S. but not in Malaysia.

## FAMILY LIFE

---

Family customs in Malaysia vary according to the traditions of ethnic or religious affiliation, but your student is likely to come from a close-knit family. Understanding some typical, Malaysian family traditions and customs will help you with the day-to-day adjustment with your student.

### ***Respect for Elders and Authority***

Perhaps stemming from the strong sense of collectivism (see Personal Life Section), those with social status, authority, age, and wealth are usually treated with great respect. Most Malaysians are brought up learning the importance of respect and mannerisms in the context of a person's status in the family and in society.

As a host parent you may find that your student does not openly question your authority. However, while your student may not challenge your authority, they may also rely heavily on you to make decisions for him or her and to organize their schedules. In contrast, many American teens have been taught to make their own plans and to keep track of their responsibilities. Your Malaysian student may be waiting for the parent to remind or tell him/her what to do.



*We found our student to be largely compliant, but sometimes lacked in initiative. Being direct with students early on is the key. We explained early on that American teens are expected to think for themselves and take responsibility for adhering to schedules and assignments.*

– US Host Family

Additionally, an unquestioning compliance with your decisions may lead your student to not directly communicate that s/he is unhappy with something you have said or done. Sensitivity to this aspect of Malaysian culture can help to mediate conflict.

Your student may speak more openly than a U.S. American would about another's position in society or role in the family. Recognize that this is accepted in Malaysian culture and that your student may simply be trying to figure out where s/he stands in relation to others in order to know how to behave appropriately.



**You may need to discuss with your student that openly comparing people to others may be perceived negatively in our culture – that is comes across as judgmental or unfriendly.**

### ***Family Roles***

In Malaysia, men are traditionally considered heads of household. Malaysian parents sometimes give special privileges to their sons over their daughters, especially with matters pertaining to education or activities outside the home. Sons may have the option of participating while daughters may not. More traditional families may believe that women should assume the role of homemaker upon marriage; this view is becoming less prevalent in urban areas. The difference in treatment of men and women reflects a culture of protectiveness rather than disrespect of women.



*According to my student, her father was considered the “head of the House” and he had tremendous influence over the family. He governed much of what occurred when he was both in and out of the home. I believe we both learned to understand the differences between our family lives.*

– US Host Family

## ***Household Chores***

In Malaysia, it is more common for families to have a live-in maid or other household help than it is in the U.S. As a result, many children learn some household chores but may have fewer responsibilities than their American peers. In general, a Malaysian student's number one job is to study. Men tend to have fewer household responsibilities than women.



*Our student had never completed a tedious chore in his life...He could come up with many excuses why he couldn't complete a boring chore. We just had to understand that hired help was cheap in Malaysia.*

– U.S. Host Family



**We encourage you to provide your student early on a detailed list of expected chores and instructions on how to complete them.**

## ***Family Togetherness***

Family is extremely important to Malaysian social structure. Family provides a sense of unity, loyalty, security, and belonging. It is not uncommon in Malaysia for some families to have three generations living together.

Siblings tend to be close, going together for shopping, movies, eating out and short trips. Weddings are large, extended family events, and holidays often center on large family gatherings. At such communal events, men and women often have specific roles. Families generally stick together when running errands, going out to eat, etc. Family vacations are common during time off from school. Parents rarely leave the kids behind when going away, even for a short time.

It is not uncommon in Malaysia for some families to have three generations living together.



**Your student will most likely appreciate family time, including outings and large family events.**

## ***Showing Affection***

To Malaysians, families in the U.S. may seem more outwardly affectionate when compared to Malaysian families. For example, it would not be typical for parents in Malaysia to kiss in front of others. In Chinese Malaysian families, physical displays of love, such as hugging, are particularly uncommon between any family members. Your student may feel uncomfortable when family members show openly physical affection for each other. If you notice your student is uncomfortable, talk to him/her about it and recognize that it is a cultural difference.

## ***Parental Guidance***

Malaysian parents tend to be protective of their children. Your student may be used to explaining where s/he is going, with whom she is accompanying, and what time s/he will return. Your student may be surprised by the amount of freedom given American students. Speak with your student early on about your expectations.

## Food

Food and mealtimes are important parts of Malaysian culture and form a central pillar of family life. Most meals are eaten with the family. Malaysian holidays and festivals focus on family meals and are often day long events.

Malaysian food has been described as a cultural fusion of Malay, Indians, Chinese and Peranakan cuisines. Meals often consist of a large variety of foods. A noticeable characteristic is the vibrant colors within the meals. Eating is a national pastime in Malaysia and with, which can be seen as an embodiment of the diversity of cultures in Malaysia. Hopefully, your student will share some of the Malaysian cooking s/he has learned as it is a great way to connect with your student.



*He was used to a very high standard of cuisine, which we were unable to match. He was talking about how his family would have been ashamed to offer this type of food to a guest. I pointed out to him that he was not a guest but a family member, and that this is what our family thought was quite acceptable for a casual dinner at home.*

– US Host Family



**For Malaysians rice is a comfort food, as it is something they grow up with. Some say a meal without rice is not a meal. Your student may appreciate the opportunity to eat rice several times a week. This will make them feel more at home with the family. In some cases your student may feel this way about noodles.**

**If your family does not frequently eat rice, show your student how s/he may prepare rice for him/herself in your household.**

Your student may be surprised by what some American teenagers eat for breakfast. Traditional breakfast in Malaysia consist of soup or fish. Western breakfast of cereal, bread, coffee or tea is popular in urban families. Ask your student what he/she would like to eat for breakfast.

For Malaysian students, it is more popular to buy a hot lunch than to bring lunch. Have a conversation with your student about how you will provide lunch; your student may need to adjust if s/he is going to bring lunch. Your student may feel hungry later in the evening. Be sure to have a discussion with your student about where s/he may go to get a snack in the home and in your general community.

Easy access to markets, and many various eating places means that food in Malaysia is purchased fresh within a few days of being used. Because Malaysia has a year-round growing season, frozen food is not common; whereas in the U.S., many families rely on frozen foods for meals. Show your student how to cook frozen food if necessary.

## Malaysian Meal Times

Meal times might be an adjustment for your student as eating schedules vary around the world.

Morning/Afternoon	Evening
<b>Breakfast</b> Typically eaten in two parts; Malaysian students will eat something very light such as a hot drink or a piece of toast before leaving the house, or some will stop at roadside “hawker” stalls on the way to school. At school around 10:00-11:00 they will generally be provided a larger breakfast.	<b>Dinner</b> the main meal of the day; family members would eat together; typically takes place between 6:00 to 10:00pm; food is usually home cooked; for busy families “take away” or eating out is common as food is fairly inexpensive. On weekends, families may go out for a meal.
<b>Lunch</b> Takes place around 1:30 for students; this meal might consist of a main dish that includes some type of meat – beef or chicken – and rice or noodles, a drink and fruit. Teatime: late afternoon snack with tea.	<b>Supper</b> a small snack sometimes eaten around 10:00pm; in Malaysia, many eating places are open late or even 24 hours in big cities. Your student may be surprised if eateries in your community close at 9:00 or 10:00pm.

## Water

In Malaysia, water from tap needs to be boiled or filtered before consuming. Be sure to inform your student whether it is okay to drink water straight from the tap.

## Meal Time Etiquette and Manners

Etiquette and manners vary among families and ethnic groups as they do in the U.S. Typically in Malaysia, food is served all at once, “family style,” rather than in courses. Second helpings are often served automatically, especially to guests. Your Malaysian student may refuse second helpings even if s/he is still hungry because, in Malaysia, it is generally considered impolite to accept the first time food is offered. Make sure to check in with your student in case s/he is still hungry.

Wasting food is not accepted in Malaysian culture. In general, people only take as much food as they can eat. If your student is given a portion that is too large, s/he might feel compelled to finish it all. Make sure to let your student know that it is acceptable to take large restaurant portions home as leftovers.

It is common in Malaysia to use a fork and spoon at the same time to cut and eat food rather than a fork and knife as is typical in the U.S. Many Malaysians are also used to eating with their hands instead of utensils.



**Use of left hand for certain actions is taboo in Malaysian culture, especially for eating, because the left hand is used for body hygiene and is considered the “unclean hand.” Washing of the hands before and after the meal is important.**

Behavior such as talking while chewing or taking large bites is also generally considered unacceptable in Malaysia. However burping or belching may be acceptable for men. Be sure to have a conversation with your student about the table manners that you expect in your household.

In Malaysia there is strong protocol for how a guest behaves at the table. For example, it is polite for guests to wait to eat until the eldest person has started the meal. It is also polite to at least sample the items served. Even though your student is part of your family and not a guest, s/he will likely uphold these norms, especially at first when s/he may be unsure of how to behave appropriately. When your student first arrives, explain mealtime, etiquette and use of the kitchen in between meals.

# TEENAGE LIFE

---

Teenage lifestyles in Malaysia are very similar to American teenage lifestyles in many ways. Malaysian teenagers enjoy hanging out with friends and going shopping together at the mall or going to see a movie. Occasionally, friends will get together after school on weekdays, but usually they see each other on the weekends or during school breaks. Most students in Malaysia do not have afterschool jobs because they spend much of their “free time” studying.

## ***Peer Relationships & Dating***

Your student might be shy in making friends at school and in their host community. Malaysian teenagers tend to be very polite and friendly and are generally not used to having cliques in schools. During their first few weeks as a student in an American school, your student might need some encouragement in joining sports teams or clubs to help them make friends. Malaysian teenagers tend to seem spontaneous when making plans – it is normal for them to call and invite friends to go out at the last minute. By contrast, American students and their families tend to plan outings and social events well in advance, typically listing things on “a family calendar.” A family calendar is unusual in Malaysia; if it is your practice to use one, make sure to explain the concept and your expectations to your student.

Most students will be happy to befriend students of the opposite sex at school. However, in Malaysia, if a boy and a girl were to spend time together alone, in public it would be considered a “date.” Teenage dating in Malaysia is generally discouraged, although this is changing in Malaysia’s urban areas. Regardless, public displays of affection are taboo.

## ***Social Events & Parties***

Parties in Malaysia, when they occur, probably seem tame to your student compared to teenage parties in the U.S. A teenage party in Malaysia would usually consist of some friends getting together to watch a movie or play games. Unsupervised house parties and parties with alcohol or drugs are unheard of in Malaysia especially considering that the consumption of alcohol is forbidden by Islam, and the possession of marijuana and other drugs are illegal in Malaysia, just as they are in the US.

Parties of this nature are a stereotype of teen culture in the U.S. Your student may be familiar with this stereotype and feel nervous about facing this aspect of U.S. life. Be sure to have a candid conversation with your student about teen culture in your community and how you expect him/her to handle party situations.

Curfews are carefully established by parents, so your student will probably not be uncomfortable if a curfew is the tradition in your house.

## ***Clothing & Appearance***

Malaysian teenagers generally dress more conservatively than teens in the U.S. It might be an adjustment for your host student to become accustomed to U.S. fashion. Most students will dress in an American/Western style and enjoy wearing jeans and a tee-shirt. However, Malaysians generally don’t dress in clothing that reveal large areas of their bodies; they try to dress modestly at all times. Malays and Indians may wish to dress in traditional clothing, but most teenagers prefer casual clothing unless it’s a special holiday or special occasion.

Students are not allowed to have eccentric hairstyles or piercing during their school years in Malaysia and most parents frown upon it. Makeup is acceptable for teenage women in Malaysia although it is not permitted at school. For more about school dress, see School Life.



**If your student wishes to dye his/her hair or get piercings on their body while in the U.S, please make sure this is acceptable to your student's natural family.**

## ***Transportation***

The legal driving age in Malaysia is 18 years old. Most teenagers have their parents drive them to school or to meet up with friends. Students from larger cities may be accustomed to using public transportation, but in general, your student will most likely rely on you to get around. Since planning in advance in Malaysia is not typical, you may have to discuss with your student what are his/her transportation options.



# SCHOOL LIFE

---

School is a central part of your exchange student's life. Through the process of being selected to become an exchange student, your student has already had to demonstrate very strong academic proficiency, study English for many years and achieve success in school. However, the culture of U.S. schools is very different from those in Malaysia and your student will be making a rather big adjustment.

Before school starts, it is important to prepare your student for what to expect and how negotiate challenges, in order to have a good experience at school. Once school has begun, follow up with your student on a routine basis to discuss how s/he is adjusting to the differences s/he finds between school in the U.S. and school in Malaysia.



*School Lunch Room*

## ***Daily Schedule***

In Malaysia the school week can go from Monday to Friday, or Sunday to Thursday, depending on the school. The school day is usually split into morning and afternoon sessions; the older grades attend in the morning and the younger grades in the afternoon. This creates a shorter school day than a typical school day in the U.S.

Teachers, rather than students, move from class to class in Malaysian high schools. Your student will need to be

familiarized with how much time s/he has between classes as well as his/her school's tardiness policy.

## ***Classes & Schoolwork***

It is also common in Malaysia for a student's class to be his/her social circle because the class stays together for the whole year. In the U.S., it may be a challenge for your student to make friends when s/he encounters a different group of students in each class.

The Malaysian school system is exam-based. Classes are generally taught in lecture format, and students take qualifying exams at strategic points throughout their schooling that decide the track that a student's education will take from that point forward. Exams decide what students are able to study in high school and whether they may enter university. The U.S. practice of daily homework assignments, with homework factoring into the final grade, may be unfamiliar to your student. If this is the case s/he may benefit from reminders and encouragement so that his/her grade is not adversely affected.



*School work can seem very easy to Malaysian students, don't let them slack off and make sure they do their homework.*

*– U.S. Host Family*

Your student may feel overwhelmed by the option of choosing elective subjects to take in the U.S. and may desire assistance in making these choices.



**Find out how you can alert your student's guidance counselors and teachers in the beginning of the year that they will have an exchange student and how to best assist the school in serving your student.**

In order to prepare for rigorous testing, Malaysian students usually spend the majority of after-school-time studying. Your student may need guidance balancing study time with extracurricular activities and friends so that s/he has a positive social experience.



*...both girls spent so much time [in Malaysia] studying and in family and religious activities at home, that they had rarely had opportunities to plan their own social activities.*

– U.S. Host Family

### ***Teacher-Student Interaction***

In Malaysia, teachers are treated with the utmost respect; it is considered disrespectful to question the information that a teacher presents in class. Teachers are greeted at the beginning of class. Each time a student passes a teacher in the hallway; the student greets and bows respectfully to the teacher. You can imagine what a culture shock it might be for your student upon seeing the way some U.S. teenagers interact with their students. Your student may be uncomfortable with the comparatively casual nature of student-teacher interaction in the U.S. and the culture of debate that is often encouraged in U.S. classrooms. This cultural difference could cause misunderstandings between your student and his or her teachers. If your student doesn't actively participate in class, the teacher may perceive his/her inactivity as a sign the student doesn't understand the subject or is simply not interested in contributing to the class.



It may be helpful for your student's adjustment process to meet with the teachers in the beginning and explain some of the cultural differences in education. It will also be important for your student to understand the degree of independence and initiative that teachers expect from him or her in the classroom.



*When they had trouble figuring things out at school, we urged them to speak with their teachers and work out solutions for themselves.*

– U.S. Host Family

### ***Extracurricular Activities***

Sports and clubs commonly take place after school in Malaysia as well as on Saturdays. Encourage your student to seek out extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs, as a way to make friends.

### ***School Environment***

In Malaysian schools, there is generally much less "down-time" between classes when compared with a U.S. school where there are usually at least a few minutes to socialize between classes. A school environment that allows students to socialize between classes might seem unusually casual for your student. Additionally, public displays of affection in school between students of the opposite sex may make your student feel uncomfortable, as such contact is not allowed in public in Malaysia, and certainly not in schools. Be sure to follow up with your student about how s/he is settling into the school environment socially as well as academically.



## ***School Uniform and Dress Code***

All schools in Malaysia require students to wear uniforms. It may be an adjustment for your student to get up in the morning with enough time to pick out his or her clothes for school. U.S. schools usually have some kind of dress code of which your student should be made aware.

Changing for Physical Education, or other sports activities, may present a challenge for your Malaysian student as it is culturally unacceptable in Malaysia to remove clothes in front

of others—even those of the same sex. Muslim girls also may wish to wear long sleeves, a hijab (head scarf) or skirts over pants, even in gym class (see Religion Section). If your student has concerns about changing for P.E., it would be helpful to address these issues with the school.

## ***Parental Involvement***

Your Malaysian student may not be accustomed to parental involvement with his or her progress in school. If you intend to check your student's grades online, explain your intentions early on so that it does not appear to be an issue of lack of trust. Explain that your student need not be afraid if you look at his or her grades; this is a way for families in the U.S. to support students. In fact, the local coordinators are required by the U.S. government to report monthly on the educational progress of exchange students, and parents will be asked about the student's grades.

## **CONCLUSION**

---

Hopefully this handbook has helped you to begin forming a relationship with your student that is grounded in a solid foundation of effective intercultural communication. However, this book can only go so far. Your best resource for learning about Malaysian culture is learning it directly from your Malaysian student. Talking to your student is the very best way to learn about his/her needs, solve conflict and build trust.

Be sure to take a look at the resources section where you can find extra sources on Malaysia and Malaysian culture that form much of the research for this handbook. The appendices also include more information distributed by the Youth Exchange and Study ("YES") Program and other interesting facts.

We wish you the very best experience with your Malaysian student!

## APPENDIX A – REFERENCES

---

The following list of resources includes those that have been consulted in the process of compiling this handbook. We encourage you to seek them out as they all contain more information about Malaysia and Malaysian culture.

Andaya, B.W. & Andaya, L.Y. (2008). *MacMillan Asian histories: A history of Malaysia*. Honolulu, HI: Palgrave MacMillan & The University of Honolulu.

Ariff, M. (2010). A holistic approach to reforming Malaysia's economy. *East Asia Forum*. Retrieved from: <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2010/02/03/a-holistic-approach-to-reforming-malaysias-economy/>

Bindloss, J. & Brash, C. (2008). *Kuala Lumpur, Melaka & Penang*. Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd.

The Central Intelligence Agency. (2011). The world factbook online: Malaysia. Retrieved from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/my.html>

Danhi, R. & Martin, Y. (2008). *Southeast Asian flavors: Adventures in cooking the foods of Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia & Singapore*. El Segundo, CA: Mortar & Press.

Hooker, V. M. (2003). *A short history of Malaysia*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

King, V. (2007). *Customs & etiquette of Malaysia*. London: Simple Guides on imprint of Bravo Ltd.

King, V. T. (2008). *Culture Smart! Malaysia: The essential guide to customs & culture..* London: Kuperard.

Malaysia: Language, cultures, customs and etiquette. (2010). Retrieved from: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/malaysia.html>

Mehrabian, A. (1981). *Silent messages: Implicit communication of emotions and attitudes*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth

Mowe, R. (2007). *Southeast Asian specialties: A culinary journey*. Cologne: Konemann

Munan, H. (2001). *Culture Shock! Malaysia*. Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Center Pub. Co.

Richmond, S., Brash C., Karlin, A., Low, S. &, Presser, B. (2009). *Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei*. Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd.

## APPENDIX B – A GUIDE TO MALAYSIAN CUISINE

---

Food is an integral part of Malaysian culture and the wide variety of cuisine present in the country represents its rich diversity. This section describes some interesting food facts that you can use as talking points with your Malaysian student and as a way to learn a little more about life in Malaysia.

### Food Names

The names of Malay traditional food also implies the uniqueness of the meal. For example, "nasi dagang" literally means: traveler's rice. The nature of the rice is that it can last for a couple of days thus giving it its name. "Rendang" means "wok" and any food with the word "rendang" means exactly that: the food is stewed over long period in a wok.



### Style and Spice

Like the ethnic Malays in Malaysia, the ethnic Chinese use a lot of curry in their food and different types depending on the meal. Indian Malaysian cuisine often includes hot and spicy flavors. Their staple diet usually consists of either rice or flat bread which is eaten with various curries.



**A favorite especially during the Mooncake festival are mooncakes. This festival is when the moon is at its brightest all year. Rich and sweet, these special celebratory cakes are made with various fillings of sweet red bean paste, white lotus seeds, lotus seed paste and a whole egg yolk, symbolizing the full moon.**

### Hawker Stall's

Because they are cheaper when compared to traditional restaurants, these roadside venues are very popular for grabbing a quick, tasty meal. Similar in appearance to food carts around some of the U.S., the food at these stalls is actually considered very good; they serve fresh foods that are designed to eat while walking, or to take home such as nasi lemak, roti chennai, noodle soups, different types of kueh and other everyday foods.

Hawker stalls often develop variations on traditional fare. For example, Malaysian Indian hawkers have created unique versions of local dishes, which are not found in India. Even Hawker stalls that serve more Chinese food will still be spicy.



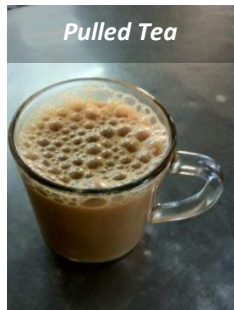
**Some even say, "Hawker stalls: dirtier the stall, the tastier the food."**

Though American fast food chains (MacDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, etc.) do exist in Malaysia, the idea of a quick meal is very different between Malaysia and the U.S. Many places in Malaysia are open late at night or even around the clock. Your student may be looking for markets and street stalls in order to grab a quick meal or a late-night snack, and may be surprised to learn that they are uncommon in most places in the U.S. outside large cities.

### Dessert

Common desserts are a myriad of kuih-muih (sweet and savory cakes) made with rice flour; other traditional desserts will tend to have coconut, or fresh fruit. Desserts in Malaysia are typically very sweet and include ingredients such as coconut milk, palm sugar, and flour. Fresh fruit is popular for dessert and desserts in Malaysia tend to make use of generous amounts of coconut milk. 'Junk food', in

Malaysia is usually healthier than U.S. junk food and includes dried snacks, chips, or preserved fruit. Chocolate is quite expensive in Malaysia and your student might consider it to be a special treat.



### **Beverages**

Cold drinks like ice lemon tea, syrups, fruit juices, flavored milk and carbonated drinks like Pepsi and Coke are common. One of the most popular beverages is also an old U.S. favorite: iced tea with lemon.

Many beverages are served in a cup or can. If purchased at a stall may be in a plastic bag with a straw. Many canned beverages around Malaysia are of fruit or vegetable juice rather than soft drinks as is more common in the U.S. Your student may be surprised and excited to try such a huge variety of beverages in the U.S. that are not offered in Malaysia.

### **Fresh vs. Frozen**

In Malaysia they do not have a lot of frozen foods. Most food is purchased fresh and used within a few days. Your student may be surprised at the size of your refrigerator/freezer unit.

## APPENDIX C – YES CULTURAL TIPS SHEET

TOPIC	CULTURAL INFORMATION	POSSIBLE SUPPORT ISSUES	SUPPORT ADVICE
RELIGION	<p>Even though many YES students come from countries that have large or majority Muslim populations, there are other students who are Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, Jewish, etc. Some students are very devout and religiously observant while others are not practicing. (Please also refer to the <u>YES Cultural Handbook</u> on differences regarding religious practices and following of religious rules which may differ greatly from country to country).</p> <p>The month of Ramadan is a time during which many Muslims fast from sun up to sun set (no food or drink). This special month is based on a lunar calendar and therefore does not correspond exactly with the solar, Gregorian calendar.</p> <p>Prayer is an important aspect of the religious life of practicing Muslims, who will generally pray five times each day, at specific times, which are religiously-dictated.</p>	<p>Diet: Practicing Muslims are not allowed to eat pork or consume alcohol; Hindus do not eat beef; many Hindus are vegetarians. In many religions, meat has to be prepared in a certain way prescribed by the religion (Halal foods/ Kosher foods).</p> <p>Fasting during Ramada for Muslims may mean that they do not participate in sports or feel left out during family meal times; swimming can be an issue; if participating in sports, not drinking water may be an issue</p> <p>While the prayers typically take no more than several minutes, finding a quiet and clean place for prayer can sometimes prove challenging, especially the noon prayer, which takes place during the school day.</p>	<p>Diet: Be mindful of dietary needs; discuss and look up ingredients in dishes; if a student does eat something forbidden, it is ok, but may need to stop once the mistake is discovered. Some host families choose to avoid eating the type of food that is forbidden; some offer different kinds of foods so that their host son or daughter can avoid the forbidden foods, while enjoying many of the same dishes his or her host family does.</p> <p>Fasting is common in a number of religions in some form. Some families choose to participate in fasting with their students as a way of experiencing a new cultural through their hosting. Students may be excused from participating in sports during Ramadan.</p> <p>Praying does not have to be done in a mosque or temple; a private space can be provided; it is helpful to find out the direction Mecca is and not to disturb the student while praying. Many schools allow the students to use a corner of a room designated for “study hall” or a school counsellor’s office.</p>

TOPIC	CULTURAL INFORMATION	POSSIBLE SUPPORT ISSUES	SUPPORT ADVICE
	<p>Many religions require specific levels of modesty in dress or specific types of dress. In the case of Islam, there is a wide array of interpretation of “modest dress” but many observant Muslims feel that head covering for women is essential and many would include the covering of legs and arms for both men and women as essential elements of modesty in dress. Again, there is a widely varying interpretation among the religiously observant Muslims about what is required.</p> <p>In Islam, the saliva of dogs is to be avoided, as it is seen as unclean.</p>	<p>Ablutions: practice of religious cleansing (basically, of the face, hands and feet) before prayer can result in wet floors/</p> <p>Some people not used to seeing women who cover their hair, will find the practice awkward. The head cover will not stop a student from participating in normal family and school life (with the exception maybe of joining a coed swimming team in some cases). Some students who wear the head covering might feel somewhat rejected by their peers in their schools because the head covering is unusual to see in most U.S. high schools.</p> <p>Students may be afraid or reluctant to live with dogs Many religiously observant students would strongly prefer not to touch dogs. Some may not realize themselves that the prohibition is actually against the saliva of the dog and would not necessarily preclude them from walking the dog for example. However, it is the case that the religious root of the aversion to dogs is also compounded by the very practical consideration in many countries from which the YES students hail, that a great number of dogs are, in fact, dangerous because they are generally used as guard dogs or are strays prone to biting.</p>	<p>Since wet floors in a bathroom may be seen as quite OK in the context many students are coming from, explanation of expectations regarding dry floors and using towels to soak up any water left on the floor would help them meet expectations in the host family’s home. Stepping inside the bathtub, rather than using the sink for the ablutions can help a lot.</p> <p>Students who use head covering make the decision to wear a veil on their own and will not view it as subservient (as is often interpreted in the West). They see the head covering as an essential element of their religious observance and are not embarrassed by. A frank and open conversation about their religion and the part the head covering plays in their observance can help to demystify it and even lead to some good discussions about what “modest” dress may mean to different communities.</p> <p>Keep the dog out of the student’s room and don’t expect the student to pet the dog; this does not mean the student cannot live with a dog; many students come to like their host family’s dog and overcome that fear.</p>



TOPIC	CULTURAL INFORMATION	POSSIBLE SUPPORT ISSUES	SUPPORT ADVICE
		Going to church or mosques participating in host family's religious services.	Students can participate in religious services of host family; there is nothing wrong with attending a different religious service; however, host families should not force a student to attend church if they feel uncomfortable doing so.
<b>SOCIAL LIFE AND GENDER ROLES</b>	Many students come from more hierarchical societies where respect of elders is stressed and fathers may be dominant. They may also be used to segregation of males and females. These societies stress dependence on others and doing many things as a group, not as individuals. People are very socially minded and often have social gatherings. Relationships are extremely important and saving face is a major concern. People can be very spontaneous and live in the here and now.	Students may not be used to being independent and doing things on their own. Female dominance may be difficult for them. Touching of members of the opposite sex may be considered inappropriate whereas touching of same sex friends may not be an issue. Public appearances can be extremely important and there is a difference in public vs. private behaviours. Strong reliance on friends and families may result in what could be considered excessive communication with family and friends. Spontaneity can be interpreted as lack of planning or not being on schedule.	Understanding of these differences as well as an explanation of these differences are a first step. Modelling by elders or advice from friends could be very helpful. Giving students time to adjust and be mindful of differences in touching and space differences is helpful. Knowing that reliance on friends and family is very important and gaining trust is a prerequisite for building a relationship. It is important to know that relationship building may be slower than in the U.S. It is based on helping each other and sharing secrets, not on doing activities together. By helping someone and doing things for them, you show that you care for them.
<b>COMMUNICATION STYLES</b>	Students are generally used to more indirect communication styles. That means they will not directly state what they think but will expect the listener to decipher the message and to find out what they really mean. Students rely on the context and on nonverbals to convey a message. It is also important to tell the listener what they think the listener wants to hear and not to offend people, especially when they are in higher positions, so they can save face. It is also polite to refuse things that are offered (food, for example) with the expectation that it will need to be	The indirect way of communicating and not directly stating what they really need, think, or want can lead to many misunderstandings - from confusion to a perception that the student is "lying" or "manipulative". For example, a student will find it more acceptable to give vague answers or make excuses instead of saying "no". They will also avoid direct confrontation at all cost and prefer to work through third parties who can mediate for them. Another tendency may be to exaggerate things, for several people to talk at the same time, or to get very loud and excited when they feel strongly about something (some Arab cultures). Other cultures may be very quiet	Know that what students say may not be what they really mean. It takes time to get to know the student and to build a trusting relationship. If the student thinks that you do not care for him or her by doing things for them, they may shut down and not be willing to do anything. They will say yes but have no intention of doing things because that is what they think you want to hear.  Silence may not mean that they agree; in fact it may mean that they should not object and shows that they do not agree (again, being respectful). Open ended questions such as "why did you do this?" are not productive; instead, closed statements followed by some silence may be better in getting students to

TOPIC	CULTURAL INFORMATION	POSSIBLE SUPPORT ISSUES	SUPPORT ADVICE
	<p>offered several times before they can accept. Likewise, when told “no”, they may argue/ ask repeatedly after being told “no”, since this is what they think will bring the expected result. Repetition is very acceptable.</p>	<p>(Asians, for example); for them it is important to be modest and respectful; this could be shown by not looking people directly in the eye and by speaking in a very low and soft voice.</p>	<p>open up (for example, “this ....must have been very difficult for you”, showing the student that you feel for them, understand them, and want to help them. When the need for confrontation arises, know that this makes them very uncomfortable and the use of a third party (maybe a teacher or religious person) may be helpful. It helps to use stories or accounts of personal or other people’s experiences to get a point across (could be fictitious, too) without mentioning people by name to avoid embarrassment.</p>
<b>HOUSEHOLD RULES AND FAMILY LIFE</b>	<p>Many students could be used to male dominance in their families. It could be that they did not have a lot of independence (may be more the case for females than males) and had a lot of very direct guidance from their parents. They may not be used to the concept of getting an allowance and may have no practice in spending money, either not wanting to spend any or spending too much. Household chores may not be something they are used to, especially males. Objects or personal things may be considered as belonging not to one individual, but to everyone in the family because it is one unit.</p>	<p>Families may find the students passive or needing too much guidance, direction, and/or attention. They may be perceived as lazy if they have to be constantly reminded to pick up after themselves or keep things clean. They could also be seen as immature. Some males may not be following instructions from females or feel uncomfortable in a female dominated household. Some communication practices may be perceived as “badgering”, not listening, or not following instructions. Using other people’s property could be an issue (stealing vs. sharing). Students could be expecting to be treated as guests at the beginning.</p>	<p>It may be advisable to enlist the help of a same sex person in advising the students. Doing things as a family and spending time together would be a good idea as well as giving a lot of direction and guidance at the beginning and slowly making changes. Taking the student to other families where behaviour patterns can be observed is also helpful. Of course, another good way to experience different family styles is by spending time with friends and their families.</p>

TOPIC	CULTURAL INFORMATION	POSSIBLE SUPPORT ISSUES	SUPPORT ADVICE
<b>TIME AND SPACE</b>	<p>Time is not as scheduled and more fluid in most of the YES countries. It is not as important to be on time. It may also not be common to plan things that will happen in the future.</p> <p>Personal space may not be as important and people could stand a lot closer during conversations.</p>	<p>Some students could be late or oversleep. They may want to stay up late. They may not be on time at school or for certain events the family is planning on. They may change their minds on whether or not they would like to do something or not openly state what they would like to do.</p> <p>Being physically close may make some people uncomfortable.</p>	<p>Students may need some time to adjust to a very time-oriented U.S. culture where it is important to schedule events ahead of time and to be on time. They may need some additional help in getting up or getting ready for events.</p> <p>You will need to offer an explanation on space differences and how people feel about it in different countries.</p>
<b>SCHOOL</b>	<p>School and studying may vary also. In some countries, there is a lot of homework and students are expected to work on their own when at home. In some other countries, studying may be done at school and not at home. There may be more group activities or very little discussion. Testing is different (multiple choice and open book tests may be uncommon). Writing styles, learning styles, teacher/student interaction are most likely completely different.</p>	<p>Students may have a difficult time adjusting to school and different expectations from teachers and host families. Students who do little homework or little independent work after school in their own countries may be struggling in school. Due to the idea of saving face and indirect communication styles, they may state they have done their homework and school is going well when in fact it is not. Teachers who have not had experiences with people from other cultures could be misinterpreting behaviours and ways of approaching homework and classroom interaction. In Asian cultures it is not expected to criticize or disagree with what the teacher is saying; they may be very quiet in class. In other countries, the classroom may be very loud and students work a lot in groups.</p>	<p>It is definitely a good idea to contact the school and the teachers early and get progress reports. It may be a good idea to monitor homework and to provide help (or enlist help), especially in the beginning. Get grade reports early and do not assume that the student's reports on school work are accurate. Get the teachers email addresses and check on progress regularly before there are any issues. Conversely, if a student studies all the time, encourage them to go out and spend time with friends. Working with friends on school work is also a good idea instead of not doing any homework. It is ok to help each other out but not to do the work for them or to copy from others. Certain subjects in school such as U.S. history or literature may need to be taken later on in the school year. After hour school clubs could help in making friends at the school and enlisting help with homework.</p> <p>Any issues regarding school should be reported to the volunteers early on so help can be set up before there are any problems.</p>

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

This publication is made possible through support from the United States Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. See <http://exchanges.state.gov>.

The following individuals are responsible for the contents of this handbook:

## **AFS Malaysia Volunteers:**

Noorliza Leow Abdullah  
Sheena Maria Moses  
Nazhatulshima Nolan  
Muhammad Azhan bin Mohamad Rabi  
Choo Ching Wong

## **AFS-USA Volunteers:**

Colter Mertlich  
Paula Mushrush  
Brian Quinn  
Bonnie Richardson

## **AFS Malaysia Staff:**

Siti Idris

## **AFS-USA Staff**

Ruth Quiles  
Robin Weber

AFS-USA maintains this handbook on behalf of its YES consortium partners including ACES, AIFS Foundation, CIEE and PAX.

Photographs courtesy of Colter Mertlich, Brian Quinn and Bonnie Richardson.