

Studying in Malaysia: Two ICM students in Kuala Lumpur

Preparation

The preparation for our semester abroad in Asia took about nine months. Initially we started the application at our home university and got the information that Asia Exchange is a good organization which is specialized for studying in Asia. So we applied by Asia Exchange and chose Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur) for our semester abroad. Subsequently, we submitted Auslands-BAföG applications, since it requires approximately six months of processing time. We also applied for a scholarship parallel to BAföG. The application procedures at the foreign university and for the visa were accompanied by Asia Exchange and therefore very easy and fast done. The registration fee for Asia Exchange took 75€ and the semester fee at the foreign university took 1390€ instead of 1440€ because our home university has a partnership which includes a discount of 50€. To make the stay abroad worthy for our master program, we formed a learning agreement in cooperation with our faculty coordinator. In addition, we checked early if we need special vaccinations. Since we wanted to borrow a car or scooter abroad, we applied for an international driving license. In retrospect this was not necessary because the German driving license was completely sufficient in South East Asia. We also assured that our passports and credit cards were still valid for a minimum of six month after the stay. We looked for suitable sub-tenants for our apartment in Nordhausen, redirect the post to our families and temporarily shut down our cell phone contracts for the period abroad. After receiving the letter of acceptance from the university in Malaysia, we booked the flights and health insurances. It is important to mention, that Auslands-BAföG took over the costs of the flight, the health insurance and the study fees completely additional to the basic amount.

Arriving

After landing in Kuala Lumpur, we went to a hotel to check different accommodations before we move in. We bought sim cards for our mobile phones to find accommodations via the Internet. Living in the dormitory on the campus was out of the question, as the dress codes are very stringent throughout the campus and also within the buildings and common areas. Further it was a challenge to always wear long clothes at temperatures above 30 degrees. In addition, we wanted to stay two months longer than the semester lasts and therefore we would have had to move again. Within the first three days at the hotel we visited 15 potential accommodations. The apartment we have chosen, cost around 175€ per person per month

including gym, pool, study rooms, table tennis rooms, billiard rooms and a roof top with barbecue stations. In walking distance there were various shops and restaurants. By taxi it took us 10 minutes to the university and 20 minutes to the city center, which was very cheap because of the driving services UBER and GRAB.

University Putra Malaysia

At the beginning, we had an introductory event with an employee of Asia Exchange to meet the other exchange students and to get some tips about living in Malaysia. There was also an introductory session of the University, which gave us an overview of the practices, dress codes, campus distribution, bus connections, weekend trips etc. In addition, we did some formalities for the stay abroad like register for courses, buying bus tickets and undergo a health check (blood sampling, x-ray, sight test, etc. for around 80€). The courses we visited were very varied. The grades consist of group and individual work, a few short tests, the level of participation and at least two examinations. Our Malaysian fellow students were very friendly but also shy and distant, because of the prevailing religion. Touches between men and women, e.g. hand shaking should be avoided. So in some cases it was considerably more difficult to get into contact with the other sex during group works. There is no headscarf duty for women, especially not for foreigners. However all Muslim girls, even those who did not wear a headscarf in leisure time, wear it during classes because of an unwritten law. Every faculty owns a food court which provides meals at very low costs (0.5€ to 2€). Most of the time, we just stayed at our faculty, since the campus is so huge that you can hardly walk the distances between the faculties on foot, but there are shuttle buses between the faculties. The University also offered a weekend trip for all exchange students to participate in a homestay. Therefore groups of four students stay at local houses in the countryside to get to know the native people, their work and their lifestyle. This was a priceless experience which we do not want to miss, because we had a lot of fun and found many new friends from all over the world.

Malaysia

Malaysia consists of the following three main ethnical, religious and cultural groups - Muslim Malays, Buddhist Chinese and Hindu Indians. Although these three subcultures differ in many perspectives of life, they have a lot in common, too. All of them show inexpressible hospitality, affability and thoughtfulness, no matter in which gods, god, goddess, animal,

plant or whatever you believe. It was absolutely fascinating to realize, that one of the biggest cultural shocks was the fact, that three different cultures can live peacefully together in one common country. Besides this insight, the most pleasant effect of three different cultures within the same country is the variety of food. The mix of Malay, Chinese, Indian and also Arabic food with the addition of any mysterious spices was absolutely amazing. Even if we had a kitchen in our accommodation, we did not cook once. We always went outside to eat in restaurants or street stalls which are very cheap and indescribable delicious.

Unfortunately during the seven month the weather was worse than in other South East Asian countries. Many times from one second to another the weather changed completely from blue sky and sunshine to thunderstorms, heavy rains and floods. But at least it was always hot. The locals told us that the weather became very unpredictable during the last five years as a result of the climate change.

One important learned lesson is the Malay mentality of ignoring problems and waiting or praying until they will be solved self-acted. This attitude is a challenge for Germans, because we have one of the most intense problem-solving-mentality. Another learned lesson was the different understanding of punctuality. But this was just a small price to pay in contrast to all the amazing experiences in Malaysia.

Travelling around the whole country by bus, boat, train or plain is very cheap compared to Germany and Malaysia has a relatively good infrastructure compared to other developing countries. Malaysia has not only white dream beaches with crystal clear water, surrounded by palm trees, but also mountains, rivers and jungles. The flora and fauna are amazing and no word could really describe the beauty of the country and its people.

To keep it short, we are very grateful for obtaining this wonderful semester abroad and for every great moment, shared experience and taught lesson, which made the stay in Malaysia so unique! We really recommend a semester abroad in such a diverse country like Malaysia to everybody, because we learned a lot inside the university but also outside for ourselves and our personalities.

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Date

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