

MALAYSIA

Forty percent of Malaysia—the more industrialized portion, where glass-walled skyscrapers abut 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 and Hindu temples 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.

Community Service Program

AFS's Community Service program gives you the opportunity to share in and contribute to the life of a community in Malaysia by living and working alongside its members in a community-based service organization. At the organization, you will be asked to pitch in and offer assistance in whatever capacity might be needed and to share the knowledge and experience you have gained from your home culture in the process. No one expects you to be an expert with all the answers to local problems or the ability to change local conditions. Rather, you are expected to be a willing participant in a process of mutual discovery. This experience will present you with innumerable learning opportunities both personally and professionally.

Worldwide, AFS Community Service program participants contribute their talents and energies to a variety of social programs that range from protecting the environment to teaching children or adults, from assisting the elderly and the disabled to defending human rights, from enhancing public health to helping local businesses become established.

Past participants in Malaysia have been active in social projects. However, all specifics—including assignments, orientations, logistics and activities—vary depending on the program cycle.

AFS & Your Experience

AFS Malaysia became part of the AFS international network in 1958. Today it is known as *Antarabudaya Malaysia*—Malaysia Intercultural Exchange programs (ABM). *Antarabudaya Malaysia* has nine chapters across the country; each represents a state. Local volunteers work hard year-round to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. *Antarabudaya Malaysia* has welcomed AFSers from as many as 12 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.

Orientations

Immediately after participants arrive in Kuala Lumpur, they receive a three-day introduction to Malaysian culture and work ethics, a half-day tour of Kuala Lumpur and an introduction to Bahasa Melayu, the local language. In all, participants will have 20 hours of language lessons before starting work.

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS Malaysia will provide you with several others. AFS orientations offer participants a chance to meet for several days and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities

and self-examination. Sessions also provide language training as well as 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 people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences while preparing them to handle their community service assignments.

Living in Malaysia

Living arrangements

During the first two weeks, participants receive instruction in the local language and live with host families, sharing their daily lives, their meals and perhaps a host sibling's bedroom. Subsequently, participants stay either part-time at their worksites and part-time with families or full-time at their worksites, depending on their placements.

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, chillies 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 chillies. 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.

Health Precautions

AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Malaysia (which you can get from your government or find easily on the Internet) with your doctor at home, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs. Participants who are dependent on medications or have chronic medical conditions are difficult to place.

If you require 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.

Safety and Support

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.

Travel

AFS's Community Service programs allow participants to travel on their own through their host countries, typically for a week or more, to explore and absorb each country's cultural diversity.

Documents

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices in your region and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

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. It is your responsibility to obtain your visa and pay the fees. However, AFS will let you know how to proceed and will provide you with the documents you need to apply for the visa.

Program Prices

All participants are required to pay participation fee and do a mandatory fundraising. To get further information, please visit our website www.afscanada.org or contact us.

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's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; 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 southeast 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-23°C/70°F-73°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 21.3 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 1.5 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 practiced.

Launching your AFS experience

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that if you prepare prior to leaving, you will have the best experience. In order to get 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. Your effort to learn some Bahasa Melayu will be highly appreciated. Then, to familiarize yourself with life in Malaysia, visit your local library or search the Internet. AFS International's website, AFS.org, provides links to websites for each participating country.

Although every participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Malaysia. This veteran will be an excellent resource regarding living and working there. If you do not know a veteran, please contact your local AFS volunteer or AFS Interculture Canada office. In addition, AFS will provide you with essential information about your host country to prepare you for immersion in a new and exciting culture.

Finally, Malaysians will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised how much they already know about your country's history and politics. Therefore, you will find it helpful to be informed about current events in your home community and country.

How to Apply?

You first have to fill out the Preliminary Application form that you can find on our website at www.afscanada.org. If you don't have access to Internet, call us at (514) 288-3282 or 1-800-361-7248 and we will send you the document by mail.

Quick Facts

Country data	Size	329,750 km ² 127,300 mi ²
	Population	23,092,940
	Official language	Bahasa Melayu
	Government	Parliamentary democracy
	Currency	Ringgit, divided into 100 Sens
Useful website	http://www.geographia.com/malaysia/	
AFS Malaysia website	http://afsmas.tripod.com/	