



Focus on MALAYSIA School Program

"My experience in Malaysia has taught me the values of appreciating different cultures, religions and the Malaysian way of life which will contribute to my future."

- Samuel McCosh, participant from New Zealand, 1992-93

Forty percent of Malaysia—the more industrialized portion, where glass-walled skyscrapers about low-rise spice shops—is on the Southeast Asian peninsula. The other 60%, less developed, is on an island shared with Borneo and Brunei, 400 miles across the South China Sea. Each portion is thick with equatorial rainforest. Malaysians themselves represent a collage of cultures. Native Malays share citizenship with ethnic Chinese and Indians, and though the state religion is Islam, Buddhist shrines, Hindu temples and Christian churches are as commonplace as mosques. Yet despite these cultural differences, Malaysia has minimal ethnic tension. Each culture retains its identity but shares its place in Malaysian society with remarkable ease. Visitors from other societies, too, are welcomed with warm hospitality.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Malaysia became part of the AFS international network in 1958. It has 13 chapters across the country; each represents a state and 3 in the Klang Valley. Local volunteers work hard year-round to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. AFS Malaysia welcomed AFSers from as many as 26 countries over the years.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

Landing in Malaysia

You will arrive in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. AFS Malaysia volunteers will meet you and your fellow AFSers and bring you to the Arrival Orientation Camp.

Arrival Orientation

This first Malaysian orientation will introduce you to the country, Malaysian life and the various aspects of the AFS experience. You will also get a short language orientation and other tips for your stay. Orientation will last between two and three days, after which you will join your host family.

Living in Malaysia

Lifestyle and Family Living

Thanks to the diverse structure of Malaysian society, your family may belong to any one of the main ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese or Indian. Customs, values and manners might be very different from those you are accustomed to. A modest and humble attitude will help in communication and adapting to your new environment.

Traditionally, Malaysian houses are made of timber, and blend into natural settings. These days, however, families may live in semi-western style houses, apartments, link houses, semi-detached or detached houses. Extended families often live together. Elders are highly regarded and respected. Malaysians have a relaxed attitude about time and punctuality.

When visiting a Malaysian house, it is customary to stop at the bottom step and announce your presence, or knock at the door and wait. Nobody walks through an open door uninvited (a man might be considered as having bad intentions toward the women of the household). After being invited in, visitors take off their shoes and leave them at the door. Most of the time, visitors will be served drinks and snacks, and Malaysians may be offended if food is refused.

Your host family, regardless of your age, will be protective of you and would like to know about your whereabouts. You may share a room with a member of the family or have a room to yourself. Bedrooms are not private. Family members can enter at all times, but your host parents' bedroom is out of bounds. Modesty, privacy and respect are shown while dressing or changing clothes or relaxing at home. Families will explain their rules for using the bathroom, showering, washing clothes and drying them.

Dress and Appearance

Two things are seen as public interest in a small town: dress and personal morality. A Muslim woman is expected to cover her arms, head and legs. Long-sleeved shirts, trousers and sarongs are acceptable. Short or mini skirts or tight spaghetti-strap dresses are not acceptable in small towns but propriety is slightly flexible in the city.

Usually you will have to change clothes in the bathroom. In some families, a *sarong* or dressing gown is worn when you are going to the bathroom for your bath. It is not advisable to undress in the company of others, even if they are of the same sex. Girls and boys are expected to wash their own underwear and clean and change their clothes daily. You will be expected to bathe twice a day, once in the morning and again in the evening before dinner.

A school uniform is worn in school at all times, with some common rules such as: no nail polish, short hair for boys and tied back long hair for girls, no jewelry or makeup, no ear piercing for boys.

Diet and Meals

Malaysia offers a range of mouth-watering food—spicy Malay dishes, an endless variety of Chinese food, exotic cuisine from North and South India, as well as local Nyonya and Portuguese dishes. Western cuisine is also easily accessible, and there are many international fast-food chains.

Chinese dishes come mainly from Cantonese and Hokkien kitchens. All feature soup, meat, seafood and vegetables. You may try exotic foods such as bird's nest, yap pot dish or shark fin soup.

Malay dishes are generally spicy. They resemble Indonesian and Indian cooking. Most dishes are characterized by the liberal addition of spices, chilies and coconut cream. *Satay* is cubed BBQ chicken or beef dipped in hot peanut sauce, eaten with square-shaped compressed rice and cucumber.

The Indian community is famous for curries and chilies. Rice, vegetable, milk, yogurt and lentils are frequently used in Indian cooking.

Fish is made for any occasion and in many styles. One favorite dish is *Yong Tau Foo*—stuffed paste made from fish or salted fish, filled with tofu, vegetables, eggplants or okra. Food on the table is shared by all the family. It is proper etiquette not to finish everything even if you love it and to break and eat a small piece at a time. It is imperative that you never use your left hand to pass things to others or for eating—always use your right hand. Use your left hand to wash yourself every time you go the bathroom. It is courteous to invite the elders to eat before you begin.

School

School plays an important role in Malaysian society. It not only gives knowledge but also helps the family in inculcating moral values and behavior. Teachers will look out for your welfare, and you can ask them for help anytime.

Most AFS students will be placed in form 4, 5 or 6 (with students age 15, 16, 17). School normally starts at 7:30 a.m. and ends at 1:30 p.m. from Monday through Friday. In states where Friday is a weekend day, school runs from Sunday through Thursday. Term holidays are usually one week in March, two weeks in May/June, one week in August and seven weeks in November/December.

To develop a common national identity and to promote integration, all Malaysian schools follow a common curriculum and syllabus. The language of instruction is Bahasa Melayu but English is a compulsory second language.

There is one major examination in primary school (in the final year—i.e., Year 6, age 12), and two major examinations in secondary school, in Form 3 and Form 5. After the Form 3 examination, students can decide to pursue their education in Form 4 in one of these categories—Pure Science, Social Science, Commerce or Technical—which most secondary schools provide. AFS students can choose which classes to join depending on their interests and availability.

Most schools in Malaysia (both primary and secondary) have computer labs, and learning to use the computer is compulsory.

The national school uniform for girls is a turquoise pinafore, white shirt or white *baju kurung* and turquoise *sarong*. For boys: olive green long pants and white shirt. Shoes and socks are white. The uniform and shoes cost around US\$30 per set.

Extracurricular activities, including sports and clubs, are conducted after school hours or on Saturdays.

Teen Life

Malaysian teenagers love sports. Soccer and badminton are the most popular games. Tennis, bowling, golf, squash, volleyball, swimming and horseback riding are also loved by many, especially those who live in the bigger cities. One can engage in sea sports such as surfing and jet skiing, or try martial arts and traditional games like *sepak takraw* (a foot-kick-ball type of volleyball), giant top spinning or kite-flying.

City teenagers like watching movies and going window-shopping. Some of them who are in the examination year will spend their free time staying at home to study or attending supplementary classes.

Dating is generally not encouraged among teenagers. As a Muslim country, the religious authority has the right to fine fellow Muslims who are found kissing or courting in public. All religions in Malaysia respect one another. Body contact between different sexes is frowned upon, although it is acceptable for men to walk with their arms on another man's shoulder and for girls to hold each other's hand.

When dining out, usually one person pays for all but is later reimbursed privately or the treat is returned another time.

AFS Activities

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Malaysia will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences.

Midway through your stay, you will get together with the other AFSers in your batch for another orientation called the Mid-Year Camp. This event is organized by the National Office. You will have a chance to talk about your placement situation and get advice about adjustment issues.

AFS Malaysia will give you the opportunity to see different places and cultures in Malaysia by placing you with another host family for two weeks during the latter part of your stay. Students will be given choices for placement—for instance, plantation, city/urban, suburban, traditional village (*kampung*), etc.

Some chapters may organize a brief home-stay for you with a family of a different race or religion so you can experience the spirit and excitement of their particular festivals. Because Malaysia's population is so diverse, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and other holidays are observed throughout the country. Depending on your placement, you will have the chance to savor a wide range of religious events. Some chapters may similarly organize a home-stay for a few days with a family of another race and religion during one of their festivals to experience the excitement and festive spirit.

Apart from the mid-stay orientation and a short home-stay in a different environment, your local chapter may organize activities and trips. However, you will be responsible for covering the cost of these trips.

To prepare you for your return home, there will be a national End-of-Stay orientation for three to four days, taking place usually one month before departure. The End-of-Stay is about looking back at your sojourn and also thinking of the future.

Language

The official language of Malaysia is Bahasa Melayu, but English is a compulsory second language. You will have one session of day-to-day survival Bahasa Melayu during the arrival orientation as well as a “refresher course” during the delayed orientation.

Travel

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Malaysia, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have some opportunities to travel with your host family, school or community organization. Independent travel is allowed only during school breaks and after receiving authorization from AFS Malaysia.

Spending Money

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do things such as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the related expenses are your responsibility. But remember that spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them. It is wise to learn to spend as they do.

The cost of living in Malaysia is relatively inexpensive. We recommend that about US\$1,000 should be sufficient for a year's expenditures, and you can open a bank account in Malaysia. Nowadays, credit card use is common in bigger shops and cities. If you prefer to have one, please make sure that the card is accepted in Malaysia.

Safety and Support

Malaysia is a relatively safe country, and you should do well if you follow the normal precautions you would at home.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Malaysian. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Malaysia may have additional rules.

Health Precautions

Before you come to Malaysia, AFS Malaysia will consult with the medical advisor on your medical report. AFS Malaysia is concerned with your health and vaccination history. You may be required to take appropriate shots and precautions before leaving home.

In addition, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Malaysia (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant, your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you may also need a visa to enter and reside in Malaysia. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate. However, it is best to check with your local Malaysian Embassy if you may enter on a tourist visa and apply for as student one after arrival.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents. US\$180 (or equivalent to RM600) is required for visa processing, and it is collected when the student has arrived in Malaysia.

Program Prices

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship opportunities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS' medical insurance; placement with your host; various orientations in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host country; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

Country Information

Geography and Climate

Malaysia is situated in South-East Asia, just north of the Equator. The neighboring countries are Singapore to the south, Thailand to the north and the Philippines to the east. The area of the country is 329,758 sq km, comparable to that of Germany,

covering two regions: Peninsular Malaysia and the states of Sabah and Sarawak, which are on Borneo Island.

Malaysia has a warm and humid climate throughout the year, with temperatures averaging 21°C-30°C /70°F-78°F. The annual rainfall is from 2,000 mm to 2,500 mm and humidity is high year-round.

Population

The population of Malaysia is about 27.7 million people. The three main racial groups are: Malays (50%), Chinese (35%) and Indians (10%), with diverse indigenous groups in Sabah and Sarawak. The Federal Capital is Kuala Lumpur with more than 1.8 million people.

Language

The official language is Bahasa Melayu. Other spoken languages are Chinese, Tamil and English, which is widely used all over the country.

Government

Malaysia comprises 13 states and two federal territories—Kuala Lumpur and Labuan (an island off the coast of Sabah). Nine of the states have hereditary rulers from whom the Supreme Head of State, the Yang *Di Pertuan Agong* (King) is elected every five years. The government is based on parliamentary democracy. The Prime Minister is the head of government. Each state has its own elected Chief Minister or *Menteri Besar* and its own State Assembly.

Religion

The official religion is Islam. Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and other religions are freely practised.

Launching Your AFS Experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to be ready, first make every effort to learn some key English words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language. Taking initiative to learn some Bahasa Melayu will be highly regarded and appreciated.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Malaysia, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Malaysia and its cultures.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Malaysia. This returnee will be an excellent resource regarding living as a Malaysian. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Malaysia will provide you with a package of country-specific information.

Malay people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

Curiously Malaysian

- ✦ Near Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, are the world's largest reserves of tin.
- ✦ The Petronas Twin Towers, at a height of 1,453 feet, were the world's tallest buildings until 2001, and they rise above the skyline of Kuala Lumpur.
- ✦ In the world's oldest rainforest jungle in Malaysia is the home of the Sumatran rhinoceros, the clouded leopard and Malayan tiger, the sun bear, the monitor lizard, and the orangutan, or "man of the forest."

How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student age (upon arrival)	15y to 18y	
Country data	Size	329,750 km ² 127,300 mi ²
	Population	27,730,000
	Official language	Bahasa Melayu
	Government	Constitutional monarchy
Currency	Ringgit, divided into 100 Sens	
Useful website	http://www.geographia.com/malaysia/	
AFS Malaysia website	http://www.afs.org.my	

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>