

Malaysian culture

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MalaysianCulture. INTRODUCTION : Malaysia's has a multicultural and multiethnic population consisting of Malays, Chinese, Indians and Bumiputra of Sarawak and Sabah, in which people of different religions, countries of origins and race live in a peaceful and harmonious society has influenced its arts and culture. Each of Malays, Chinese, Indians and Bumiputra celebrates different festivities that they hold from their great great grandparents.

BODY : 1) First of all, Malays are the largest community in Malaysia. Hari Raya Puasa and Hari Raya Haji are the most significant festivities that they celebrate with families and friends.

Hari Raya Puasa, the day of celebration of marking the end of Ramadan (which is a month-long period where fasting takes place from sunrise to sunset) is the biggest event of the Muslim calendar. This is a time when you will see Malay families dressed up in their best traditional outfit like baju kurung and baju Melayu to mark this special occasion. Similar to the Chinese during Chinese New Year, the Malays also have the tradition of giving Angpau but on this occasion it is known as duit raya and is given in green packets.

Being a Malay and Muslim in Malaysia, the tradition is that, once a year during the festival of Hari Raya Aidilfitri, they prepare luxurious festive foods such as ketupat, beef rendang, lemang, satay and the Raya cookies. Then, Hari Raya Haji is celebrated approximately after 70 days the celebrations of Hari Raya Aidilfitri. The ancient Muslim festival of Hari Raya Haji, also known as the " Festival of Sacrifice" that is celebrated over two days by Muslims worldwide. The festival starts off with prayers by male volunteers and the sacrifice of sheep, goats and cows to symbolize Prophet

Ibrahim's readiness to sacrifice his own flesh and blood.) Next, the second major population is the Chinese people. They celebrate Chinese New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival and Hungry Ghost Festival. The date of the Chinese New Year is determined by the lunar calendar and it often falls annually in either January or February. Being a major event on the Chinese calendar, the Chinese residents celebrate this occasion in stylish red or gold colours. Spring cleaning for this festive season is essential to most Chinese and it is a common sight to see red pieces of paper with Chinese calligraphy bearing good wishes placed onto doors and walls.

The distribution of Angpau (red packets containing money) by parents and relatives to unmarried children is a common practice during this festive season. The Mid-Autumn Festival also known as Lantern Festival which falls on the 15th day of the eighth Chinese Lunar Calendar. This is a historical festival rather than a religious one. It marks the successful rebellion against the Mongol ruler dated back in 14th century China. Legend has indicated that the secret about a plot against the Mongolians was hidden inside the moon cake and the moon cake was distributed widely. Lanterns were used at night as signals from higher grounds and hilltop.

Today, this festival is celebrated with moon cakes and lantern hanging in the house. The lantern and the moon cakes have attracted many children and adults attention. Next, the seventh month of the lunar calendar is when the hungry ghost festival is celebrated. This event is a traditional Chinese festival celebrated worldwide by Chinese people and it involves the offering of food and burning of offerings for example incense and papier-mache material items such as clothes, gold, cars and houses as a form of ancestor

worship with the meaning of extending filial piety from descendants to their ancestors even after their deaths.

These offerings can be seen along roadsides and on open grounds as a means of appeasing and respecting the departed. In some areas of Malaysia you may even have the chance watching the Chinese operas which are staged to entertain the wandering spirits. During this festival, puppet shows are traditionally held along with live singing performances. 3) Deepavali is one of the significant events celebrated by the Indians. This is a festival when Indian communities are filled with lights, music, scents, arts and performances. Known also as the “ Festival of lights”, it is an occasion of celebration for both Hindus and Sikhs.

It marks the beginning of a New Year for certain North Indians, while some believe that the departed souls of relatives will descend during this time and rows of tiny oil lamps are used to guide them on a journey to the next world. During this festival, new clothes are worn, and vibrant and colourful lights, festive bazaars and cultural activities enliven the streets of the Indian communities across Malaysia. 4) Next, we move on to the Bumiputra. In Sarawak, Gawai Dayak marks the important date for the Ibans ethnic group and marks the end of the paddy rice harvest season.

The Ibans invite their friends, family and people from different ethnic groups to join in the gaiety celebrated in their longhouses. At the beginning of the ceremony, prayer is usually led by the tribal chief as a traditional way of seeking blessings from the gods, followed by dances performed by men wearing warrior attire. This is followed by the most important part of the ceremony; the miring, a ritual performed by the elderly who simultaneously

mutter a chant for peace, safety, protection and a plentiful harvest in the next season. In Sabah, Tadau Kaamatan is a harvesting celebration held by the Kadazandusuns ethnic groups of Sabah.

This is a celebration of thanksgiving offered to the rice gods by the farmers. Thus prayers are also held in hope for an ample harvest the following year. They give thanks to the gods and spirits for blessings and a good paddy harvest. Sabah natives wear their traditional costumes and enjoy a carnival-like atmosphere, which is usually stretches from dawn to dawn. Tapai, their homemade rice wine is freely served during the festivities. Then, there is the Unduk Ngadau, a traditional beauty contest, in which, the fairest in the land will participate, and a Kaamatan Queen will be selected.

This is however no ordinary beauty contest, as it apparently owes its origins to the legend or story of the Kadazandusun's genesis and their creator, Kinoingan's sacrifice of his only daughter, Huminodun for the love of his people. Besides that, Christmas Day, which is held annually on Dec 25th, Christians celebrate the Nativity, or the birth of Christ. Here in Malaysia, since we live in a multi cultural country with nosnow, all Malaysians tend to celebrate this festive seasons visiting friends and families. Shopping malls put up their decorations and lights and Christians put their Christmas trees up one to two weeks before Christmas.

As with everywhere, Christmas preparations are done up to the last minute of December 24th. On Christmas Eve, Christians dress up in their new clothes and go to church for midnight services. Before mass begins they normally have sketches or plays by the children and Christmas carolling. In most Christian homes, it is a tradition to say a short prayer before doing

anything else. After the prayers most families have wine and fruit cake to toast Christmas. After this, gifts are exchanged and they snap plenty of photos of the person opening the gifts. Once the excitement has died down they head on to bed.

On Christmas day, families have a feast and this is the time when friends of all faiths make their rounds to wish Merry Christmas. Some visitors bring presents and gifts. The children laugh with joy as they receive gifts and money in a modified version of 'ang-pow' from friends and relatives.

CONCLUSION : Each ethnic group has its own underlying culture that separates it from the others, and they have achieved different levels of integration. Perhaps the easiest way to begin to understand the highly complex cultural interaction which is Malaysia is to look at the open door policy maintained during religious festivals.

Although Malaysia's different cultural traditions are frequently maintained by seemingly self-contained ethnic communities, all of Malaysia's communities open their doors to members of other cultures during a religious festival, to tourists as well as neighbours. Such inclusiveness is more than just a way to break down cultural barriers and foster understanding. It is a positive celebration of a tradition of tolerance that has for millennia formed the basis of Malaysia's progress.