

Heriot Watt University Malaysia Pre-Visiting Awareness

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Introduction

Malaysia is a vibrant and diverse country known for its rich culture, history, and natural beauty. If you are visiting Malaysia for work, particularly to Putrajaya, this information can serve as practical awareness to help inform any adjustment to local life. Understanding the national cultural nuances, social expectations, and daily practices could enhance your experience at Heriot Watt University Malaysia (HWUM).

Note: This awareness compliments the HWUM 'Pre-arrival Guide for International Staff', which provides detailed information upon commencing a workplace visit.

1. Adjusting to Life in Putrajaya and Malaysia

Putrajaya, the federal administrative capital of Malaysia, is a modern city known for its picturesque landscapes, government buildings, and tranquil environment. It is located just 25 km from Kuala Lumpur, the bustling capital, making it easy to access the vibrant city life while enjoying the peaceful setting of Putrajaya.

1.1 Climate

Malaysia has a tropical climate with high humidity and consistent temperatures ranging between 25°C to 35°C. Be prepared for sudden rain showers, especially during the monsoon seasons (May to September in the Southwest and November to March in the Northeast). Refer to the official website of Malaysian Meteorological Department [here](#) for updates and more information.

1.2 Transport:

Putrajaya is approximately 40 – 50 mins minutes drive, 33 km from KL City Centre (KL Sentral Station). The distance between KLIA Airport to Putrajaya is between 28.6 km to 40.2 km depending on the route taken and the travel time is around 36 to 47 minutes.

Public transport options in Putrajaya include buses, taxis, and ride-sharing apps like Grab, and the city is well-connected by highways. One of the most popular modes of transportation is by using the local bus system. The Putrajaya Nadi Putra bus network covers most parts of the city, making it easy for residents to get around. While owning a car is not essential, it can be convenient if you live and work within Putrajaya.

Getting to HWUM:

It is serviced by a shuttle bus and public transport. From the airport, public buses and the KLIA Express will take you to Putrajaya Sentral (the main bus and express rail station at Putrajaya). The campus shuttle bus links Putrajaya Sentral with the campus and student accommodation.

1.3 Cost of Living

Putrajaya's well-developed infrastructure, numerous attractions, and vibrant cultural scene may contribute to a higher cost of living compared to other regions in Malaysia, particularly in housing. Despite this, the city offers many affordable options for shopping, dining, and entertainment.

Putrajaya features a wide variety of markets and shops where residents can discover unique and interesting goods at reasonable prices. From traditional street food to contemporary fashion, the city's bustling markets cater to all tastes. However, as imported goods may be costly, it is useful to explore local markets and supermarkets for daily shopping needs. Alternative cities or areas to live in that offer convenient commutes and a range of amenities are Cyberjaya, Seri Kembangan, Kajang, Bangi, and Puchong.

1.4 Weekends

In Malaysia, weekends differ between states. In Putrajaya and most of the country, the weekend falls on Saturday and Sunday, with Friday being a regular working day. However, the weekend in Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu observed on Friday and Saturday, and Sunday is a regular working day.

2. Laws and cultural restrictions

Important: National laws and practices relating to culture differ from those in place at HWU Scotland campuses. The following UK Government guidance is available to inform a visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/malaysia>

There are also strict legal restrictions impacting LGBT+ people in Malaysia, please refer to:

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/malaysia/safety-and-security>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-foreign-travel-advice>

Please refer to awareness on national religion; attire; public displays of affection; and alcohol is available in sections 2.2-2.5).

2.1 National culture

Malaysia is a multicultural society with three main ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Each of these groups brings its own traditions, festivals, and values to the collective Malaysian identity. This diversity also extends to the country's cuisine, arts, and religious practices.

Malaysians are generally open and accepting of other cultures. However, it is important to be mindful of local customs, particularly during religious or cultural festivals like Hari Raya Aidilfitri (Eid Ul-Fitri), Hari Raya Haji (Eid Ul-Adha), Chinese New Year, Thaipusam, Deepavali, and Christmas.

2.2 Religion

Malaysia is a predominantly Muslim country, but it is home to various religious practices, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. Respecting religious practices and beliefs is essential in day-to-day interactions.

Islam: As the state religion, Islamic practices and holidays, such as Friday prayers and Ramadan fasting, are central to the local culture. Non-Muslims should be aware of these practices, particularly during the fasting month when eating or drinking in public spaces during daylight hours may be frowned upon.

Be accustomed to hearing the call to prayer from the loudspeakers of a nearby mosque five times a day.

Other Religions: You will also find Buddhist and Hindu temples, Churches, and Sikh Gurdwaras particularly in multicultural areas. Be respectful of religious spaces by dressing appropriately and observing local customs.

Religious Holidays: Malaysia observes a variety of religious holidays, such as Hari Raya Aidilfitri (Eid Ul-Fitri), Hari Raya Haji (Eid Ul-Adha), Chinese New Year, Thaipusam, Deepavali, and Christmas. Public holidays may vary depending on the state, so check the local holiday calendar.

2.3 Attire

Malaysia has a conservative dress code, but it is also quite relaxed in urban areas. The general guideline is to dress modestly, particularly in government offices and when visiting religious sites.

For professional settings, both men and women are expected to dress in smart business attire. In government offices like those in Putrajaya, it is common for women to wear long skirts or trousers and tops that cover the shoulders. Men typically wear shirts and trousers. In casual settings, modesty is appreciated but not strictly enforced.

When visiting religious sites such as mosques or temples, men are expected to wear shirts that cover the elbows and long trousers that reach the knees. Women, on the

other hand, should wear loose-fitting clothing that covers the shoulders, arms, legs, and knees. A headscarf is required for women when entering mosques.

2.4 Public Displays of Affection

Malaysia has a conservative stance on public displays of affection. While light gestures like handholding, brief hugs, and quick pecks on the cheek are generally acceptable, more intimate actions such as excessive kissing or hugging are considered inappropriate in public spaces.

2.5 Drinking alcohol and eating out

Alcohol is widely available in restaurants, bars, and supermarkets in urban areas like Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, tourist hubs, and legal for those over 21 years of age. However, it is less common in rural areas or places with a majority Muslim population.

It is not acceptable to drink alcohol in public spaces (e.g., parks or streets). Bars, pubs, and licensed restaurants are designated places for drinking.

In Malaysia, tipping is generally not a common practice. Instead, a service charge is often included in your bill, especially at cafes or restaurants. This charge is usually noted on the menu and is paid directly to the establishment rather than to individual staff members. Although tipping is not customary in Malaysia, offering a little extra as a gesture of appreciation for exceptional service is always welcomed. More information online:

<https://www.malaysia.travel/>

2.6 Language

Malaysia's official language is Bahasa Malaysia (Malay), but English is widely spoken, particularly in business settings and urban areas. Many Malaysians are also fluent in their ethnic languages, such as Mandarin, and Tamil.

3. Accessibility & Disability

The campus is designed to be accessible to all colleagues. Features include wheelchair access to key buildings, meeting rooms, and shared spaces, accessible toilets and parking spaces for individuals with mobility needs.

We recognise that our colleagues may require additional support to thrive in the workplace. Wherever possible, reasonable adjustments will be made to help you remain in gainful employment. Recommendations for reasonable adjustments and support must be guided by medical advice to ensure they are effective for members. We encourage self-declaration for any disability or health condition during the pre-arrival process by informing the HWUM HR Department.