US Forces Pacific Culture Guide

MALAYSIA

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of 2 parts:

Part 1 "Culture General" introduces the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment – Southeast Asia in particular (Photo: Malaysian, Royal Thai, and US soldiers during Cobra Gold 2014 exercise).

Part 2 "Culture Specific" describes the unique cultural features of Malaysian society. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location (Photo: US sailor signs autographs for Malaysian school children).

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at http://culture.af.mil/ or contact AFCLC's Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, representing the importance Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and

economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize these behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems among others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the ways different cultures define family or kinship, a deployed military member can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors Across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition,

although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

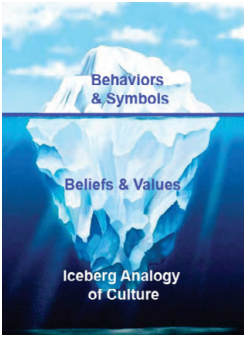
One of our basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different according to our cultural standard. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Consequently, we assume that individuals falling into the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for our actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is physical evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central facet of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels

of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout Southeast Asia, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

Southeast Asia includes 5 countries on the mainland (Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam) and 5 maritime countries in

the North Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea (Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Brunei). As early as 150 BC, the scattered communities on the mainland traded with and paid tribute to the dominating kingdoms of China and India. China maintained a presence in Vietnam for over 1000 years, while's India's influence was felt mainly as its inhabitants spread Hinduism, Buddhism, and later Islam across the region. Southeast Asia's most famous ancient empire, the Khmer, ruled for 4 centuries beginning around 800 AD from its center at Angkor in Cambodia. Later, Thai kings expanded across the mainland, while a Hindu kingdom from India united the Indonesian archipelago.

China began to halt its expeditions to the region in mid-15th century, just as European nations began sending theirs. The Portuguese were the first to conquer a Southeast Asian settlement in 1511, although their influence in the region was short-lived. Observing their success, the Dutch and English moved into the area as well. The Europeans sought to acquire trade routes and territories, and from the 17th through the 19th centuries the Dutch worked to consolidate their power in today's Indonesia, the Spanish their control of the Philippines, the English their hold over Burma and Malaysia, and the French their control over Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. By the beginning of the 20th century, virtually all of Southeast Asia was controlled by colonial powers; only Thailand remained independent.

During World War II, Japan invaded and occupied portions of Malaysia, Burma, Thailand, and the Philippines. After the war, independence movements regained traction, and following years of struggle against the occupying Americans, the Philippines became the first country in Southeast Asia to gain its independence in 1946. Other countries endured years of instability and conflict on their way to independence. In Vietnam, communist rebels battled and defeated the French but then engaged the US in a controversial war. A civil war in Cambodia ended in the rise to power of the Khmer Rouge,

during whose reign in the late 1970s almost 2 million people died. A few years after the Dutch ceded power in Indonesia, a dictator took control in a coup and ruled for 32 years before resigning in 1998. Similarly, a military junta wielding absolute power has ruled Burma since 1962. Since the 1990s, Southeast Asia has largely enjoyed renewed stability. Both Thailand and Malaysia now have an affluent, educated middle class; Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam are well on the road to recovery from decades of conflict; and even Burma has recently held elections and initiated reform to a civilian democracy.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community.

Differences in the physical environment affected the social and political structures that historically developed in Southeast Asia. Where people were nomadic or semi-nomadic, systems of government were less permanent and bureaucratic. In areas where populations were more settled, a reliable tax base allowed the development of more elaborate and permanent governing structures. These early states, though, often found it difficult to extend their authority into the remote highlands, where small tribal groups resided, and the islands, where some groups lived permanently in water communities of small boats.

Significant changes occurred in Southeast Asia around 2000 years ago as peoples from China and India began to move into the region (see *History and Myth*). New leaders formed new empires and states, and spiritual beliefs and practices changed as religious leaders introduced new religious traditions (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Many colonial-era governments, fearing the threat that an educated class might hold, largely denied education and civil liberties to most Southeast Asians and discouraged political

activities. Political participation swelled around the time of independence, although many post-independence political structures in the region were dictatorial and repressive. While most countries are healing from their 20th century conflicts, many governments continue to reflect authoritarian elements. Elites across the region continue to seek to control access to the political system. They are typically from the country's dominant class, which is often comprised of members of a particular ethnic group.

Some countries, such as Vietnam and Cambodia, are somewhat ethnically homogenous, while others, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, are much more diverse. Many countries also have minority communities of ethnic Chinese and Indians. So-called hill tribes, minority groups with distinct ethnic and linguistic identities, are found in Burma, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), formed in 1967, is a regional intergovernmental organization whose goal is to promote economic and political cooperation among its members, including the creation of a free trade community by 2015. ASEAN priorities include fostering economic and diplomatic relations with India and China, which have been strained due to longtime territorial disputes in the region. The European Union has a strong relationship with the organization and has taken steps to deepen trade and business links. The US also has close political, security, and economic relations with most of the member states.

The relationship between Japan and the countries of Southeast Asia has improved significantly since World War II, and Japan is a crucial economic and aid partner today.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help

preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

The earliest populations of Southeast Asia were animists, which means they believed that many different spirits inhabited elements in the natural environment, such as trees and rocks, or were represented in natural phenomena, such as thunder and lightning, or represented deceased ancestors. In many areas today, these traditional beliefs are still very important, and many Southeast Asians incorporate them in their practice of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity.

Indian traders and priests first brought Hinduism to Southeast Asia in the 1st century AD, where it eventually became the dominant religion in several kingdoms. In the 14th century the influence of Hinduism began to wane as people turned to Islam. Today, although there remain only small communities of Hindus in Indonesia, the Hindu principles of absolutism and hierarchy remain significant in politics across the region.

Indian merchants also brought Buddhism to Southeast Asia beginning in the 1st century AD where it became well established in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Later, Chinese immigrants introduced Buddhism to Vietnam and Singapore. Many Southeast Asian mainlanders are Buddhist today, although their beliefs and practices may also include some animist and Hindu traditions.

Chinese people spread the teachings of Confucius primarily in what is today Vietnam and Singapore. These teachings embody a complex belief system emphasizing stability, consensus, hierarchy, and authority that still influences ideas of social harmony across the region.

Islam reached Southeast Asia beginning in the 10th century through Muslim traders from the Middle East, China, and India,

with a large number of Southeast Asians converting to Islam beginning in the 14th century to escape the Hindu caste system. The largest population of Muslims in the world, approximately 234 million, lives in Indonesia today. Muslim minority communities in Thailand and the Philippines have historically suffered economic and political marginalization.

Christianity was introduced to the region by European colonizers beginning in the 16th century. Today, although parts of Indonesia have Christian communities, the Philippines is the only predominantly Christian country in Southeast Asia.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

Family life is very important to Southeast Asians and relationships among family members are highly valued. As in the US, kinship is generally traced through both parents. Children are generally very respectful of their parents, and parents are devoted to their children, making economic or other sacrifices as a matter of course to ensure their well-being.

Traditionally, close proximity of kin was a valuable resource in Southeast Asia's agriculturally-based villages. Families were large and close-knit as individual members supported each other economically and socially and the rhythms of family and village life mirrored those of the agricultural cycle.

Family life in Southeast Asia has changed in recent decades as societies have become more economically and socially diverse due to industrialization and urbanization. Today, a much wider variety of occupations is open to both men and women, and the middle class is growing in cities across the region. Women have fewer children today than they did 3 decades ago, and

many households in the cities no longer contain 3 or 4 generations of extended family but are mostly nuclear families.

Many Southeast Asian countries that have large rural hinterlands, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, also have large metropolises, such as Jakarta, Manila, and Bangkok. In these sorts of countries, there is a sharp rural-urban divide in economic and educational opportunities that results in stark differences in rural and urban family life. In rural villages, extended families may remain intact whose activities revolve around agricultural production, while in urban centers the household is usually much smaller and family structures are much more diverse.

Although arranged marriages are much less common today, most Southeast Asians depend on their family's input when choosing a marriage partner. The ages of both the bride and groom have increased as young people postpone marriage to pursue economic and educational opportunities, and divorce rates have risen in recent decades. Of note, in Indonesia and Malaysia Muslim men are allowed to practice polygyny, or have more than one wife, if they can afford to support them all. For these Southeast Asians, matrimony and divorce are under the jurisdiction of Islamic law.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

Southeast Asia's dominant philosophies and religions (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity) privilege the male's role as provider and stress female subordination. Despite most countries' commitment to gender equality, women across Southeast Asia may find participation in the business and political spheres difficult, and in some countries there is still a marked preference for sons over daughters.

Despite these challenges, there is widespread acceptance of women in the workplace, though women usually receive less pay than men. Industrialization has provided new opportunities for women, and many Southeast Asian women continue to work beyond marriage and children. Hundreds of thousands of Southeast Asian women even relocate to other countries to work as nurses and domestic workers.

Within the agricultural sector, women produce about 50% of food in the region and represent a significant share of the agricultural labor force. They are particularly involved in harvesting rice, tea production, and working on rubber and fruit plantations. Women generally have access to education and training, and in Thailand and the Philippines there are actually more post-secondary female graduates than males.

Opinion on sexual orientation and gender identity is most liberal in the Philippines, where homosexuality is legal and there have been attempts to pass anti-discrimination legislation to protect sexual minorities. But in many parts of Southeast Asia homosexuals suffer discrimination and stigmatization. Malaysia criminalizes homosexuality and cross-dressing, and in Indonesia transgender individuals are often the victims of violence and exploitation.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

Southeast Asia is linguistically very diverse; of the approximately 6000 languages spoken in the world today, about 1000 of them are found in Southeast Asia. Many of the ancient indigenous languages that were present in the region have become extinct as a result of war, cultural and economic domination, and small population size.

The languages of mainland Southeast Asia belong to 3 groups: Austro-Asiatic (such as Cambodian and Vietnamese), Tai (such as Thai and Lao), and Tibeto-Burmese (including highland languages and Burmese). Languages that belong to these 3 groups are also found in India and China. Conversely, most of the languages spoken on the islands of Southeast Asia belong to the Austronesian family, a group of languages originating from southern China and Taiwan.

The colonial powers that controlled Southeast Asia until the 20th century primarily promoted and used their own languages including French, Dutch, English, and Spanish. Since independence, several states have named one local linguistic variety as the "standard," such as Bahasa Indonesian and Bangkok Thai, and promoted its use over both European and other local languages. Recently, after years of aggressively promoting their national languages, many Southeast Asian countries have re-introduced English as a language of instruction in school and allowed ethnic Chinese and Indians to attend school in their own languages.

Ancient Southeast Asians developed their own writing systems based on scripts from India and China. Today, Vietnamese, Malaysian, Indonesian, and Filipino, like English and most western European languages, use the Latin alphabet, while Burmese, Laotian, Thai, and Cambodian use writing systems derived from ancient Indian scripts.

Southeast Asians are rarely confrontational or highly demonstrative and emotional in their communication. They value respect as a key component in maintaining social harmony, and conveying respect is a significant aspect of both verbal and non-verbal communication. For example, proper greetings, such as pressing the palms together and slightly bowing as is common in Thailand, are extremely important across Southeast Asia.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Throughout their history, the cultures of Southeast Asia have willingly borrowed and adapted ideas, practices, and institutions from beyond the region. This willingness is evident in the history of education. Prior to colonization, both Hindu and Muslim traders and migrants from India and beyond brought their own traditions of education to the region, and local Southeast Asian communities adopted these curricula and educational methods to their needs.

Later, during the colonial period, the European powers were largely uninterested in providing education to Southeast Asians because they viewed them principally as agricultural laborers. If the colonial powers did provide educational opportunities, they were largely confined to members of privileged groups.

Still later, as populations across the region began to resist colonization, the lack of educational opportunities became a topic around which to rally. In many countries, local activists adopted western educational methods but also drew on local traditions to devise new educational opportunities through which they articulated their arguments for independence.

Today, education in Southeast Asia is viewed as both a tool for developing the region and as a human right. Consequently, in most countries education is open to every citizen regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic background. Rapidly growing populations challenge most national governments in

their goals of providing 12 years of basic education to all, often forcing a sacrifice in the quality of services. Students in both urban and rural areas often suffer from a lack of adequate classrooms, teachers, and good text books, although primary school enrollment averages an excellent 93% in the region.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Conversely, in most Southeast Asian cultures establishing and maintaining relationships within the group can take precedence over accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner.

Southeast Asians' emphasis on the well-being of the group and maintaining social harmony often means people will deliberately avoid embarrassment of themselves and others, a strategy often referred to as "saving face." Many Southeast Asians try to manage their time efficiently while still showing respect to their co-workers and maintaining "face."

Time is maximized by multi-tasking, and engagements usually start when scheduled. Networking is very important in Southeast Asia, and new contacts are often best made through a high status third party who knows both parties well. Only after the establishment of a good rapport can business negotiations proceed.

Public and private spaces often overlap in a way that is unfamiliar to Americans. Shop owners may also live at their place of business, so entering into a public space can also mean entry into an individual's private space. Consequently, customers and clients should always show proper respect.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Most of Southeast Asia's forms of creative expression, such as art, architecture, dance, music, and theater, reflect the diversity of cultures and ethnicities of the region as well as the influence of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Ancient and elaborate Hindu temples and highly symbolic statues of Buddha are found in many countries. Similarly, across Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, Islamic art and architecture intermingle with examples of Hindu and local animist traditions.

Traditional classical dance and theater are enjoying a revival after some forms came close to extinction during the wars and conflicts of the 20th century. These traditions trace back to the ancient kingdoms of the region and often include dancers dressed in elaborate masks and costumes. Ancient forms of shadow-puppet theater, in which paper puppets are manipulated against a lighted backdrop, are also popular in several countries.

Combat sports of Asian and Western origins are popular in Southeast Asia today. With the end of the colonial-era ban on martial arts, indigenous forms such as *Pentjak Silat* and *Bersilat* combined with other Asian forms to make up *Muay Thai*, *Pencak Silat* and *Kali*, the main components of today's Mixed Martial Art fighting.

The Southeast Asian Games are an important regional sporting event. These biennial games bring together over 4,000 athletes for 11 days of competition in the Olympic sports and promote regional cooperation and understanding.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease

and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

As expected from Southeast Asia's location on the water, more fish is consumed than any other form of animal protein. Rice, a grain that has been cultivated in the region for thousands of years, is the primary food staple. Everyday meals are typically simple, consisting of chopped pieces of meat and vegetables that are fried or steamed and served with rice, often accompanied by spicy chili condiments. Influences from India and China are obvious in popular dishes such as spicy curries and rice noodle soups. Members of Muslim communities in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines typically do not eat pork or drink alcohol.

Malaria, HIV/AIDS, and the lack of clean drinking water are the main health concerns in Southeast Asia. With an estimated 15% of worldwide cases coming from the region, malaria is a major problem. The HIV/AIDS epidemic was delayed in reaching Southeast Asia but turned into a major cause of death throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Since then, due to successful HIV prevention programs including those aimed at sex workers and their clients, transmission rates have steadily declined, and recent HIV/AIDS incidence rates have been similar to those of the US. Access to clean water has increased in most regions but in Cambodia and Laos half of the population still lacks access to clean drinking water.

All countries are faced with the rise of non-communicable diseases among their aging populations, and most face the threat of emerging infectious diseases, such as the avian flu.

The countries of Southeast Asia confront many challenges in providing health care for their growing populations. Rapid but unequal socioeconomic development has resulted in significant disparities in health and access to healthcare. Despite these

challenges, most countries have experienced a continual increase in life expectancy since the 1950s.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Most Southeast Asian communities practiced wet-rice and slash-and-burn agriculture for centuries before the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century. In addition, Southeast Asia's geographical location between China and India as well as its position on navigable waterways which connect the West and Middle East with Asia and Australia made the area an important center of trade well before European presence.

With European expansion into the area came the introduction of plantations and the mechanization of agriculture as well as the entry of the region into the global marketplace. Worldwide demand for rice increased dramatically in the 19th century, further changing the agricultural landscape of the region. Today, all 3 agriculture types – wet-rice, slash-and-burn, and plantation – are still practiced in the region and all have caused serious ecological damage such as massive deforestation and an increase in the production of greenhouse gases.

Beginning in the 20th century the region experienced a dramatic industrialization process with growth rates exceeding even those of developed nations. Explosive growth in exports such as textiles, electronics, auto parts, and petroleum lead to double-digit economic growth, greatly increasing local GDPs. Though roughly 1/3 of the population currently lives below the poverty line, regional economies have grown and now supply both skilled and semi-skilled workers to other countries.

The 2008 global financial crisis caused damage to the economies of Southeast Asia. While the financial sector did not engage in high-risk lending practices, there was a severe drop

in exports due to a global reduction in spending from which the countries are still recovering.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. After the colonial period, the countries of Southeast Asia have expanded at different rates and currently experience varied levels of economic development. Their places in the global market range from Singapore, which has the third-highest GDP world-wide, to Burma and Cambodia which are ranked among the poorest countries in the world.

Prior to colonial rule, the region's inhabitants were expert farmers, having adopted domesticated rice from India and China and developed complex rice-farming techniques, or mariners who traded across the region. European colonists brought additional skills in metalworking, agriculture, sailing, and navigation. The introduction of commercial agriculture, mining, and an export-based economy during the colonial period placed Southeast Asia on its current technological path.

Southeast Asian nations are generally open to trade and investment, having transformed from inward-looking economies dominated by agriculture to outward-looking, market-oriented economies in just a few years. As China's "backyard," Southeast Asia is often seen as the site of economic competition between China and the US and between India and Japan. Despite lingering mistrust of China because of several unresolved maritime territorial disputes, some Southeast Asian nations welcome China's investment in infrastructure, energy, agriculture, and mining. About 15% of Southeast Asia's total trade is conducted with China. By comparison, about 12% of Southeast Asia's trade is conducted with the US.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Southeast Asian society at large, we will focus on specific features of Malaysian society.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Note: Modern Malaysia comprises 2 detached regions separated by about 400 miles of the South China Sea. An extension of mainland Southeast Asia, Peninsular Malaysia borders Thailand in the North and Singapore in the South. The narrow waterway that separates Peninsular Malaysia from the Indonesian island of Sumatra is the Strait of Malacca.

East Malaysia, sometimes called Malaysian Borneo, occupies the northern part of the island of Borneo and comprises the Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah. Occupying about 30% of Borneo, East Malaysia encircles the independent Kingdom of Brunei on Borneo's north coast while the remainder of the island belongs to Indonesia.

Although the 2 regions share some history, each region developed uniquely. Consequently, this guide distinguishes events and populations either by "Peninsular Malaysia" or "East Malaysia." By contrast, the term "Malaysia" refers to territory of the entire modern nation.

Similarly, the term "Malaysians" refers to all citizens of Malaysia, regardless of their ethnicity or place of origin. Malaysians comprise several ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. About half of the population identifies as Malay, an indigenous ethnic group. Another roughly 12% of Malaysians are members of over 50 other indigenous groups. Around 23% are Chinese (also known as Chinese Malaysians) while about 7% are Indian (or Indian Malaysians).

Overview

Malaysia's position on the major maritime trade routes between the Middle East, India, and China greatly influenced its historical trajectory. From ancient times, merchants and explorers from diverse cultures and religious traditions traveled through the region as indigenous and foreign powers struggled for control of strategic ports and seaways. Since independence in 1957, Malaysia has confronted regional instability and ongoing ethnic tensions to become an economically developed and politically stable nation.

Prehistory of Malaysia

The oldest archaeological findings suggest that people settled East Malaysia at least 40,000 years ago when Borneo was still connected to mainland Southeast Asia by a land bridge. The descendants of these early inhabitants include some of Borneo's indigenous groups, such as the Dayak (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Some scientists believe that humans settled Peninsular Malaysia as early as 25,000 years ago. Descendants of these indigenous people today include various groups of Orang Asli, the "original people," and Orang Laut, the "sea people" (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Early History of Peninsular Malaysia

Beginning about the 1st millennium BC, successive waves of the ancestors of modern Malays migrated to the region from Sumatra. In the first few centuries AD, traders became increasingly active on the Strait of Malacca, helping to create economic and cultural links among Southeast Asia, China, India, and the Middle East. Malay kingdoms forming at the time adopted new concepts of government, art, and religion – including Hinduism and Buddhism (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) – introduced by South Asian traders (Photo: 2000 year old Bujang Valley ruins).

Kingdom of Srivijaya: Beginning around the 6th century, the Buddhist empire of Srivijaya expanded from Sumatra to eventually control the Strait of Malacca, most of the islands of Sumatra and Java, parts of Borneo, and much of Peninsular Malaysia. The kingdom absorbed smaller Malay kingdoms between the 7th-11th centuries, growing wealthy through trade in spices, silk, jewels, and tropical woods with India and China. Beginning in the late 12th century, competing empires and pirates targeted Srivijaya's riches and control of trade. The empire finally fell in 1400.

The Malacca Sultanate

The Malaysian government traditionally traces the beginning of the country's history to the early 15th century. At that time, a Hindu-Buddhist prince exiled from Srivijaya (see "Myth" below), established the Kingdom of Malacca ("Melaka" in Malaysia today) on Peninsular Malaysia's southwest coast. Due to its good harbor and strategic location, the Kingdom soon controlled the Strait of Malacca where traders transporting spices, gold, tin, silks, porcelain, and tea passed.

The Spread of Islam: Arab and Persian Muslim merchants began visiting Peninsular Malaysia as early as the 6th century. Islamic influence grew substantially in the 13th century as Muslim merchants expanded trade throughout the Strait of Malacca. In 1444, Malacca's sultan (king) Muzaffar Shah converted to Islam and declared his sultanate (kingdom) a Muslim state. Malacca soon became a hub for the spread of Islam throughout the Malay kingdoms (see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*) (Photo: Modern replica of 15th century Mansur Shah's palace in Malacca).

Malacca Falls to the Europeans

Malacca's reputation for lucrative trade spread to Europe. Spurred by potential profits and the chance to spread Christianity in Asia, the Portuguese reached Malacca in 1509, conquering it in 1511.

Portuguese Control: In an attempt to reclaim his rule, the Malacca sultan – allied with his son, the sultan of Johor – conducted military raids against the Portuguese. This effort effectively prevented the Portuguese from developing their desired trade monopoly. For the remainder of the 16th century, the Portuguese, the sultanate of Johor, and the powerful Aceh sultanate on Sumatra fought each other to control regional trade as Malacca's wealth and influence declined.

Dutch Control: Meanwhile, the Dutch were emerging as the region's dominant trading and naval power. From their base on the island of Java, the Dutch leveraged an alliance with the sultan of Johor to take control of Malacca in 1641. Because the Dutch focused their energies on developing Batavia (Jakarta, the modern-day capital of Indonesia) as a center of trade, Malacca continued to decline during Dutch rule (Photo: Christ Church in Melaka, erected by the Dutch in 1753).

The Arrival of the British

With the goal of protecting Britain's interests in India and taking a larger role in the expanding India-China trade, the British acquired the island of Penang off Peninsular Malaysia's west coast in 1785. Almost 35 years later, Britain expanded its regional presence when it negotiated the right to settle Singapore in 1819. Five years later, the British acquired Malacca from the Dutch in a treaty that defined the territories that would eventually become Indonesia and Malaysia.

In 1826, Britain united Penang, Singapore, Malacca, and other peninsular territories into the Straits Settlements. These settlements attracted traders and migrants from all of Asia and the Middle East. They were especially attractive to migrants from southern China who sought opportunities following the discovery of tin ore and the opening of tin mines.

British Control of Peninsular Malaysia

During this period, the British largely focused on establishing and maintaining their ports and coastal trading posts, while allowing a number of Malay sultanates to compete for control of

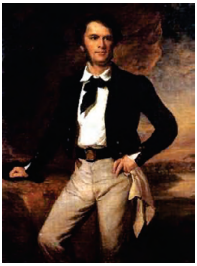
the rest of the peninsula. In the mid-19th century, the British grew uneasy as Thai kingdoms continued their belligerence toward Malay sultanates in the North and as conflicts erupted elsewhere between Malay sultans and Chinese tin miners.

The British Resident System: Fearing that the Malay sultans could not maintain order in the tin-producing regions, the British became increasingly involved in their political affairs. In the 1870s, the British implemented a system of indirect rule whereby the sultanates were forced to take on "Residents," British advisors whose advice was mandated.

In 1896, the British compelled the 4 tin-producing sultanates to sign a treaty that established the Federated Malay States. Although other Malay-controlled sultanates managed to remain relatively independent of British control for a few more years, British influence soon expanded again. In 1909, the British forced Thailand to cede sovereignty over 4 sultanates, and 5 years later, compelled the still-independent Johor sultanate to accept a Resident. Through these acts, Britain effectively controlled Peninsular Malaysia by 1914.

The British on Northern Borneo

Until the 19th century, the territories of East Malaysia on Borneo developed separately from Peninsular Malaysia with little European involvement. The Kingdom of Brunei was historically the dominant force in northern Borneo.



British expansion in the 19th century eventually grew to include territories on Borneo. In 1841, the Sultan of Brunei appointed British adventurer James Brooke (pictured) governor of the state of Sarawak following Brooke's support in suppressing a revolt against the sultanate. The British gradually brought the state of Sabah under their control through lease agreements and political maneuvers. In 1888, Britain consolidated its northern Borneo holdings by granting protection to Sarawak, Sabah, and the Kingdom of Brunei in exchange for control over their foreign policy.

Economic Development and Societal Divisions

Following further tin ore discoveries in the late 1800s, the British built railways, roads, and ports and other infrastructure that facilitated economic diversification, such as British-owned rubber plantations. While Malaysia was the world's largest exporter of natural rubber by the early 20th century, most residents benefitted little from this economic development. A significant aspect of British colonialism in Malaysia was the connection between ethnic identity and economic occupation.

Malays: In the 15th century, the people of Malacca began calling themselves ***Melayu*** or Malay. Eventually, all Malay-speakers who practiced Islam (see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*) adopted the label. While the British employed a small number of Malays as civil servants during the colonial period, the vast majority of Malays engaged in traditional small-scale agriculture and fishing. Generally, the British discouraged Malays from pursuing any other work.

Chinese: Seeking to escape political instability and poverty in their homeland, several million Chinese (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*) immigrated to Malaysia from 1800-1941. Most early migrants formed closed communities near their work in tin mines. The Chinese eventually acquired control of the tin industry. Some later migrants participated in the colonial economy as wage laborers and entrepreneurs, often active in trade, retailing, and finance in urban areas (Illustration: Chinese couple in Malaysia in 1880).

Indians: Because their rubber plantations required large work forces not available locally, the British imported thousands of foreign laborers, primarily Tamils from southern India (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*). Indians from other regions migrated to urban areas where they engaged in shopkeeping and moneylending, or joined the police or army.

In British-controlled Malaysia, society was strictly divided. Economic advancement was primarily open only to Chinese

since they dominated the tin industry. The British implemented policies separating English, Malay, and Chinese school systems (see p. 1 of *Learning and Knowledge*) to help maintain these ethnically-based social and occupational divisions.

Emergence of a Malay Identity

Although Muslim Malay-speakers had been calling themselves "Malay" for centuries, they based their primary identities on their places of residence or loyalties to certain sultans. Malay identity acquired a deeper significance in the early 20th century. Unlike other Southeast Asian colonies, Malaysia did not experience a strong anticolonial (anti-British) nationalist movement. Instead, Malays banded together in ethnically-based political and cultural organizations because they feared domination by the more economically successful Chinese. As some Malays began to promote the idea of a Malay nation, ethnic tensions began to simmer.

World War II: The Japanese Invasion and Occupation

To fuel its expansionist goals in World War II, Japan targeted Southeast Asia's oil reserves, including those discovered in 1910 in East Malaysia. Consequently, Japan invaded Peninsular Malaysia in December 1941. By February 1942 Japanese forces had expelled the British and occupied the entire peninsula.

Over the nearly 4 years of Japanese occupation, Malaysia's ethnic tensions crystallized under Japan's discriminatory policies. The Japanese largely favored the Malays, allowing many of them to retain their civil service positions. By contrast, many Chinese joined a guerilla resistance movement against the Japanese who in turn persecuted and repressed them. Generally, the occupation was a grim period. The Japanese targeted the Chinese population through the Sook Ching (means "purge through cleansing") massacres, resulting in over 50,000 deaths. They also sent both Chinese and Malays to work on the infamous Thai-Burma Railway, where an estimated 100,000 laborers died (Photo: Japanese troops in Kuala Lumpur in 1942).

The British Resume Control

Following Japan's surrender in August 1945, Britain resumed administration of its territories in Peninsular Malaysia and took control of Sarawak and Sabah on Borneo as crown colonies. Although the war showed that colonial rule was not necessarily a permanent state, a united struggle for independence still failed to form.

The Growing Importance of Political Parties: In 1946, the British proposed a Malayan Union encompassing all of its peninsular territories except Singapore. Because Malays and non-Malays would enjoy equal rights in the proposed Union, Malay nationalists objected to the plan, founding the United Malays National Organization (UMNO). The British withdrew the Union plan for 2 reasons: strong UMNO opposition, expressed in large-scale strikes, demonstrations, and boycotts, and the unexpected and unwanted support of the plan by the Chinese-dominated Communist Party of Malaysia (CPM).

The Federation of Malaya

After negotiations, the British proposed the Federation of Malaya designed to provide Malays certain special privileges, such as autonomy in decisions regarding Malay customs and religion. This significant change, plus citizenship requirements that favored Malays, dissatisfied many Chinese and Indians. Despite their protests, the British implemented the plan in 1948, while guaranteeing eventual self-rule.

The "Emergency": Many Chinese saw the privileges granted Malays in the Federation as a betrayal, especially given the Chinese population's sacrifices against the Japanese in World War II. The CPM exploited this Chinese frustration as civil conflict erupted and the British declared a state of emergency in mid-1948. The CPM's military arm, the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA) began a rural insurgency that continued for the next 12 years (Photo: Special Constables escort rubber plantation workers in 1950).

Although the persistent insurgents enjoyed some initial success, they became a minor threat by 1951 due to their poor organization and unpopularity. The British military forced many Chinese to relocate to newly-formed villages in an attempt to isolate the insurgents. This action successfully undermined MRLA's support and led to its defeat. While the Chinese had access to improved health and educational services in the new villages, they continued to protest unfair treatment.

The Alliance: While the British had promised eventual self-rule, ongoing disagreements between the ethnic groups stalled progress. Eventually, the Malays agreed to share political power only if they received substantial support in improving their economic status. Upon agreement from the Malaysian Chinese Association and the Malayan Indian Congress to recognize Malay privilege, the UMNO formed a partnership with them. Beginning in 1952, this "Alliance" won a series of elections and became the predominant political voice.

Independence

As a necessary step to self-rule, a commission proposed a constitution in 1956 that contained several compromises. It proposed Islam as the state religion while guaranteeing religious freedom (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). It proclaimed Malay the national language, yet called for English to be a national language for several more years. Significantly, it gave Malays special rights and privileges while defending the rights of non-Malays. Following the constitution's 1957 ratification, the Federation of Malaya – consisting of all of Britain's Peninsular Malaysian holdings except Singapore – became an independent country.

The Birth of Modern Malaysia

Singapore (pictured) requested to join the Federation but was refused for fear that the addition of Singapore's large Chinese population would tip the Federation from a majority Malay to a majority Chinese state. Instead, the Federation proposed a new association among the Federation, Singapore, Brunei, and the Borneo states of Sabah and

Sarawak that would be majority Malay. In 1963, an amended constitution proclaimed the birth of modern Malaysia. Of note, the Kingdom of Brunei eventually opted to remain independent. After 2 years, due to unresolved disagreements, Singapore seceded from Malaysia and became an independent country.

Ethnic Tensions in the Young Country

In the new country, the Chinese protested economic programs exclusive to Malays and policies requiring the use of the Malay language. The Malays in turn accused the Chinese of having amassed wealth at their expense. Although the Alliance retained power in the 1969 elections, it lost a large share of the vote to an opposition party supporting the abolition of Malays' special status. When Chinese and Indian opposition party supporters gathered in Kuala Lumpur to celebrate election results, riots ensued that resulted in the deaths of 200 people.

New Economic Policy: In response, the government redoubled its support to Malays by implementing the 1971 New Economic Policy (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*). Intended to reduce poverty among all ethnic groups and end the association between occupation/social status and ethnicity, the policy actually perpetuated unequal treatment.

The Rise of the National Front

Despite challenges, Malaysia maintained a stable political system. In 1972, the UMNO joined other parties to form a broader, interethnic coalition called the National Front (***Barisan Nasional*** – BN, see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*). Typically supportive of educational and economic policies that favor Malays, the BN continues to dominate politics today.

The Mahathir Era: UMNO leader Mahathir Mohamad (known as "Mahathir," pictured) took office as Prime Minister (PM) in 1981, beginning a 22 year tenure. Chinese and Indian Malaysians did not welcome his election, associating him with policies privileging Malays. Mahathir initially focused on basic economic reforms such as privatizing state industries, promoting joint-ventures,

and growing export-oriented industries (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*). In the mid-1980s, he responded to rising ethnic tensions with severe tactics, including arrests of opposition leaders and restrictions on civil liberties. Upon Mahathir's retirement in 2003, his hand-picked successor, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (known as "Abdullah"), took office as PM.

21st Century Leadership

Abdullah was initially very popular, vowing to continue the fight against poverty. Although his popularity carried him through a victory for the UMNO and its BN coalition in the 2004 elections, public perceptions of corruption dogged him. The rise of a new coalition of opposition parties – the People's Alliance (***Pakatan Rakyat*** or PR, see p. 6 of *Political and Social Relations*) – during the 2008 elections forced the BN to lose its decades-long hold on Parliament. Abdullah resigned in March 2009.

Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak (known as "Najib," pictured with President Obama in 2011) succeeded Abdullah. In 2013 elections, UMNO received just 47% of the popular vote but won 60% of the parliamentary seats, leading to accusations of electoral fraud. Despite this controversy, the UMNO-led BN coalition maintained its hold on power and Najib retained his office. Although Najib previously expressed strong pro-Malay sentiments, since taking office he has stated that his administration aims to treat all ethnic groups fairly.

Malaysia continues to face challenges as it strives to become a prosperous, developed country. These challenges include ongoing ethnic and religious tensions (see p. 8 of *Religion and Spirituality*) and a fragile political climate with growing political opposition (see p. 6 of *Political and Social Relations*). In addition, Malaysia's limited human rights protections, as in the case of opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim (see p. 6 of *Political and Social Relations*), provide opportunity for politically motivated judicial harassment.

Myth

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. While many Malaysian myths reflect Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic themes (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*), Malay folktales often teach lessons about morality and justice through trickster characters and the use of humorous situations.

The Founding of Malacca

After Prince Parameswara was driven from Singapore, he reached Moar, where he remained until one night a great swarm of lizards infested the place. Although the people killed the lizards and threw them into the river, the lizards returned again the next night. Eventually, Moar became intolerable due to the smell of the dead lizards. Parameswara gave Moar a 2nd name, ***bewak-busok*** or stinking lizard.

Forced to leave Moar, Parameswara arrived at another place where he started building a wooden fort. That night, his work rotted away. He rebuilt the fort the next day, but it rotted again the next night. He called that place ***cotaburu***, or the rotten fort. Because he could make no progress, Parameswara departed yet again.

He then returned to the shore of the sea near the banks of the river Bartam, where he hunted and rested beneath a tree. One of his dogs found a white deer mouse (notably alert mouse and not to be confused with mousedeer – see p.4 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) which attacked the dog, forcing it into the water. Parameswara was pleased, and said "This is a fine place, where even the deer mice are full of courage. Let us found a city here." Parameswara's men agreed. Parameswara then named the city after the tree under which he had rested, the ***Malacca*** tree, the name the city retains today [Photo: Buildings along the Melaka River in Melaka (Malacca)].

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
Malaysia

Political Borders
Brunei: 237 mi
Indonesia: 1,107 mi
Thailand: 314 mi
Coastline: 2,905 mi

Capital
Kuala Lumpur

Demographics
Malaysia's population is about 30.5 million, making it the world's 43rd most populous country. Its population growth has slowed in recent decades, primarily due to decreased fertility rates (see p. 3 of *Sex and Gender*). Presently, the annual population growth rate is 1.44%, down from an average of 2.6% from 1960-2000. Malaysia has undergone steady urbanization since independence, with the urban population growing from 25% of the total in 1960 to 74.7% in 2015. About 80% of the population reside in Peninsular Malaysia.

Flag
Adopted in 1963, the Malaysian flag is modeled on the design of the US flag. It includes 14 alternating red and white stripes of equal width with a blue rectangle in the flag's upper left. Within the blue field are a yellow crescent and yellow star with 14 points. The stripes represent the equal status of the 13 Malaysian states and the federal government, while the star represents the unity of these entities. Because blue is the traditional color of Malay rulers, the blue rectangle symbolizes the unity of the Malay people. The yellow crescent is a traditional symbol of Islam, Malaysia's official religion (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Geography

Malaysia consists of 2 land masses separated by the South China Sea with a total land area of 126,895 sq mi, making the country slightly larger than New Mexico. Peninsular Malaysia, also known as western Malaysia, is an extension of the Asian continent that extends as a peninsula from mainland Southeast Asia. It borders Thailand in the North, the Strait of Malacca to the West, Singapore and the Johore Strait to the South, and the South China Sea to the East.

Comprising 60% of Malaysia's total land area, East Malaysia (also known as Malaysian Borneo) occupies the northernmost 30% of the island of Borneo, encircles the Kingdom of Brunei, and has a long coastline on the South China Sea. The remaining 70% of Borneo belongs to Indonesia. Malaysia also includes many islands, the largest of which is Labuan, off the coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Just 1.7 mi wide at its narrowest point, the Strait of Malacca provides the shortest route between the Pacific and Indian oceans. Malaysia's strategic location on this important waterway shaped its history and development as a nation (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*).

Both Peninsular and East Malaysia have coastal plains with forested mountainous interiors. While forests still covered 64% of the country in 2005, those existing along the coasts and rivers have been largely cleared either for settlements or palm and rubber plantations. The resultant deforestation has had significant environmental consequences. At 13,451 ft, Malaysia's highest mountain, Gunung Kinabalu (pictured), is also Southeast Asia's highest peak.

Climate

Peninsular and East Malaysia have similar tropical climates. Although conditions vary by altitude, temperatures range between 73°F-93°F year-round with relative humidity between 80% and 90%. Malaysia receives heavy annual rainfall due to southwest monsoons which arrive between April and October and northeast monsoons between October and February.

Environmental Issues

Decades of deforestation due to commercial logging and agriculture, road building, and residential development has caused flooding, landslides, river siltation, and a resultant scarcity of fresh-water fish. Among other initiatives, the government has established several national parks, forest reserves, and wildlife sanctuaries in an attempt to preserve the country's tropical rain forests (Photo: Aerial photo of deforestation in East Malaysia).

Water pollution dates to the late 19th century, when tin mines (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*) and cash crop plantations began dumping waste and runoff into Malaysia's rivers. The country's lack of adequate treatment facilities for household waste water and sewage has resulted in waterway pollution. Urban areas also suffer air pollution from motor vehicle emissions. In addition, the use of fire to clear land in neighboring Indonesia results in serious air pollution. Known as "the Haze," this annually-recurring period of air pollution typically forces school closures amidst health concerns.

Natural Hazards

Malaysia's natural hazards include flooding, landslides, and forest fires. Floods resulting from heavy monsoon rains and occasional strong storms are often intensified by deforestation. The flood risk to local populations is highest in the low-lying, highly populated coastal areas of Peninsular Malaysia. Landslides are also a threat in mountainous regions.

Government

Malaysia is a federal constitutional monarchy with parliamentary government. The country divides into 13 states, each with its own constitution and local government, and 3 federal territories (Kuala Lumpur, Labuan, and Putrajaya) administered by the Ministry of Federal Territories. Adopted in 1957 and amended in 1963 (see p. 9-10 of *History and Myth*), the constitution outlines the system of government and the rights and privileges of Malaysian citizens.

Executive Branch

Conference of Rulers: The Malaysian constitution preserves the position of hereditary rulers (8 sultans and 1 raja) in the 9 states that were sultanates in the British colonial period (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). The 4 states that were not sultanates are led by appointed governors. The 9 hereditary rulers and 4 governors together form the Conference of Rulers (***Majilis Raja-Raja***), which approves judicial appointments, rules on administrative policy, and deliberates on national policy. In addition, the 9 hereditary rulers elect a king from among their ranks for a 5-year term.

The constitution designates the King of Malaysia, known as ***Yang di-Pertuan Agong*** or the Supreme Head of the Federation, as head-of-state. Although the military and civilian services owe him their loyalty, the king holds largely ceremonial powers, acting only on the advice of the Prime Minister (PM) and the PM's appointed cabinet. Malaysia's current king, Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah of Kedah (pictured), began his 5-year term in 2011.

The highest level of executive authority resides with the PM, the head-of-government. The PM is typically the leader of the political party that holds a plurality of seats in the parliamentary House of Representatives. Current PM Najib Razak took office in 2009 and retained his office in 2013 elections.

Legislative Branch

Malaysia's legislature is a 2-chamber Parliament consisting of a 70-seat Senate (***Dewan Negara***) and a lower 219-seat House of Representatives (***Dewan Rakyat***). Each of Malaysia's 13 states elects 2 senators, while the king appoints the remaining 44 senators, including senators for the federal territories. Senators serve 3-year terms. Popularly elected, members of the House of Representatives serve 5-year terms. While either house may initiate legislation, only the House of Representatives may legislate funding. In order to enact a law, both houses and the king must approve the legislation.

Judicial Branch

Malaysia's judiciary comprises 2 systems. Based on Islamic law, the ***sharia*** system includes state-level high courts, subordinate courts, and courts of appeal. The *sharia* courts have authority over family, personal status, inheritance, and religious matters for Muslims only – about 61% of the population (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). A secular system of courts has authority in civil and criminal matters for all Malaysians, as well as in family law for non-Muslims. This system's highest court and court of final appeal is the Federal Court, composed of a chief justice and 10 judges. Critics note several human rights problems with Malaysia's judicial system. These include laws that grant the government wide latitude to detain individuals without trial and the use of caning as punishment (Photo: The Palace of Justice in Putrajaya).

Political Climate

Malaysia's political climate reflects its ethnic, and to a lesser extent, religious divisions. Malaysia's earliest political parties, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association, and the Malayan Indian Congress (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*), were largely dedicated to the respective interests of their majority constituencies. While these 3 parties achieved significant electoral success as an interethnic coalition (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*), the Chinese and Indian parties were often forced to subsume their interests to the coalition's pro-Malay platform.

Since achieving independence in 1957, Malaysia has enjoyed relative political stability as coalitions led by the UMNO have maintained a steady hold on the PM's office. Currently sharing power in a coalition called the National Front (***Barisan Nasional*** or BN), UMNO continues to support the preeminent position of Malays and select other indigenous groups. Implementing the latest in a series of pro-Malay economic development programs (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*), UMNO also aims to protect Malay culture and uphold and defend Islam as the official religion.

Malaysian opposition parties face several hurdles to competing on equal terms with the ruling coalition. These hurdles include disproportionate parliamentary seat distribution that favors the UMNO; restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly; and government harassment. For example, over a period of several years, the government pursued charges of sexual misconduct against prominent opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim which many observers believe were politically motivated. In early 2015, a court upheld Anwar's 5-year prison sentence, effectively ending his political activities and influence.

Despite these obstacles to political opposition, Malaysian politics has recently become more competitive. The BN failed to win a 2/3rds majority of parliamentary seats for the first time in 2008, then failed again in 2013. Observers suggest the BN likely lost voters when Chinese and Indians withdrew their support due to dissatisfaction with government corruption and BN-supported pro-Malay affirmative action policies.

The primary opposition coalition, the People's Alliance (PR, or ***Pakatan Rakyat***) includes the Democratic Action Party, the Parti Keadilan Rakyat, and the Parti Islam se-Malaysia. These parties represent significantly different constituencies and policy platforms. After widespread protests following the 2013 election, some experts noted that the political climate continues to encourage rather than lessen ethnic polarization.

Defense

The Malaysian Armed Forces (***Angkatan Tentera Malaysia*** or ATM) consist of ground, maritime, and air branches. The ATM holds responsibility for the defense of the country and domestic stability. Due to its experience during the "Emergency" period of civil conflict (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*), the ATM has extensive experience with counter-insurgency and continues to support extensive military-police cooperation. Malaysia is also a large contributor to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations (Photo: US Navy personnel share submarine functions with Royal Malaysian Navy personnel).

In 2004 the Ministry of Defense introduced the National Service Program intended to increase patriotism, national integration, and racial unity among Malaysia's youth and the military. Under the program, randomly drafted 18-year-olds participate in a military-based 3-month training program. In early 2015, the government announced plans to temporarily suspend the program as a cost-cutting measure and to review and improve the program.

Malaysian Army: The Malaysian Army (***Tentera Darat Malaysia*** – TDM) consists of 80,000 active duty personnel. Divided into 2 military regions and 4 area commands, the TDM includes 1 special forces brigade, 14 maneuver brigades and regiments (including armored, mechanized, light, air maneuver, and aviation), and 1 Combat Service Support regiment. The TDM's 50,000 reserves are organized as the Territorial Army, consisting of 16 light infantry brigades, 5 highway security battalions, 2 border security brigades, and 2 combat support regiments (Photo: US Marine and TDM personnel during 2011 exercises).

Royal Malaysian Navy: Composed of 14,000 active-duty personnel and 1,000 reserves, the Royal Malaysian Navy (***Tentera Laut Diraja Malaysia*** – TLDM) is organized into 3 regional commands. It has 10 frigates, 2 tactical submarines, and 37 patrol and coastal combatant vessels. The TLDM also has an aviation wing and 1 marine commando unit.

Royal Malaysian Air Force: Consisting of 15,000 active-duty personnel and 600 reserves, the Royal Malaysian Air Force (***Tentera Udara Diraja Malaysia*** – TUDM) has 1 air operations headquarters, 2 air divisions, 1 targeting and logistics command, and 1 integrated area defense systems headquarters. It has 67 combat capable aircraft, organized into 2 fighter squadrons, 4 ground attack squadrons, 1 ground attack/ISR squadron, 1 maritime patrol squadron, and 4 transport squadrons.

Malaysian Air Force Rank Insignia

LEADING AIRCRAFTMAN

AIR CORPORAL

AIR SERGEANT

FLIGHT SERGEANT

WARRANT OFFICER
1st/2nd Class

2nd LIEUTENANT

LIEUTENANT

CAPTAIN

MAJOR

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

COLONEL

BRIGADIER GENERAL

MAJOR GENERAL

LIEUTENANT GENERAL

GENERAL

FLIGHT MARSHAL

Security Issues

During the 2000s, Malaysia focused on countering terrorist networks in Southeast Asia. Unlike some other Muslim-majority nations, Malaysia has never been a base for major Islamic terrorist or insurgent groups. Instead, Malaysia strives to promote moderate Islam (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*) and marginalize religious extremism. One way it does so is by acting as a mediator between governmental authorities and Muslim separatist groups in both Thailand and the Philippines.

Malaysia's primary security concerns include ongoing territorial disputes with China (see "Relations with China" below) and continued piracy in the Strait of Malacca. Recently, Malaysia's military and maritime law enforcement along with its counterparts in Indonesia and Singapore have successfully implemented joint anti-piracy measures (Photo: US and Malaysian ships underway in the South China Sea).

Of note, the Malaysian government tends to equate national security with the country's social stability, which the ruling BN coalition traditionally associates with the continued support of Malay privilege and status. Consequently, the government has historically perceived any challenge to Malay privilege as a threat to national security.

Foreign Relations

Malaysia's aspirations to become a Southeast Asian regional leader and a political and economic model for the Islamic world shape its foreign relations. As a moderate, Muslim-majority state, Malaysia strives to maintain good relations with the West while supporting certain Islamic causes, such as the status of Palestinians in Israel. Malaysia actively participates in the Organization of Islamic Conferences, the primary international pan-Islamic organization. It also has launched the Global Movement of Moderates to counter extremist voices and improve the image of Muslims.

Relations with the US: While US-Malaysian relations are cooperative, the Malaysian public is often critical of US actions. For example, Malaysians typically oppose US support for Israel and question US aims in Muslim-majority countries. In response to public opinion, Malaysia has historically avoided high profile cooperation with the US, preferring more subtle support. For example, although Malaysians vocally protested the Afghanistan war, the Malaysian government regularly deployed military medical personnel to augment US staff in the Afghan theater.

Malaysia works closely with the US to combat terror and disrupt terrorism networks in Southeast Asia. In addition, the US and Malaysian militaries enjoy solid ties through frequent bilateral exercises, combined training, collaborative efforts to combat piracy, ship visits, and military education exchanges. Overall, the countries conducted over 75 cooperative activities in 2013, including jungle training at a Malaysian facility (Photo: US Navy and Royal Malaysian Navy personnel confer in 2011).

Relations with ASEAN: As a founding member and the 2015 chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN – consists of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Burma, and Cambodia), Malaysia is a strong proponent of a consensus-based model of regional coordination.

Relations with Singapore: Malaysia and Singapore's bilateral relationship is close but shaky. Although the 2 countries are important trade partners (see p. 4 of *Economics and Resources*) and cooperate militarily on a regular basis, they are also economic competitors who view each other as security threats. Contentious issues include Malaysia's objections to Singapore's land reclamation projects designed to enlarge its limited territory and Malaysia's control of Singapore's water supply.

Relations with Indonesia: Despite deep trade ties and common cultural features, Malaysian and Indonesian relations also have been historically contentious. Soon after Malaysia's

establishment, the Indonesian government sought to unite the countries against Malaysia's wishes. Indonesia's attempt to spark a revolt in Malaysia to force unification backfired, resulting in the 2 countries signing a peace treaty.

Indonesia and Malaysia have disputed ownership of islands off Borneo's northeast coast for years. After a 2002 ruling granted ownership to Malaysia, the countries continued to clash over oil exploration rights. Malaysia's treatment of undocumented Indonesian migrant workers also causes tension.

Relations with Thailand: Sectarian violence in Thailand's Malay Muslim majority provinces bordering Malaysia has heightened tensions between the 2 countries. The Malaysian government does not support the insurgents and has developed joint initiatives with Thailand to help counter extremist groups. Nevertheless, many Malaysians object to the Thai government's harsh response to the insurgency, citing human rights violations. Meanwhile, the Thai government has occasionally accused the Malaysian government of allowing insurgents passage across its border (pictured).

Relations with China: Due to China's support for the Communist Party of Malaysia (see p. 8 of *History and Myth*), Malaysia initially viewed China as a threat. Despite this historical mistrust, Malaysia became the first Southeast Asian nation to establish diplomatic ties with China in 1974. Since then, relations have warmed as economic ties have strengthened and China and the ATM have conducted bilateral exercises.

Recently, tensions flared when China laid claim to the South China Sea, rejecting Malaysia's claims to 3 islands near prospective oil and gas reserves. In 2013-14 China sent naval patrols into the disputed territory. In response, Malaysia announced plans to form a marine corps while attempting to assert its territorial claims more strongly through diplomatic channels.

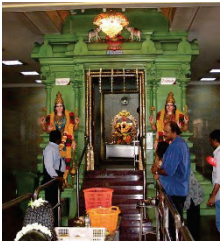
Ethnic Groups

About 50% of Malaysia's population are Malay, around 23% Chinese, and roughly 7% Indians. Malaysia is also home to over 50 indigenous groups distinct from Malays that together comprise about 12% of the population. Malaysia also hosts non-citizens, largely migrant workers from South and Southeast Asia that make up 8% of the population.

Bumiputra*:** The government uses the term ***bumiputra ("sons of the soil") to refer to Malays and to certain Muslim indigenous groups who are the beneficiaries of its pro-Malay affirmative action policies (see p. 10 of *History and Myth* and p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*). As defined in the constitution, all Malays are Muslim and Malay-speakers. The largest indigenous group considered to be *bumiputra* is the Dayak which divides into 26 sub-groups that collectively comprise the majority of the population in East Malaysia.

Other Indigenous Groups: Indigenous groups that are not considered *bumiputra* include the Orang Asli (the "original people") and the Orang Laut (the "sea people") of Peninsular Malaysia as well as the Kadazan-Dusun of East Malaysia.

Chinese: Malaysia's Chinese residents trace their roots to diverse regions in China and speak various Chinese dialects, including Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, Hainan, and Foochow. A unique group of Malaysian Chinese are the ***Peranakan***, descendants of Chinese who settled in the Straits Settlements (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), married Malays, and developed their own distinctive language and culture (see p. 2 of *Sustenance and Health*). Many Chinese are Buddhists (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*).



Indians: Like the Chinese, Malaysia's Indian population is highly diverse, composed of people with varied caste, language, religion, and geographic background. The most prominent groups are Tamils, Bengalis, Gujeratis, Chulias, Parsees, and Malayalis. Many Indians are Hindu (see p. 8 of *Religion and Spirituality*) (Photo: Indians in a Hindu temple)

Social Relations

British colonial policies forged an ethnically divided and hierarchical social system (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). Within the system, few Malays, other indigenous people, or Indians had opportunities for social or economic advancement. While economic advancement was open to Chinese, they were largely confined to certain industries and occupations such as tin mining.

After independence, the pro-Malay government implemented affirmative action and economic development programs that were intended to alleviate poverty among all Malaysians (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*). In reality, these programs granted Malays rights and privileges which facilitated wealth accumulation only among politically connected Malays. Consequently, income inequality remains a problem in Malaysia. Of note, Indians have seen the least economic advancement of any major group: the government classifies about 70% of Indian Malaysians as poor or very poor (Photo: Housing differences in Kuala Lumpur).

Both the government's pro-Malay stance as well as the programs and policies it implements to support Malay privilege continue to divide the population socially and economically. Malaysia's ethnic groups largely coexist rather than intermix, maintaining their own separate cultures and traditions. For example, many Chinese prefer Chinese-language private schools over Malay-language public schools. This preference is intended to prepare their children for life and work within their own Chinese-majority communities rather than the Malaysian national community (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

The government has granted *bumiputra* status, and the associated rights and privileges, to just a few indigenous Muslim groups, largely because *bumiputra* status can only be applied to Muslims (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Consequently, indigenous groups have unequal access to the government's affirmative action programs.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Census figures indicate that 61% of Malaysians are Muslim, 20% Buddhist, 9% Christian, and 6% Hindu. About 1% of Malaysians follow other Chinese traditions and philosophies, 0.7% claim no religious affiliation, and 0.4% acknowledge another affiliation. This religious diversity is seen throughout the country in a variety of mosques, temples, shrines, and churches (Photo: The Putra mosque in Putrajaya holds 15,000 worshippers).

Since first used in the 15th century, the term ***Melayu*** or Malay describes a person who speaks the Malay language and practices Islam (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). This connection between Malay ethnicity and Islam is enshrined in Malaysia's constitution, which legally defines all Malays as Muslim from birth. Furthermore, it basically denies Malays the right to renounce Islam or convert to another religion.

A connection between ethnicity and religion also prevails among Malaysia's minorities: while the Chinese are predominantly Buddhist, the Indians are largely Hindu. The trend does not necessarily hold among non-Malay indigenous groups. While groups officially recognized as ***bumiputra*** (and thus eligible for certain affirmative action programs-see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*) are Muslim, non-*bumiputra* groups may exhibit a range of religious affiliations. For example, about 20% of Orang Asli are Muslim, 10% Christian, and about 70% follow animist traditions (see "Early Spiritual Landscape" below).

The constitution names Islam as Malaysia's official religion but also includes a provision guaranteeing freedom of religion. In reality, the government places several limitations on religious freedom, such as restricting religious assembly and denying legal status to some religious groups.

Despite such limitations on religious freedom, Malaysia views itself as a model moderate, Muslim-majority state. It outwardly supports religious diversity by allowing minority religious groups to practice their beliefs within certain limitations. In addition to several Muslim holidays, Malaysia observes Christian Christmas, Hindu Deepavali, and the Buddha's birthday as national holidays (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*).

Early Spiritual Landscape

Many early inhabitants of Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, practiced animism, the belief that a spirit or consciousness resides in all objects, both animate and inanimate. Within animist traditions, all natural objects – for example, trees and animals – are sacred, and there exists a close connection between animists and their environment. Some local religious traditions also recognized guardian spirits that inhabited homes, gardens, and rice fields. Others acknowledged spirits of the dead who could help or hinder the living. Some of Malaysia's indigenous groups traditionally held and may continue to hold similar beliefs.

Buddhism

Origins of Buddhism

Buddhism traces its beginning to around 500 BC, when Siddhartha Gautama, a South Asian prince, attained spiritual insight through meditation and became the Buddha or "the awakened one." Buddhists believe that humans are fated to suffer, that suffering is caused by greed or desire, and can be stopped by following a spiritual path that includes unselfish living and meditation. Buddhists' ultimate goal is to achieve nirvana, a state of peace and unity with the universe. While Buddhism is based on a voluminous set of scriptures, it does not focus on the worship of a god or gods. Instead, it emphasizes ethical and moral instruction to help people follow a spiritual path. Buddhism also offers an explanation of life after death, specifically, that humans proceed through cycles of birth, death, and rebirth or reincarnation (Photo: Malaysian Buddhist shrine).

The Arrival and Spread of Buddhism in Malaysia

In the first few centuries AD, South Asian traders introduced the Indian religious concepts of Hinduism and Buddhism to Malaysia. Buddhism strongly influenced the emerging Malay kingdoms. From the 7th-13th century, the regional Buddhist empire of Srivijaya (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*) supported a community of Buddhist monks and became an important center of Buddhist learning.

Buddhism in the region declined substantially as Islam gained significant influence in the 10th century (see "The Arrival and Spread of Islam in Malaysia" below). The faith enjoyed resurgence when Chinese Buddhists began migrating to Malaysia beginning in the early 19th century (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*).

Islam

Origins of Islam

Islam dates to the 6th century when Muhammad, whom Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in Mecca in what is today Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the Qur'an, or "Holy Book," to guide their everyday lives and shape their values (Photo: Late 7th century Arabian Qur'an).

Meaning of Islam

Islam is a way of life to its adherents. The term Islam literally means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is "a person who submits to God."

Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into 2 sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Sunnis are distinguished by their belief that the leader (*Caliph*) of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'a Muslims believe the religious leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Malaysia's constitution proclaims Sunni Islam as Malaysia's official religion.

Five Pillars of Islam

There are 5 basic principles of the Islamic faith.

- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger."
- **Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray 5 times a day while facing the Ka'aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka'aba is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship (Photo: US Marine at the Ka'aba in 2012).

- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Donate a percentage of one's income to the poor or needy.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.
- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (The *Hajj*):** Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime.

Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel those of Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews "people of the Book," referring to biblical scriptures, because they also believe in one God.

Abraham: All 3 faiths trace their lineage to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. However, Christians and Jews trace their descent to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; while Muslims trace theirs to Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ishmael.

Scriptures: Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments. Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Jews and Christians altered God's word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God.

Jesus: The 3 religions differ significantly in their understanding of the role of Jesus. While Christians consider him the divine Messiah who fulfills Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet but do not acknowledge his divinity or the Christian Trinity.

View of Death: Muslims believe that God determines the time of death and birth. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death itself as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven.

Concept of Jihad

The concept of jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with jihad. Most Muslims are opposed to terrorism and consider it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

Ramadan

Ramadan, known as ***Bulan Puasa*** in Malaysia, is a month-long time for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time, Muslims who are physically able are required to fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal. By fasting, a Muslim learns to appreciate the good in life (Photo: Sultan Ahmad I Mosque in Pahang, Peninsular Malaysia).

During Ramadan in Malaysia, authorities may fine or detain Muslims found eating or drinking on the street during daylight hours. It is common for Malaysian Muslims to break their fast at sunset with a meal known as ***iftar***. Ramadan is observed during the 9th month of the Islamic calendar (see p. 2 of *Time & Space*) and includes the following 2 holy days:

- **Lailat al-Qadr:** ***Nuzul Al-Quran*** in Malaysia, this "Night of Power" marks Muhammad's receipt of the first verses of the Qur'an.
- **Eid al-Fitr:** ***Hari Raya Puasa*** or ***Hari Raya Aidilfitri*** in Malaysia, this 3-day "Festival of Fast-Breaking" celebrates Ramadan's end.

Another important holiday is celebrated when the Hajj ends, about 70 days following the end of Ramadan.

- **Eid al-Adha:** ***Hari Raya Haji*** or ***Hari Raya Aidiladha*** in Malaysia, this "Festival of Sacrifice" commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (or Isaac, according to Christians), as proof of his loyalty to God.

The Arrival and Spread of Islam in Malaysia

Arab and Persian Muslims on their way to East Asia probably first brought Islam to the Malay Peninsula not long after Islam's founding in the 6th century. By the 10th century, several kingdoms in Peninsular Malaysia controlled regional trade and were extending Muslim influence in the region. South Asian Muslim merchants and traders expanded trade throughout the Strait of Malacca in the 13th century, further spreading Islam.

In the early 15th century, Malacca on Peninsular Malaysia's southwest coast became the dominant trading center (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). When Muzaffar Shah became Malacca's ruler in 1444, he declared the kingdom a Muslim state. In later years, Malacca's commercial, military, and political influence helped spread Islam. By the end of the 15th century, most of Peninsular Malaysia's coastal districts had converted to Islam.

Religion Today

Islam

Most Muslims in Malaysia, along with about 15% of Muslims worldwide, are followers of the Shaf'i Madhab school of Sunni Islam. Of note, Sunni Islam is the only legal form of Islam in Malaysia (Photo: Sign indicating a mosque in Penang, Peninsular Malaysia).

The government reportedly maintains a list of banned Islamic sects, including Shi'a, Ahmadiyyah, and Al-Arqam. In addition to the Malay population, automatically classified as Muslim, some Malaysians of Indian and Chinese descent are Muslim.

Malaysia has experienced a Muslim revival over the last decades. In 2012, 90% of surveyed Malaysian Muslims reported that religion is very important in their lives, while about 57% acknowledged attending mosque at least once a week. Other manifestations of heightened religiosity among Muslims include women's increased use of the Islamic veil outside the home (see p. 1 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) and the greater reliance on Islamic law to regulate Malays' religious behavior (see "Religion and the Law" below).

In addition, some Malaysians support politicizing Islam, causing tensions within the Muslim community. A 2011-2 survey found that 82% of surveyed Malaysian Muslims agreed that religious leaders should have at least some influence in political matters. In the same study, 79% of surveyed Malaysian Muslims agreed that converting others to Islam is a religious duty, compared to just 31% in neighboring Indonesia.

Buddhism

Most Malaysian Buddhists focus less on the philosophical underpinnings of Buddhism and more on its teachings as a guide for living. Malaysia's Buddhist temples usually contain an image of the Buddha and table where followers leave offerings and perform worship. Malaysian Buddhists often perform rituals to honor ancestor spirits.

Other Chinese Religions: Some Malaysian Chinese combine Buddhist teachings and practices with various other Chinese traditions in a syncretic (combining of different beliefs) system of ancestor veneration and deity worship. These people regularly visit a variety of Chinese temples where they pray or offer thanks for good fortune. Some temples offer visitors the opportunity to light incense in honor of particular spirits or deities (pictured).

Christianity

Malaysia counts several different ethnic groups, including Chinese and Indians, in its Christian population. In addition, some members of indigenous groups such as the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia and the Kadazan-Dusun and Kelabit of East Malaysia are Christian. In 2000, 42% of the population of the East Malaysian state of Sarawak was Christian.

Hinduism

Based in ancient scriptures, Hindu worship focuses on a Supreme Being with many forms and natures, including Brahma, the creator, Siva, the destroyer, and Vishnu, the preserver. Malaysia's Hindus visit temples to pray individually or engage in collective worship (Photo: Sri Maha Mariamman Hindu Temple in Kuala Lumpur).

The Importance of Spirits

While Malaysians identify primarily with Islam, Christianity, or Buddhism, some of them also uphold a respect for the spirit world. Recognizing that spirits reside in geographic places, in buildings, or in objects, these Malaysians may engage in rituals to honor spirits or carry amulets to protect themselves from harm. Some indigenous groups in East Malaysia hold festivals to thank the spirits for a good harvest.

Religion and the Law

The Malaysian government increasingly uses the Islamic ***sharia*** court system (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) to regulate its citizens' social and religious behavior. Through a *sharia* court, the government has occasionally arrested members of what it deems illegal Muslim sects, detaining them for "rehabilitation" in Sunni Islam. Reversing a 2009 court decision, a ruling in 2013 determined that non-Muslims may not use the word "Allah." The state of Kelantan in Peninsular Malaysia has declared that women and men must remain apart when in public, resulting in solutions such as gender-specific checkout lines in supermarkets. Some such policies are applicable to all people, regardless of their religious affiliation.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

Life among all ethnicities in Malaysia traditionally centered on family and community. In recent decades, family life has changed as many Malaysians migrated to urban areas seeking education and employment, married later, and had fewer children. Despite changes, Malaysian values such as respect for elders and social harmony remain fundamental to family life.

Residence

In more traditional rural areas, extended families consisting of multiple generations occupy communal homes or compounds, often constructed from modern materials. In urban areas, nuclear families (2 parents and their children) usually live in multi-family apartment or condominium buildings.

Rural: Architectural styles typically vary by ethnic group. The traditional rural Malay home, a ***kampung***, stands on stilts to avoid seasonal flooding. Thatched palm leaf roofs facilitate rainwater runoff while many windows provide ventilation. A *kampung* has a ***serambi gantung***, a veranda where the family entertains guests, a kitchen, and a ***rumah ibu***, an open room that serves as the family's living and sleeping room.

The Dayak people of East Malaysia (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*) traditionally live in longhouses – narrow, extended multi-family homes with a common roof and separate ***bilik*** (rooms) for up to 12 families. A covered veranda along the front (pictured) serves as a focal point for socializing, preparing meals, and exchanging goods.

Urban: Traditionally, many urban Chinese lived and worked in 2-story terraced houses. While the family business occupied the front part of the house, the family lived in the back and upper story. Many Malaysian urban areas still feature these so-called shop houses.

Today, about 75% of Malaysians live in urban areas where many occupy apartments or condominiums, some in high-rise buildings. Other urban and suburban residents live in detached housing. Whatever the type, modern Malaysian housing often incorporates traditional features such as verandas, pillars, and particular roof designs. Rapid urbanization has resulted in housing shortages in some urban areas. Despite government efforts to provide low-cost housing, some Malaysians must settle in makeshift housing on city outskirts (Photo: Condominium towers loom over an older building in Kuala Lumpur).

Family Structure

Generally, Malaysians value cooperation, loyalty, and unity within the family and exhibit a strong obligation to their kin. Nevertheless, modernization and urbanization in recent decades have changed family life in Malaysia so that some large extended families no longer share a household. Despite this change, the family remains the basic unit of Malaysian society and community life.

While many Malays have moved to urban areas for work or education, they maintain their ties to their ancestral villages. Malays often ***balik kampung***, or “returning to the village,” for weddings, festivals, and weekend visits. Even in urban areas extended families often try to live near each other to provide mutual support and security.

Children typically live with their parents until marriage, at which point the couple moves into separate quarters. Among all Malaysia’s ethnic groups, the oldest male is typically head of the household. Elder family members receive much respect and are a source of advice for younger members. Although children traditionally cared for their elderly parents, this tendency appears to be shifting. A recent study revealed that less than half of surveyed Malaysians expected to live with their children upon retirement.

Children

Malaysians consider children a blessing and an essential outcome of marriage. Children born out of wedlock may have no legal claims to paternal inheritance or guardianship (see p. 2 of *Sex and Gender*). From a young age, Malaysian children help with household chores and care for younger siblings. This care may also include providing financial, educational, and career support to siblings later in life (Photo: US Navy personnel play tug-of-war with Malaysian children.)

Birth: Malays traditionally perform the ***potong rambut*** or ***akikah*** ritual 1 week after a baby's birth. Male family members announce the baby's name to the assembled then shave its head as a cleansing ritual. Family members may donate a sum of money equivalent to the weight of the hair to charity. Later, the family performs the ***naik buai*** ceremony to welcome the child to the family and present its new cradle. Family members place a freshly cut log in the cradle to absorb negative influences, then the grandmother rocks the child to sleep. Guests celebrate by eating sticky rice or sweet porridge and decorated eggs (see p. 1-3 of *Sustenance and Health*).

Circumcision: Muslim Malaysian boys typically undergo circumcision between ages 5-12, signifying their passage into adulthood and membership in the Islamic community. While traditional healers once performed this ritual at large public events, a doctor typically performs the procedure today. In 2009, Malaysia's *sharia* courts mandated all Muslim females be circumcised before age 2 (see p. 3 of *Sex and Gender*).

Marriage

Malays traditionally relied on family elders or professional matchmakers called ***tukang risik*** ("spy") to find a partner with an appropriate social, ethnic, and economic background. Although this custom is much less common now, some Malays and Indians continue to use matchmakers or informally seek potential partners through family, friends, or dating agencies.

While some young people in urban areas may engage in Western-style dating, parents usually prefer that their children begin dating only upon completion of their education (see *Learning and Knowledge*). Of note, non-Muslims may marry Muslims only if they convert to Islam.

Although the legal minimum marriage age is 18, Muslims as young as 16 may marry with an Islamic court's approval (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*). In 2014, courts approved 74% of underage marriage requests. Since 1970, Malaysians' average marriage age has increased significantly. In 2010, women's average marriage age was 25, while men's was almost 29. Observers note that if this trend continues, the average marriage age for both men and women could soon be 33 years.

Brideprice: According to Malay Muslim tradition, the groom is expected to make 2 so-called brideprice payments to the bride and her family to compensate for the loss of her labor and presence. Local Islamic authorities set the ***maskahwin***, a compulsory amount for the 1st payment. Although technically optional, the ***hantaran*** (2nd payment) is a longstanding Malay tradition. Set by the bride's family, this amount is often high and typically leaves the new couple in debt (Photo: Malay family).

Weddings: Malaysians follow different wedding customs according to their ethnic and religious backgrounds. Malay Muslim weddings typically have 2 parts. During the ***akad nikah*** the couple signs the marriage contract and the groom presents the brideprice to the bride's family. On the following day the ***bersanding*** (enthronement) takes place. Dressed in traditional Malay clothes (see p. 1 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*), the bride and groom sit on a raised platform. Guests greet the couple by sprinkling rice flour, sandalwood water, or flower petals over the couple's hands. Later, the bride and groom feed each other sweet sticky rice in a messy and humorous ritual. Finally, guests enjoy a wedding feast where they usually present money to the new couple and receive flowers and decorated eggs, a symbol of fertility, as parting gifts.

Chinese couples may announce their engagement by sending a treat wrapped in red paper to family and friends. Because it is considered important for the wedding to fall on a lucky day, many Chinese couples consult an astrologer to set the date. Depending on their religious affiliation, Chinese may hold Buddhist or Christian ceremonies (see p. 7-8 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Many Chinese end their wedding celebration with a luxurious banquet at a hotel or restaurant (Photo: A 1941 Malaysian Chinese wedding).

Indians often consult elders or a Hindu priest to choose a favorable wedding date. Before the ceremony, the groom may present the bride a gift of wrist bangles and a small nugget of gold. A jeweler then fashions the gold into a ***thali***, a pendant symbolizing the couple's union. Traditional Hindu weddings usually occur at a Hindu temple and involve extensive prayers and ceremonies. These rituals usually include chanting and blessings by the temple priest and the tying of the *thali* around the bride's neck. Following the ceremonies and festivities, guests enjoy a communal feast.

Polygyny: Legal only for Malaysian Muslims, polygyny is the practice of a man having multiple wives simultaneously. In accordance with ***sharia*** (Islamic) law (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) Malay Muslim men may have up to 4 wives. To take an additional wife, a man must make an official request before the court, provide justification, and prove his ability to provide for each wife.

Divorce: From 2004-2012, Malaysia divorce rates doubled across all of Malaysia's ethnic groups, although the rate was slightly higher among non-Muslims. Some observers attribute this overall increase to a better educated female populace who has become less financially dependent on men. Recent studies suggest that many new marriages break under the financial burdens young couples face such as brideprice and dowry costs. Practiced by some Indians, a dowry is a payment made by a bride's family to the groom's family.

While discouraged in Islam, divorce does not carry a negative stigma in Muslim Malay culture. Although Muslim women face several hurdles to initiating divorce, men may divorce their wives fairly easily (see p. 3 of *Sex and Gender*). Consequently, divorce is relatively common among Malays, affecting between 20% and 25% of marriages. While the *sharia* (Islamic) courts handle divorce for Muslim couples, the civil courts (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) serve non-Muslims.

Death

In line with Islamic tradition, Muslim Malays bury loved ones as soon as possible after death, usually within 24 hours. The deceased is bathed and clothed in a white shroud with a thin veil over the face. After offering prayers and burning incense at the mosque, male family members carry the deceased to the gravesite. The call to prayer is whispered in the deceased's ear, and the body is placed in the ground and buried.

The family then sprinkles sandalwood water and flower petals over the grave. The deceased's family and friends gather for 3 days following the death, often praying and sharing meals. This tradition is repeated on the 7th, 14th, 40th, and 100th day after death, and then annually thereafter.

Chinese Malaysians typically follow Buddhist traditions. Upon death, the body is bathed and wrapped in a silk cloth and placed in an elaborately carved coffin. The coffin is then transported to a funeral home or hall where it typically remains for several days before burial. The memorial service may include prayers and hymns offered by Buddhist monks.

After the service, the coffin is either moved to a grave for burial or to a crematorium for cremation. The funeral procession traditionally includes lively music with cymbals and drums intended to drive away evil spirits. Mourners carry banners and pictures of the deceased. After burial, families decorate the graves with flowers and paper replicas of items from the deceased's life (Photo: Chinese cemetery in Melaka).

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Traditional Malaysian family and village organization privileged men over women. During the 20th century, women's status improved with the economy's rapid expansion and accompanying need for workers (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*). Now making up 75% of all university students, Malaysian women increasingly are involved in government and business. Nevertheless, the rise of conservative Islam in some states presents challenges to sustaining gender equity.

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Labor: Women traditionally were known as the ***ibu rumah*** or nucleus of the family since they performed most household tasks, including managing the family budget and tending to children. Although they may also work outside the home, women continue to perform most domestic tasks and train their daughters for this eventuality. From an early age, girls receive more household chores, often receiving the nickname ***orang dapur***, "one who runs the kitchen."

Labor Force: In 2014, about 45% of Malaysian women worked outside the home – a significantly lower rate than in neighboring Singapore (59%), Indonesia (51%), and Thailand (64%). Women work in many sectors, including business, healthcare, and education.

Although increased numbers of women are receiving advanced degrees, (see p. 5 of *Learning and Education*), they often leave the workforce upon childbirth because few companies offer childcare or flexible work arrangements. Generally, women often earn lower wages than men but do receive higher pay in some sectors. For example, skilled female workers in the construction industry may earn 13% more than men (Photo: US male sailor confers with a Malaysian female sailor.)

Gender and the Law

While gender discrimination is illegal under Malaysia's constitution, recent changes in the implementation of ***sharia*** law (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) increasingly restrict the rights of Muslim women. For example, even though the constitution recognizes equal property rights, s*haria* law dictates that Muslim women claim just 1/3 of inherited property. Similarly, under *sharia* law, only Muslim males may be their children's legal guardians. In the case of divorce or his death, guardianship is passed to a male relative. *Sharia* laws adopted in 2005 ease requirements for men to divorce their wives and withhold alimony (see p. 6 of *Family and Kinship*).

Gender and Politics

Women received full voting rights in the 1957 constitution. Although Malaysian women are active in politics, few hold leadership positions. In 2010, an estimated 4.8% of Local Council Presidents and 1% of Village Committee Chairs were women. In the lower parliament, women hold 10% of seats compared with 18% in the US House of Representatives. In 2014, the Democratic Action Party (DAP) introduced a 30% quota for female members of its Central Executive Committee. While other parties have set similar quotas for general female participation, they have not yet achieved these goals.

Islamic Feminists

Some Malaysian women are active in the Islamic feminist movement. Established in 1988, Sisters in Islam (SIS) examines the teachings of Islam from a woman's perspective, advocating changes to laws and attitudes which oppress and discriminate against women. SIS activists include Islamic scholars and Marina Mahathir, daughter of former Prime Minister Mahathir (see p. 10-11 of *History and Myth*). Launched in 2009 in Kuala Lumpur, ***Musawah*** (Arabic for "equality") is a worldwide Muslim women's movement dedicated to educating and supporting Muslim families on issues of equality and justice.

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Although rape and domestic violence are criminal offenses under both civil and *sharia* law, many victims do not report these crimes. Observers note a serious lack of GBV law enforcement within the *sharia* system, and even civil laws contain weak provisions that make prosecution difficult. Nearly 4,807 domestic violence, 2045 rape, and 1,590 sexual harassment cases were reported to the police in 2014, yet only a fraction of charges were filed (Photo: Female police officers in Kuala Lumpur).

Female Circumcision

A recent study suggests that as many as 93% of Malay Muslim women have undergone some form of female circumcision (also known as female genital mutilation). In some societies, female circumcision is intended to modify the sex organ in order to decrease sexual desire and promote virginity. It can be an invasive procedure that results in physical mutilation and severe health consequences. Some unconfirmed reports suggest that the procedure in Malaysia can be a symbolic prick or cut. Many Muslims see this act an Islamic duty, a belief reinforced by a 2009 Islamic court ruling requiring circumcision for all female Muslims before age 2.

Sex and Procreation

Malaysians consider sexual intimacy a private matter and avoid public displays of affection. In some states, such displays are banned. Authorities often censor films to remove sexual references or depictions. Primarily due to successful family planning programs, Malaysia's birthrate has dropped, from 4.2 children per woman in 1974 to 2.55 in 2015.

Homosexuality: Gay or lesbian acts are illegal under civil and *sharia* law. Punishments include whippings and up to 20 years in prison. In the state of Kelantan, convicted homosexuals may face the death penalty. Generally, the government's rhetoric is anti-LGBT, occasionally cancelling gay pride festivals and sponsoring seminars warning of the dangers of LGBT lifestyles. Despite these challenges, gay rights clubs and a national gay rights organization openly exist in major cities.

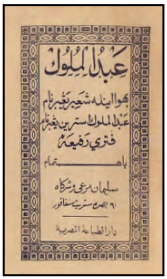
6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Malaysia's national language, Bahasa Malaysia ("The Malaysian Language") or Malay, is also the language of Malaysia's predominant ethnic group, the Malays. Minority groups – including Chinese, Indians, and indigenous groups (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*) – typically speak other dialects and languages in addition to Malay. These other languages include Chinese variants such as Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka, and Hokkien; Indian varieties including Tamil and Punjabi; and indigenous languages such as Iban and Melanau.

Bahasa Malaysia (Malay)

A member of the Austronesian language family, Malay probably originated in western Borneo, evolved further in neighboring Sumatra, and later became the region's dominant trade language and a defining feature of Malay identity (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). While the British mandated English as the language of government and commerce during the colonial period (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*), independent Malaysia chose Malay as its national language.



Foreign nationals typically find Malay easy to pronounce. Having 26 consonants and 6 vowels, Malay word order is similar to English. Malay does not use plurals for nouns, instead, denoting plurality by repeating the word ("***buku-buku***" for "books').

Writing System: Although Malay may be written in an Arabic script called ***Jawi*** (pictured), the most common writing system is a Latin script called ***Rumi***. Despite language reform efforts to achieve uniformity, Romanized spellings often demonstrate inconsistencies. For example, the word for a traditional Malay house may be written ***kampong*** or ***kampung*** (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*). As in English, Malay is written from left to right in horizontal lines.

English

Prior to the 1967 National Language Act which made Malay the national language, English was Malaysia's de facto administrative language. Today, English is a compulsory subject in primary and secondary schools and a primary language of instruction in many universities (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Some Malaysian states still use English instead of Malay in official contexts. English is also dominant in the business world (Photo: A sign with Malay written in *Jawi* and *Rumi* scripts with an English translation).

Manglish*:** Some Malaysians, especially merchants and shopkeepers, speak ***Manglish, a colloquial form of English with Malay, Chinese, and Tamil influences. The Malaysian government discourages such mixing of Malay and English, even forbidding the use of *Manglish* on public signs.

Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Malaysia requires not only knowledge of Malay, but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Malaysians pride themselves on their tolerance, generally emphasizing a unifying Malaysian identity even though some ethnic and religious tensions persist (see p. 12-13 of *Political and Social Relations*). Generally friendly and hospitable, Malaysians strive to "save face," or avoid embarrassment to themselves or others. Accordingly, they avoid openly insulting, criticizing, or disagreeing with others in public. Generally, they consider angry tones and overly direct queries to be rude, preferring calm and harmonious interactions.

Malaysians share certain societal communication norms, such as respect for elders and authority figures and a preference for humble communication styles. The various ethnic groups may convey those norms in different ways by demonstrating distinctive communication practices and preferences. For example, the Malay notion of ***budi***, the value of maintaining peace and harmony in all things, underpins an emphasis on tolerance, cooperation, patience, and courtesy in interactions. The Chinese are mindful of "saving face" during interactions by oftentimes relying on non-verbal facial expressions, tone of voice, and posture to communicate their desired messages.

Greetings

The traditional Malay greeting is the ***salam***. To indicate deference and deep respect to a person of senior status, Malays perform the *salam* by extending both hands and briefly clasping or brush fingertips. Both parties then withdraw their hands and touch them briefly to their hearts or lower parts of their faces. When greeting someone socially equal, a Malay may choose to carry out the *salam* with just one hand.

Shaking hands is a common form of greeting among both Chinese and Indians. Some Indians prefer to greet one another by bringing flat palms together at chest level and bowing the head slightly. Of note, devout Muslims may decline to touch a member of the opposite sex, instead preferring to greet with a nod or slight bow. When greeting members of the opposite sex in Malaysia, foreign nationals should wait for their conversation partner to initiate the *salam* or handshake (Photo: US Ambassador Yun shakes hands with a Malaysian worker).

Names

Malays assign a father's given name as his child's last name. For example, Rashid bin Abdullah is "Rashid son of Abdullah." Malays typically refer to each other using the first name, often prefaced by a title or other form of address (see below).

Most Indians also use first names when addressing each other, for example addressing Siva s/o ("son of") Bhaskaran as Mr. Siva, B. Siva, or Siva B. Among Chinese, last or surnames precede given names. For a woman named Tai Ching Ling, "Ching Ling" is her given name while "Tai" is her last name. Unlike most Malays and Indians, Chinese often refer to each other by last name.

Forms of Address

Traditionally, Malays used titles to signify social condition and status. Still important today, a complex system of titles dictates etiquette, behavior, and form of address. For example, members of royalty carry specific titles (such as ***Sultana*** and ***Raja*** – see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*). Further, royalty and other authority figures can bestow a variety of titles onto their Malay subjects, such as ***Tun***, which broadly translates as "Sir." Government officials also use various titles that indicate grade and post. Muslim Malaysians may use hereditary titles associated with Islam, such as those that indicate a familial relationship with the Prophet Muhammad (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Muslims who have participated in the ***Haj*** pilgrimage (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*) may use the title ***Haji*** (for a man) or ***Hajjah*** (for a woman).

To address an elder or other person of higher status, Malays use ***Puan*** (for women) and ***Tuan*** (for men), combined with the person's first name. Malays often use ***Encik*** to address a young man. To politely address a stranger, Malays may use the formal, gender-neutral term ***Anda***. Malays also frequently use titles that indicate occupation, such as ***Guru*** (teacher) or ***Dokter*** (doctor). Foreign nationals should take note of Malaysians' titles and utilize them. Only after a relationship is well established might a Malay feel comfortable omitting a title and using only a conversation partner's first name (Photo: (Malay women speaking with US Ambassador Yun in 2014).

Conversational Topics

Malaysians prefer to begin conversations with friendly, personal questions, usually inquiring about their conversation partner's background and family. Although Malaysians typically have a good sense of humor, they tend not to make or enjoy jokes concerning politics or ethnic differences or jokes containing sexual innuendos.

Foreign nationals should avoid making negative or condescending comments about Malaysia. It is also advisable to avoid talking about religion and sexuality, as many Malaysians consider these topics offensive and inappropriate for polite conversation (Photo: Malaysian Army and US Navy personnel screen a patient).

Gestures

Malaysians tend to use gestures to augment their words, occasionally becoming animated during conversations. They do, however, consider certain gestures rude or inappropriate. For example, Malaysians do not point with the index finger. Instead, they indicate direction with the thumb of the right hand while folding the fingers into the palm. Malaysians consider hands-in-pockets a sign of anger and hitting one's fist into a cupped hand an obscene gesture. Of note, Malaysians often perform a slight bow when leaving or entering a room and when passing by a person to express "excuse me."

Because Malaysians consider the head a sacred part of the body, they never touch another person's head. Further, Malaysians consider the feet to be unsanitary and typically refrain from showing their soles, using their feet to point, and moving objects with their feet.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at http://culture.af.mil/resources/index.aspx for language training resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Malay
Hello	Hai
Good morning	Selamat pagi
Good afternoon	Selamat petang
Good evening	Selamat malam
Good bye	Selamat jalan
See you again	Jumpa lagi
Welcome	Selamat datang
What is your name?	Siapa nama awak?
My name is ___	Nama saya___
How are you?	Apa khabar?
Fine	Baik *or* bagus
Do you speak English/Malay?	Adakah anda fasih berbahasa (Inggeris/ Melayu)?
Thank you for your help	Terima kasih atas bantuan anda.
Yes	Ya
No	Tidak
Thank you	Terima kasih
You're welcome	Sama-sama
OK	Baiklah
Excuse me/I'm sorry	Maafkan saya
Please	Tolong
Can someone assist us?	Boleh sesiapa Tolong kami?
I want ___	Saya mahu__
I do not want ___	Saya tidak mahu__
Do you have ___?	Anda ada ___?
What?	Apa?
When?	Bila?
Where?	Di mana?
Who?	Siapa?
Good	Bagus

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 95%
- Male: 96%
- Female: 93% (2015 estimate)

The Introduction of Formal Education

Scholars believe that formal Islamic education in Malaysia may date as early as the 12th century when Muslim leaders began to provide religious, moral, and spiritual instruction to boys. Later, students received lessons in teachers' homes, mosques, or ***pondoks*** (traditional Islamic schools).

The Rise of Separate Systems

Following the spread of British control across Malaysia in the 19th century (see p. 4-5 of *History and Myth*), formal education expanded to include Western-style schools. Gradually, separate and distinct school systems developed that served each of Malaysia's 3 main ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, and Indian - see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*).

The British opened English-language schools, primarily in urban areas, to educate some Malays so they could become civil servants in the colonial government (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). Other Malays attended religious *pondoks* or chose secular Malay-language schools that emphasized basic reading and writing along with vocational and technical skills related to agriculture.

Tamil-language schools based on curricula from India opened to serve South Asians brought to Malaysia to work on plantations (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). Meanwhile, Malaysia's Chinese residents attended Chinese-language schools based on China's traditional educational curriculum and taught by teachers from China (Illustration: Chinese College in Melaka in 1834). These separate education systems served to maintain and strengthen Malaysia's ethnic, social, and occupational divisions (see p. 6-7 of *History and Myth*).

Pre-Independence Efforts at Reform

In the 1950s, during the last years of British colonial control, the British authorities sought to reorganize and unify the country's stratified educational system. The government adopted a country-wide, standardized curriculum, naming Malay the primary language of instruction but also allowed the use of Chinese, Tamil, and English.

Education in Newly Independent Malaysia

At the time of Malaysia's independence in 1957, Malaysia's Chinese residents were on average better educated than Malays and Indians. The new government initiated sweeping education reforms beginning in 1961. Its intent was to bring educational parity to Malays as part of a broader plan to reduce poverty among Malays (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). (Photo: Malaysian students take part in a school celebration).

Pro-Malay Reforms: The government used the Malay language as a means of promoting a Malaysian identity. Consequently, Malay became compulsory in primary schools and Malay or English mandatory in secondary schools. Nevertheless, instruction in Tamil and Chinese in primary schools was allowed to continue. The government sought to increase Malays' university attendance, setting aside scholarship funds predominantly for Malay students. In the 1970s, the government introduced additional reforms that converted all English-language secondary schools to Malay-language schools.

Modern Education System

Today's public school system offers free education for all children aged 6-18, yet only primary education (grades 1-6) is compulsory. Comprising 190 days, the school year runs from January-November. Of note, female participation at all educational levels equals or exceeds that of males.

In addition to supporting students' knowledge and skills acquisition, educational policies also aim to foster national unity. Consequently, curricula contain lessons intended to inculcate certain moral values and to nurture a national, Malaysian identity within the multilingual and multiethnic student body.

Pre-Primary and Primary Schools

Non-compulsory, pre-school programs for Malaysian children aged 4-6 are offered by public, non-profit, and private institutions. Primary education begins at age 6 and lasts 6 years. Malaysia has 2 types of primary schools. So-called "national" schools use Malay as the language of instruction while providing English language lessons.

By contrast, the "national-type" schools use either Mandarin Chinese or Tamil as the language of instruction while providing Malay and English language lessons. Malaysians of Chinese descent attend Chinese "national-type" schools, while those of Indian descent attend Tamil "national-type" schools. Malaysians of other ethnic backgrounds (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*) usually attend "national" schools (Photo: A US Navy musician talks to Malaysian school students).

About 99% of Malaysian children enroll in primary school, where the core subjects are reading, writing, math, and science as well as Islamic religion and ethics lessons (see "Religious Education" below). Following primary school, all students must pass an exam to continue to secondary school.

Secondary Schools

Secondary school consists of lower (grades 7-9) and upper secondary (grades 10-11) levels. The primary language of instruction in all secondary schools is Malay. Because students in "national-type" primary schools receive significantly less Malay language instruction, they do not usually possess the language skills required for secondary school. Consequently, graduates of "national-type" primary schools must complete a year-long Malay language "transition class" before they may enroll in secondary school. This class also aims to nurture a

sense of Malaysian identity among students of Chinese and Indian descent.

About 85% of students of the appropriate age attended public lower secondary schools in 2013. Core courses are an extension of the primary curriculum, focusing on reading, writing, math, science, and Islamic/moral education. Students also receive extensive instruction in English. Chinese, Tamil, and Arabic may be offered as elective subjects. To continue on to upper secondary school, students must pass an exam.

As of 2013, about 69% of Malaysians of the appropriate age attended public upper secondary schools. Students may choose between general (academic) and technical-vocational tracks. Students entering the academic track choose a specialized field of study based on their aptitude and interests. Core subjects include Malay, English, science, math, Islamic/moral education, and history. Vocational programs have 2 paths that prepare students for employment immediately upon graduation or for admission into specialized technical colleges (Photo: Students from Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries).

To graduate, all students must pass an examination. Only about 37.2% of Malaysians have completed upper secondary school. Students interested in post-secondary education then typically enroll in a 1-2 year college preparatory program.

Post-Secondary Education

In the mid-1990s, 20% of Malaysian post-secondary students left the country to pursue degrees abroad. Concerned that these students would remain abroad after graduating, the government pursued an ambitious program to improve post-secondary education. Consequently, Malaysians may now pursue higher education at an array of Malaysian institutions, including several branches of foreign universities.

As of 2012, about 15.3% of Malaysians aged 25-29 had received a bachelor's or higher degree at one of Malaysia's 73 public and private universities or one of its 503 colleges. Of note, 75% of Malaysia's university students are female. The primary languages of instruction in post-secondary institutions are Malay and English (Photo: Science and technology building of the Kolej Universiti Islam in Melaka).

Religious Education

Islamic religion instruction is compulsory for Muslim students in both primary and secondary schools. Non-Muslim students enroll in compulsory nonreligious morals and ethics courses. The government has been unresponsive to the urgings of non-Muslim religious organizations to allow non-Muslim religion instruction (instead of ethics instruction) in public schools. Although private schools may offer any non-Islamic religious instruction they choose, they are ineligible for any government support. By contrast, the government provides grants to private Islamic schools on the condition that they allow government supervision and adopt a government-approved curriculum.

Malaysia Education Blueprint

The Malaysian government continues to emphasize the importance of education as an enabler of economic and social growth. A 2013 "Malaysia Education Blueprint" sets several goals for optimizing the availability and quality of education. One focus is full enrollment in both lower and upper secondary school by 2020. Other initiatives include the reduction of urban-rural, socio-economic, and gender achievement gaps and student improvement on international assessment scores.

To achieve these goals, the blueprint calls for an increase in compulsory schooling from 6-11 years, revised curricula that emphasize creative thinking and problem-solving, and enhanced teacher training requirements. Further, policymakers aim to create a more technically proficient workforce that is better suited to meet labor market demands.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Malaysians value loyalty, harmony, and consensus in the workplace, taking the time to build strong and lasting business relationships. While public displays of affection between genders is considered inappropriate, social touching between same-sex friends is common.

Time and Work

In the Peninsular Malaysian Muslim-majority states of Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu, the work week runs from Sunday-Thursday. In the other Malaysian states, it extends from Monday-Friday. Business hours vary by establishment type. Most banks are open from 9:30am-3:00pm Monday-Friday and from 9:30am-11:30am on 2 Saturdays each month. Private businesses are open from 9:00am-5:00pm, while post offices are open from 8:00am-5:00pm Monday-Saturday. Most stores are open from 9:30am-7:00pm 7 days a week, although larger retailers and malls typically close later (Photo: Small grocery store in Kuala Sungai Baru).

Working Hours: By law, the Malaysian work week is limited to 48 hours, with a maximum of an 8-hour day and 6-day week. Special provisions prohibit women from working in the industrial and agricultural sectors between 10:00pm-5:00am. Although designed to protect women, these policies limit women's abilities to advance in certain sectors. Of note, many workplaces provide small prayer rooms to accommodate the religious needs of Muslim employees.

Time Zone and Date Notation: Malaysian Standard Time (MST) is 8 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 13 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Malaysia does not observe daylight saving time.

Lunar Calendar: While Malaysians use the Western calendar for their daily lives, Muslim Malaysians use the Islamic calendar to track Muslim holidays. Since it is based on lunar phases, days fall 11 days earlier each year in relation to the Western calendar. The Islamic calendar's 12 months have 30 days or fewer. Days begin at sunset on what the Western calendar would show as the previous day. For example, each new week begins at sunset on Saturday, and the Muslim holy day of Friday begins on Thursday evening. Of note, many Chinese and Indians also use the lunar calendar to track holidays.

National Holidays

These holidays occur on fixed dates:

- January 1: New Year's Day (some states only)
- May 1: Labor Day
- 1st Saturday in June: Yang di-Pertuan Agong's (King's) Birthday
- August 31: National Day
- September 16: Malaysia Day
- December 25: Christmas Day

These holidays occur on variable dates according to the lunar calendar:

- ***Awal Muharram***: Islamic New Year
- ***Maulud Nabi***: Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad
- ***Hari Raya Puasa***: End of ***Ramadan***
- ***Hari Raya Haji***: The Festival of the Sacrifice
- ***Deepavali***: Hindu Festival of Lights
- ***Chinese New Year***: Chinese Lunar New Year
- ***Vesak***: Buddha Day

Of note, the Christian celebration of Good Friday is a holiday in the states of Sabah and Sarawak.

Time and Business

Generally, business tends to move more slowly in Malaysia than in the US for a number of reasons. First, Malaysians view time as flexible – something that can be molded or stretched as needed. Within such a concept of "rubber time," deadlines and appointments become more fluid. Accordingly, business meetings commonly do not start on time and often run late (Photo: Central Kuala Lumpur).

Second, Malaysians prefer to build personal relationships and establish trust before conducting business. Consequently, Malaysians tend to make business decisions slowly, after multiple meetings and lengthy discussions. Of note, Malaysians prioritize trust relationships over written contracts and commonly renegotiate even final agreements.

Third, Malaysians conduct themselves in business settings in a manner that communicates respect and "saves face" (see p. 2 *of Language and Communication*), a process that can be time-consuming. For example, Malaysians avoid direct, confrontational behavior, valuing instead tact and harmony in interactions. It is considered rude to directly criticize or confront a colleague in a public forum. The appropriate approach is to provide constructive feedback in a private setting.

Personal Space

As is common in many societies, personal space in Malaysia depends on the nature of the relationship. With strangers, the distance tends to be about an arm's length, while with family and friends, it is much closer. In general, Malaysians typically stand closer together when conversing than Americans.

Touch

Close friends and family members commonly touch one another while speaking. Similarly, friends of the same gender may hold hands in public, indicating their deep platonic friendship. Malaysian men are especially affectionate with each other, often draping their arms over a friend's shoulder, slapping each other on the back, and linking arms.

Of note, Malaysians consider displays of affection between people of the opposite sex inappropriate. Foreign nationals should avoid physical contact with members of the opposite sex, especially in rural areas where traditional values remain prominent. Likewise, Malaysians do not touch or kiss children other than their own. Malaysians consider the head sacred, and avoid touching or passing an object over someone's head.

Eye Contact

Malaysians consider direct and frequent eye contact as intrusive and rude in some contexts. They typically maintain only intermittent eye contact when conversing with strangers, members of the opposite sex, and people of higher status. Nevertheless, it is common for friends and family to maintain direct eye contact when conversing.

Photographs

Although most Malaysians do not mind being photographed, foreign nationals should always acquire a Malaysian's permission before taking his picture. While photography is usually permitted on the grounds of religious buildings, it may be prohibited inside, especially during times of worship.

Driving

Malaysian drivers tend to speed, tailgate, and ignore other traffic laws. Despite government road safety advocacy programs, traffic accidents have been on the rise in recent years. In 2014, Malaysia had the world's 17th worst traffic-related death rate, with 30 fatalities per 100,000 people. Although Malaysia's well-maintained highways and toll expressways remain relatively uncongested, traffic is a major problem in cities, especially in Kuala Lumpur. Unlike Americans, Malaysians drive on the left side of the road (Photo: The small town of Kuala Sungai Baru).

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Malaysia's artistic and recreational traditions reflect the diverse cultural and religious influences of its multiethnic population (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality* and p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*). While each ethnic group takes pride in its own traditional art forms, contemporary art tend to model external practices particularly from the West.

Dress and Appearance

Traditional: Malay men's traditional clothing consists of a ***baju melayu*** (pictured), a long-sleeved tunic with pants (**seluar)** topped with a ***sampin*** (short ***sarong***, or wrap-around skirt). Men often pair this outfit with a rimless, velvet cap (***songkok***), especially when attending Islamic religious services.

Prior to the 20th century, many Malay women wore a ***kemban***, a simple *sarong* tied above the chest. Over the last century, Malay women's clothing choices expanded to include the ***sarung kebaya***, a 2-piece outfit consisting of a form-fitting long-sleeved blouse (***baju kebaya***) over a silk or ***batik*** (dyed cloth) skirt. A looser alternative is the ***baju kurung***, consisting of a loose tunic (***baju***) worn with a long *sarong*.

Historically, some Malay women covered their heads and shoulders with a ***selendang***, a loose-fitting lace shawl. In response to an Islamic resurgence over the last decades (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*), most Malay women have adopted the ***tudung***, or headscarf. It is designed to cover all the hair, neck, and ears but leaves the face exposed, and its color coordinates with the rest of the outfit.

Malaysian women of Chinese descent often wear a traditional ***cheongsam*** (long silk dress with a raised collar) or a ***sam foo*** (floral blouse with matching pants). Malaysian women of Indian descent often wear a ***sari***, (a colorful length of fabric wrapped

around the body and draped over the left shoulder), with a matching ***choli*** (blouse). Other Indian women prefer a ***salwar kameez***, a long tunic worn over pants with a matching shawl. On special occasions, Indian men may wear a ***kurta***, a long, knee-length shirt made of cotton or linen paired with pants.

Modern: Malaysians in rural areas commonly wear traditional clothing on a daily basis (Photo: Malay men in a small village play soccer in T-shirts and *sarongs*). In urban areas, they wear Western-style clothing often paired with traditional styles. Generally, Malaysians' clothing is neat and conservative; shirts have sleeves and skirts and pants fall at least to the knee. At work, men often wear Western-style business suits or collared shirts and trousers, while women wear dresses, blouses, and skirts. Children wear uniforms to school. When they reach puberty, most Malay girls begin to wear the *tudung*.

Sports and Games

Traditional Sports: ***Sepak*** (rattan ball) is played by tossing a ball between players in a circle (***bulatan***) or over a net (***jaring***) without using hands. ***Silat*** is a popular martial art and part of the Southeast Asian Games. In ***wau*** (kite flying) competitions, so-called kite fighters attempt to cut an opponent's strings by coating their own lines with glue and powdered glass.

Football: Introduced by the British, football (soccer) is very popular in Malaysia. Many people play the sport in clubs and leagues and also enjoy watching the Malaysia Cup, organized in 1921 and one of Asia's oldest football tournaments.

Other Sports: Other popular sports include badminton, golf, swimming, inline skating, basketball, and cycling. Many Malaysians follow motor racing. Since 1999, the Sepang International Circuit in Kuala Lumpur hosts the annual Petronas Formula 1 Malaysia Grand Prix.

Games: Malaysians enjoy traditional games such as ***congkak***, similar to chess, and ***mahjong***, a game akin to gin rummy but uses tiles instead of cards. Girls typically play 5-stone, a game like jacks with "stones" made of small cloth sacks. Boys enjoy ***chaptek***, a hacky sack-like game with a ball made of rubber and feathers. Children and adults alike enjoy ***gasing***, top spinning. Using tops that weigh up to 10 lbs, players compete to knock down or out spin their opponents' tops.

Music

Traditional: Malay music traditionally centered on percussion instruments including drums, gongs, and cymbals, originally used for practical purposes such as transmitting messages between villages. Malay royal courts commissioned ***gamelan*** orchestras, composed of gongs and stringed instruments, to entertain nobility. ***Keroncon*** (village bands) played hand drums, flutes, and harmonicas.

Modern: Today, Malaysians' music preferences typically divide along ethnic lines: Malays enjoy Malay pop, Chinese prefer Indonesian and Chinese groups, while Indians listen to Sri Lankan and Indian music. Some Malaysian artists like Sheila Majid and Sudirman look to Western rock and pop for inspiration. Internationally acclaimed musician Siti Nurhaliza, known as the "Voice of Asia," combines traditional and pop music. Gerard Singh became the first Malaysian to make the US Billboard Top 40 with his 2014 single *Crazy*.

Dance and Theater

Dance and drama were often linked in traditional Malay culture. Some dances were performed to heal the sick. Others told stories, such as ***asyik,*** a seated dance in which women act as court maidens grooming themselves. ***Mak yong***, a form of dance theater, was originally a spiritual ritual performed at Malay royal courts (Photo: Malay dancers perform for US Navy personnel).

Today, dance is a popular form of entertainment at weddings, festivals, and other special

occasions. Thought to derive from a dance introduced by the Portuguese (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*), the upbeat ***joget*** often includes audience participation. Another dance, the ***zapin***, came from the Arab-Persian world in the 15th century and involves pairs of dancers performing fast, synchronized steps.

Malaysians of Chinese descent also perform various traditional Chinese dances, such as the lion and dragon dances featured at Chinese New Year parades. Also common is Chinese street opera, a combination of song, dance, and acrobatics. Indian classical dance is prevalent across Malaysia, where many dance studios engage teachers from India to preserve the ancient traditions.

Wayang kulit: Traditional shadow puppetry (pictured) features 2 dimensional puppets made from cow or buffalo hide. A puppeteer manipulates the puppets before a lighted screen so that only their silhouettes appear. Meanwhile, the puppeteer sings and narrates, often adapting stories from the Hindu epic ***Ramayana*** or from Malay and Javanese tales of warriors, royalty, animals, giants, and spirits.

Literature

Malays enjoy a rich tradition of poetry and prose passed down orally by ***penglipur lara*** (storytellers). These works included myths which taught moral lessons or promoted certain values (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). Poetry often took the form of ***pantun***, 4-line humorous or moral poems, and ***syair***, narrative poems. Well-known Malay tales relate the adventures of ***Sang Kancil***, a clever mousedeer (small deer) whose stories are still told in modern Malaysian literature and television.

Following the introduction of Islam, Malays adopted the Arabic script (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*). Early texts include ***Hikayat***, the adventures of Malay leaders, and manuscripts conveying Islamic principles and values. The influential ***Hikayat Sejarah Melayu*** (*The Malay Annals*) is part fiction yet also includes the only recorded history of the 15th-

century Malacca Sultanate (see p 3 of *History and Myth*). Others important texts include ***Hikayat Hang Tuah***, the story of a 15th-century Malay warrior, and ***Hikayat Seri Rama***, the Malay adaptation of *Ramayana*.

Known as the father of modern Malay literature, Munshi Abdullah was the first Malay to break from traditional literary styles to write on social issues. Other modern Malaysian writers, including Malaysians of Chinese and Indian descent, focus on themes of nationalism, war, and the struggle for independence. Several contemporary authors have received international recognition and awards.

Arts and Crafts

Malaysia has a rich tradition of arts and crafts, many of which were first created as practical tools, clothing, or weapons. While some artisans still follow traditional production methods, their number is decreasing. Many young Malaysian artists prefer modern styles and techniques such as installation, performance, and digital art. The government promotes the arts by funding apprenticeship programs.

Textiles: Malaysia's indigenous groups produce a variety of textiles. For example, the Iban of East Malaysia make ***pua kumbu***, large blankets woven with dyed thread. The government promotes the production of ***batik*** fabric, a component of traditional clothing and important part of Malaysia's cultural heritage. To make *batik*, artisans apply wax to cloth, then paint or dip the cloth in dye. Artisans then remove the wax, revealing intricate designs.

Metalwork: Malaysia is renowned for its high quality pewter. The Royal Selangor Company, founded in 1885 by Chinese immigrant Yong Koon, still produces dishware, décor, and modern items like flash drives and key chains.

Once considered a mystical weapon with magical properties, the ***kris*** or ***keris*** (dagger, pictured) is a traditional Malay weapon of self-defense and well-known symbol of Malay culture. With blades 12-15 inches long, a *keris* includes 60 layers of steel and iron.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Frequently described as a national obsession, food is such an important part of daily life that Malaysians often greet each other with the phrase ***Sudah makan***? ("Have you eaten?"). Malaysia's cuisine is extensive and varied, incorporating flavors and traditions from Southeast Asia, China, India, the Middle East, and Europe (Photo: ***Nasi lemak***, rice cooked with coconut milk, served with chicken, cucumbers, and egg.)

Dining Customs

Most Malaysians augment 3 daily meals with several snacks. To begin a meal, the host typically says "***silakan makan***" ("please eat"). Many Malays and Indians eat with their right hand, using their fingers and thumb to scoop food into their mouths. They clean their fingers as needed before and during the meal in a small water bowl (***ketor***). Of note, because they consider the left hand unclean, most Malaysians do not use it to eat. Some Malaysians prefer utensils, using a fork in the left hand to push food onto a spoon in the right, from which they eat. Malaysians rarely use knives since food is cut prior to being served. Chinese may eat with chopsticks or spoons.

Diet

Historically, indigenous people (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*) ate ***sago*** (a palm leaf starch), wild ferns, fish, venison, or other game. Today, rice (***nasi***), Indian flatbread (***roti***), and noodles are the most common staples. Malaysians prepare rice in many different ways, including fried, steamed, sticky, boiled into a porridge (***bubur***), or prepared with coconut milk (***nasi lemak***). Indians typically use *roti* to scoop curries and other sauces. Chinese prepare many noodle (***mee***) and rice dishes. Malaysian cuisine commonly includes chilies (such as ***sambal*** chili paste), turmeric, coriander, coconut, and cumin as flavor enhancers. Other spices include lime, galangal, ginger, shallots, garlic, and ***belanchan*** (dried shrimp paste).

Malaysians enjoy several different native tropical fruits including guava, papaya, banana, pineapple mangosteen (a small purple fruit with a white, edible interior), and spine-covered rambutan (another small fruit with a white, edible interior). Although the durian (pictured), known as the "king of fruits," is popular among some Malaysians, most public transport systems ban it due to its pungent odor.

Some members of Malaysia's ethnic groups adhere to certain dietary restrictions. Observant Muslims (see p. 6-7 of *Religion and Spirituality*) consume neither pork nor alcohol. In addition, they follow particular rules of animal slaughter and meat preparation to ensure that food is ***halal***, allowed by Islamic law. While many Hindu Malaysians (see p. 8 of *Religion and Spirituality*) do not eat beef, they consume chicken, mutton, and seafood. Other Hindus are vegetarians who acquire their protein through beans, soy, and dairy products.

Nyonya Food

Nyonya food refers to the cuisine of the Peranakan, descendants of Chinese who intermarried with Malays (see p. 12 *of Political and Social Relations*). Blending Chinese and Malay ingredients, the cuisine is most prevalent in Penang and Melaka. Dishes include ***asam laksa***, a thick and spicy fish and noodle soup, and the common snack ***kueh pie ti***, thinly-sliced vegetables and prawns served in bite-sized deep-fried pastry cups.

Meals and Popular Dishes

Malays often consume *nasi lemak* for breakfast, pairing it with dried anchovies, *belanchan*, boiled egg, and roasted peanuts. Noodles or English-style toast and eggs are also common breakfast foods. Lunch is often a simple dish based on noodles or rice. Dinner, usually the largest meal of the day, often involves curries or fried foods along with rice or noodles.

Popular entrées include ***satay,*** grilled skewered chicken or beef served with peanut sauce; ***rendang***, beef or chicken simmered in spices, chilies, and coconut milk; and ***masak lemak***, a coconut-based dish with turmeric, lemongrass, and chilies. Chinese-inspired dishes reflect a variety of Chinese regions. For example, ***Hainanese*** chicken and rice is served with chili peppers, garlic, soy sauce, cucumbers, and tomatoes. ***Hai mee*** consists of noodles served with prawns, fish cake, and bean sprouts.

Common Indian-inspired meals include *roti* sprinkled with sugar for breakfast; ***mee rebus***, yellow noodles with bean sprouts, sweet potato gravy, and a boiled egg for lunch; and ***kon lo mee***, noodles with soy sauce and roasted pork for dinner (Photo: Beef *rendang*).

Beverages

Malaysians typically drink water or other beverages after meals. While not offered at Muslim-owned establishments, alcohol is available in most urban areas. Local beers like Anchor and Tiger as well as Western, Thai, and Chinese brands are popular. Some Malaysians enjoy a rice-based alcoholic drink called ***tuak*** from East Malaysia. They also enjoy fresh squeezed juices like watermelon, carrot, lychee, or sugar cane juice. Indian restaurants specialize in ***teh tarik***, a frothy tea created by "pulling," or pouring the drink multiple times. Malaysians often drink ***kopi*** or coffee made from beans roasted with sugar. In addition to soft drinks, Malaysians also drink sweetened soya milk and ***chin chow***, a seaweed beverage.

Eating Out

Eating out is part of everyday life for many Malaysians. When at a sit-down restaurant (***restoran***), the host typically orders and pays for all guests. Of note, restaurants commonly add a 5% service charge and a 10% government fee to all meals; additional tips are not required or expected.

Urban street food vendors called ***hawker stalls*** are popular. Some *hawkers* specialize in one dish, such as ***rojak***, a fruit and vegetable salad, or skewered meat in *satay* sauce. Chinese-style ***cze char*** offer a variety of entrees such as meatballs, spring rolls, or fried noodles. Other stalls feature unique dishes like ***roti john***, a sort of omelet sandwich made with eggs, toast, spicy meats, onions, and tomato sauce.

Other casual eateries include ***kedai kopi***, coffee shops which serve small dishes like eggs and toast with ***kaya*** (coconut jam), and ***pasar*** (open air markets). Some Malaysians enjoy local versions of Western-style fast food such as cheeseburgers with *rendang* sauce.

Health Overview

The Malaysian population's health has improved significantly over the last decades. From 59 years in 1960, life expectancy at birth is now 74.75 years – higher than the regional average of 67 and the global average of 70. Maternal and child mortality rates are lower than regional averages, and clean water and sanitation facilities are readily available. Due to their marginalization, Malaysia's indigenous groups (see p. 12-13 of *Political and Social Relations*) have a much lower life expectancy, carry a higher disease burden, and have reduced access to healthcare (Photo: Malaysian hospital).

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. The Malaysian government officially recognizes and defines a variety of types of traditional medicine as Traditional and Complementary Medicine (TC&M). Acknowledging TC&M's role in healthcare, the government formulates policies and guidelines regarding TC&M's use and develops education and training standards. TC&M units operate within "integrated" hospitals across the country. A 2015 study reports there are roughly 13,846 registered TC&M practitioners.

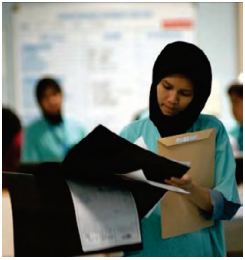
The government divides TC&M into several major types including Islamic Medical Practice (IMP), Traditional Malay Medicine (TMM), Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), and Traditional Indian Medicine (TIM). Used for the treatment of physical and spiritual ailments, IMP or ***ruqyah*** includes treatment methods based in Qur'anic prayer and recitation (see p. 3-6 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

By contrast, practitioners use TMM, TCM, and TIM for both therapeutic and wellness purposes. TMM includes herbal medicines, Malay massage, indigenous massage, and ***bekam*** or cupping – the practice of applying suction cups on the skin to regulate blood flow. While TCM includes herbal medicines and cupping, it also incorporates acupuncture (the process of inserting very thin needles into a patient's skin) and moxibustion (a process in which a practitioner burns or massages herbs into acupuncture points).

TIM incorporates 3 approaches. ***Ayurveda*** aims to balance mind, body, and consciousness through proper diet, lifestyle, and herbal remedies. ***Siddha*** uses herbal, mineral, and animal-based formulas to treat disease and unify body, mind, and spirit. ***Unani*** focuses on treatments based on herbal remedies.

Modern Healthcare System

Following independence in 1957, Malaysia moved to create a high quality, universal healthcare system that is now one of the best in the region. Healthcare providers serve the majority of the population through good facilities, mobile medical and dental clinics, and education programs in both rural and urban areas. In addition, current and retired civil servants and Malaysians in rural areas receive free primary healthcare. While of the highest quality, private healthcare is generally unaffordable for most Malaysians. In 2013, Malaysia had 349 hospitals, 7,700 clinics with physicians, and 2,009 community clinics (Photo: Nurse at the National Heart Institute of Malaysia).



Health Challenges

Despites these advances, many challenges remain. While all medical school graduates work at least 3 years in public health facilities, most doctors eventually transition to the private sector, leaving public facilities understaffed. Rural areas often lack adequate facilities or offer lower quality care (Photo: A US Navy dentist treats a Malaysian patient).

Obesity: Malaysia has perhaps the highest rates of child and adult obesity in Asia. Roughly 45.3% of Malaysian adults rated as overweight or obese as of 2015 Increased obesity has resulted in increased rates of associated diseases as well as weight-related disabilities.

As is common in developing countries, the rate of noncommunicable diseases, such as cardiovascular and chronic respiratory diseases, cancer, and diabetes has risen, now accounting for over 70% of deaths. While no longer a leading cause of illness or death, malaria is still a national concern, with over 3,923 cases and 9 deaths in 2014.

HIV/AIDS: Malaysia's focus on prevention, detection, and treatment of HIV/AIDS has resulted in a 50% drop of HIV cases in the last decade. Nearly 100,800 Malaysians have HIV, a relatively low prevalence rate of 0.45% of the population. Although most infections occur in males, female infection rates have increased in recent decades.

Medical Tourism

Malaysia's world-class healthcare and affordable accommodations have attracted many medical tourists from abroad. They travel to Malaysia solely seeking healthcare such as cardiac procedures, dentistry, general surgery, orthopedics, and plastic surgery. With government support, medical tourism has doubled since 2010, with over 770,000 patients in 2014.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

Prior to independence in 1957, Malaysia's economy was primarily based on the export of rubber and tin. By the 1980s, the country had diversified, forging an industrialized export-oriented economy. Supported by foreign investment from Japan and the US, the industrial sector continued to experience substantial growth through the 1990s. Today, Malaysia specializes in the production of electronics and agricultural commodities for export (Photo: A rubber tree farm).

This dependence on export and foreign investment left Malaysia vulnerable when the 1997 East Asian currency crisis hit, disrupting a decade of a steady 10% growth. A combination of government stimulus packages, low inflation, and low external debt reversed economic stagnation by 2002.

In 2010, Malaysia launched the $444 billion Economic Transformation Program (ETP) as a catalyst to accelerate the country's growth by investing in 12 key economic sectors. These include high technology industries, oil, gas, and energy, service industries, and biotechnology, among others. With these investments, the ETP aims to create 3.3 million new jobs and lift the country from upper-middle to high-income status by 2020.

By 2012, Malaysia's economy was growing steadily with $59 billion invested in ETP industries and over 400,000 newly created jobs. Today, Malaysia has a thriving multi-sector economy that is the world's 29th and Southeast Asia's 3rd largest behind Thailand and Indonesia. Notably, Malaysia is Southeast Asia's 2nd largest petroleum and natural gas producer and the world's 2nd largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (see p. 2 of *Technology and Material*). Malaysia's 0.6% poverty rate is remarkably low compared to Thailand's rate of 11% and Indonesia's 11.2%.

Ethnicity and the Economy

In an effort to decrease income disparities among Malaysia's ethnic groups (see p. 10 of *History and Myth* and p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*), the government introduced a socioeconomic affirmative action plan, the New Economic Policy (NEP), in 1971. The NEP reserved certain privileges for Malays and certain indigenous groups that the government officially recognized as ***bumiputra*** or "sons of the soil" (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*). For example, the NEP reserved most civil service, police, and army jobs for *bumiputra* and favored them in education and economic development programs over Chinese and Indian residents. In 2013, the government launched a similar program, the Bumiputra Economic Empowerment Program (BEEP) that continued these policies.

These and other pro-Malay policies have helped reduce poverty among Malays and diffused Malay resentment of Chinese economic dominance. Nevertheless, these policies have largely benefited only politically connected Malays. With about 70% of Malaysia's Indian population classified as poor or very poor, income inequality remains a large problem.

Services

Accounting for 56.1% of GDP and 54% of employment, the services sector is the largest and fastest-growing component of the Malaysian economy. Key services industries include telecommunications, tourism, financial services, and wholesale and retail sales (Photo: Royal guard outside the king's palace in Kuala Lumpur).

Tourism: Malaysia's tourism industry has grown considerably over the past several decades, with tourist arrivals increasing from about 7 million in 1990 to 25.7 million in 2015. That year, over half of the arrivals came from Singapore, while visitors from Indonesia, China, Thailand, Brunei, and India made up the majority of rest. Recognizing tourism's potential in driving economic growth, the government allocates substantial ETP investment towards this sector.

Industry

As the 2nd largest component of the economy, the industrial sector accounts for 35% of GDP and 36% of employment.

Manufacturing: The backbone of Malaysia's post-independence economic growth, manufacturing remains the most important part of the industrial sector. Malaysian companies specialize in the assembly of electrical machinery, electronic equipment and appliances, as well as the production of chemicals, textiles, steel, and motor vehicles.

Construction: Spurred by ETP investment, the construction industry has experienced average annual growth of 11% per year since 2010. Sustained by high levels of state and private sector investment, construction will likely continue to grow through both commercial sector development and large public infrastructure projects, including highways and railroads.

Agriculture

The agricultural sector includes farming, livestock, fishing, and forestry and is the smallest component of Malaysia's economy, accounting for 8.9% of GDP and about 11% of employment. Most agricultural activity occurs on small farms.

Farming: About 24% of Malaysia's territory is dedicated to cultivation. Production of the main food crop, rice, has declined since the 1950s. Malaysia makes up the shortfall with imports, mostly from Thailand. Important cash crops include palm oil, rubber, cocoa, tea, coffee, and coconuts (Photo: A rice field in north Malaysia).

Fishing: Restricted to accessible but shallow coastal waters, Malaysia's fishing industry historically was unproductive for the most part. In the 1970s, heavy investment into mechanized boats and trawlers allowed the industry to expand into deeper, more abundant offshore waters.

Forestry: Decades of commercial logging in Malaysia's extensive forests has resulted in deforestation (see p. 3 of

Political and Social Relations). Today, most timber production occurs in the East Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah and includes rubberwood, acacia, teak, and sentang.

Currency

Malaysia's currency is the Malaysian *ringgit* (RM), issued in 7 banknote values (1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100) and 5 coin values (1, 5, 10, 20, 50). In 2015, the exchange rate was 3.902 RM per $1 USD. Malaysians typically use cash for everyday purchases, although large businesses accept credit cards. Malaysians sometimes colloquially refer to the ringgit as "dollars."

Foreign Trade

In 2015 Malaysia's exports totaled $204 billion and imports $148 billion. Exports included semiconductors, electronic equipment, palm oil, petroleum, natural gas, wood products, rubber, textiles, chemicals, and solar panels. The largest buyers included Singapore (14%), China (13%), Japan (10%), the US (9%), Thailand (6%), Hong Kong (5%), and India (4%). Malaysia's top imports included electronics, machinery, petroleum products, plastics, cars, iron and steel products, and chemicals. These items are purchased from China (19%), Singapore (12%), the US (8%), Japan (8%), Thailand (6%), Indonesia (5%), and South Korea (5%) (Photo: Stock exchange in Kuala Lumpur).

ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)

With the European Union as a model, the AEC united the 10 member nations under a single market in late 2015, permitting goods, services, capital, and labor to move freely within it.

Foreign Aid

Japan is the primary supplier of financial aid to Malaysia. The US, UK, and Australia also provide financial support for public administration, agriculture, telecommunications, banking, poverty alleviation, and English language programs. With $3 million in support in 2014, the US planned to provide $2.3 million in 2015, mostly for military support, counterterrorism, law enforcement, and disaster relief.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Malaysia has a well-developed physical infrastructure, including an extensive network of well-maintained roads. In addition, Malaysians enjoy widespread mobile phone service, although reliable Internet connectivity is limited to urban areas. The government censors all media and strictly regulates Internet content.

Transportation

Malaysia has a comprehensive and efficient public transit system. In and around Kuala Lumpur, for example, travelers using rechargeable "MyRapid" or "Touch-n-Go" cards have the option of traveling by bus, 4 separate rail systems, and an air-conditioned monorail (Photo: Monorail in Melaka).

Buses are a common means of transit between cities and to certain foreign destinations, including Singapore and Thailand. Although rural bus routes are poorly marked, most small towns enjoy frequent service. Of note, operators often drive aggressively and occasionally use stimulants, resulting in frequent accidents. To reduce the accident rate, Malaysia's Transport Ministry implemented new safety measures, including drug screenings, in 2014. Taxis are also widely available and can be engaged for long distance trips. Taxi drivers do not usually expect tips.

Ferries provide access to Malaysia's islands and ports in neighboring countries, including Brunei, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, and Singapore. Of note, some ferry services are notorious for their disregard of safety regulations, such as operating when overloaded or using badly-maintained boats.

Roadways: Malaysia had about 90,000 mi of roadways in 2010, 80% of which were paved. Because Malaysia invests heavily in road infrastructure, many roads are in excellent condition. The country's main throughway is the 6-lane North-South Highway

(***Lebuhraya***), which stretches from the Thai border in the North to Singapore in the South.

Railways: Although slower, railways provide an inexpensive but limited alternative to buses. In Peninsula Malaysia, the Keretapi Tanah Melayu (KTM) – Malaysia's privatized national railway system – reaches as far south as Singapore then extends via 2 branches to the north. The northwest branch extends into Thailand via Kuala Lumpur, while the northeast branch runs up the east coast through the jungle.

Ports and Waterways: Peninsular Malaysia's major ports are Port Klang (serving Kuala Lumpur), Penang Langkawi, Johor, and Kuantan. East Malaysia's largest port is Kota Kinabalu. Malaysia has about 4,500 mi of inland waterways navigable by small boats. Boats and ferries operate along the rivers of Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia.

Airways: Malaysia has 114 airports and airstrips, of which 39 have paved runways. The primary transit hub is the Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Also located just outside Kuala Lumpur, Lapangan Terbang Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport provides domestic flights. There are 14 other major airports located in Sabah, Sarawak, and the Federal Territory of Labuan in East Malaysia. Malaysia's national carrier is Malaysia Airlines. AirAsia services regional and domestic routes (Photo: A Malaysia Airlines Boeing 747).

Energy

Malaysia is the world's 31st largest energy producer and 30th largest consumer. It generates about 92% of its energy from fossil fuels and the remainder in hydroelectric plants. Malaysia's energy sector is vital to the economy, accounting for almost 20% of the country's GDP in 2013. Same year, Malaysia was Southeast Asia's 2nd largest oil and natural gas producer after Vietnam, and the world's 2nd largest exporter of liquefied natural gas after Qatar. To reduce its domestic dependence on oil and natural gas, Malaysia is investing in alternative fuel sources and also increasing coal imports.

Media

Although the constitution provides for freedom of speech and press, the Malaysian government generally restricts free expression, often coercing journalists into practicing self-censorship. In addition, the government strictly controls all media, regularly censoring content it deems morally inappropriate or harmful to national security. In addition, it sets other press and free speech restrictions, such as banning books, denying printing permits, barring journalists from events, and limiting the circulation of certain publications. Despite these restrictions, more than 30 newspapers regularly publish in Malay, English, Chinese, and Tamil. The most widely-read publications include *BH* (Malay), *Utusan Malaysia* (Malay), *New Straits Times* (English), *The Star* (English), and *Sin Chew Daily* (Chinese).

Radio and TV: Both Malaysia's largest broadcaster, the state-owned Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), as well as private TV and radio broadcasters offer programs in Malay, Tamil, Chinese, and English.

Telecommunications

While Malaysia's telecommunications infrastructure is well established in urban centers, telecommunications in some rural areas, particularly in East Malaysia, remain less developed. Most of the country has access to mobile phone networks. Notably, Malaysia has about 45 million mobile phone subscriptions for nearly 31 million people (Photo: Kuala Lumpur's Petronas Twin Towers).

Internet: About 66% of Malaysians are regular Internet users. Broadband (wired) Internet is available in most cities, although some rural areas, particularly in East Malaysia, have yet to gain access. Users access the Internet using mobile phones, cyber cafes, home computers, and at workplaces. The government largely supports a policy of free and open access to the Internet. Nevertheless, a government commission monitors the Internet for content deemed offensive and occasionally blocks access to certain sites.

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