

Malaysia

Facts and Statistics

Location: Southeastern Asia. Shares borders with Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore and Brunei.

Capital: Kuala Lumpur

Climate: tropical; annual southwest (April to October) and northeast (October to February) monsoons

Population: 24,821,286 (July 2007 est.)

Ethnic Make-up: Malay 50.4%, Chinese 23.7%, indigenous 11%, Indian 7.1%, others 7.8%

Religions: Muslim 60.4%, Buddhist 19.2%, Christian 9.1%, Hindu 6.3%, Confucianism, Taoism, other traditional Chinese religions 2.6%, other or unknown 1.5%, none 0.8%

Government: constitutional monarchy

Language in Malaysia

The Malay language is an Austronesian language spoken not only by Malaysians but all Malay people who reside in the Malay Peninsula, southern Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, central eastern Sumatra, the Riau islands, parts of the coast of Borneo, Cocos and Christmas Islands in Australia. It is also very similar to Indonesian, known locally as Bahasa Indonesia.

In Malaysia, the language is officially known as Bahasa Malaysia, which translates as the "Malaysian language". The term, which was introduced by the National Language Act 1967, was predominant until the 1990s, when most academics and government officials reverted to "Bahasa Melayu," which is used in the Malay version of the Federal Constitution.

Malay Culture and Society

A Multi-Cultural Society

Malaysia is a multi-cultural society. The main ethnic groups are the native Malays as well as large populations of Chinese, and Indians. When visiting the country it is clear that the ethnicities retain their religions, customs and way of life. The most important festivals of each group are public holidays.

Although growing up, children are educated in the same schools and will eventually work in the same offices, few marry outside their own ethnicity. Families tend to socialize within their own ethnic group – all part of retaining their individual traditions and lifestyles.

Despite the ethnic differences there are commonalities culturally speaking.

Group Orientation

The family is considered the centre of the social structure. As a result there is a great emphasis on unity, loyalty and respect for the elderly. The family is the place where the individual can be guaranteed both emotional and financial support. When one member of the family suffers a financial setback, the rest of the family will contribute what they can to help out. Families tend to be extended, although in the larger cities this will naturally differ.

The Concept of Face

Malays, Chinese and Indians all strive to maintain face and avoid shame both in public and private. 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.

The desire to maintain face makes Malaysians strive for harmonious relationships.

Face can be lost by openly criticizing, insulting, or putting someone on the spot; doing something that brings shame to the group; challenging someone in authority, especially if this is done in public; showing anger at another person; refusing a request; not keeping a promise; or disagreeing with someone publicly. Conversely, face can be saved by remaining calm and courteous; discussing errors or transgressions in private; speaking about problems without blaming anyone; using non-verbal communication to say "no"; and allowing the other person to get out of the situation with their pride intact.