

5 Important Festivals and Celebrations in Malaysia

Malaysia is a melting pot of cultures. Malaysian culture is multi-faceted, each of these facets is adorned with a festival of its own. Festivals in Malaysia are celebrated with much splendour and enthusiasm. Malaysians have embraced each and every culture with open arms, and this is why they celebrate festivals from across the world with so much exuberance.

Here are the 5 Festivals and celebrations in Malaysia

Hari Raya/ Eid

Hari Raya is one of the most prominent festivals celebrated in Malaysia, as the majority of the population residing in Malaysia follows Islam. Hari Raya is celebrated during the 9th month of the lunar calendar for a period of one month. Muslims observe daily fasts from dawn to dusk and refrain from consuming food and wrong-doing. Hari Raya is celebrated on the last day of Ramadan, it marks the end of the fasting period for Muslims.

Deepavali

Deepavali is a festival celebrated by Indians living in Malaysia. This is the festival of lights, it signifies the victory of light and hope over darkness. Houses and streets of Malaysia are adorned with colourful lights and oil lamps. The day starts off by taking a bath with oil and praying. Later during the day processions, street-fairs, fireworks and get-togethers take place. The aromas of a variety of dishes lingering across the streets is one of the things that truly symbolises the festivities of Deepavali in the areas where Indians live in a large number.

Chinese New Year

This is the time when Malaysia turns red. All the Chinese living in Malaysia decorate their houses and streets with traditional red decorations, they do so in order to ward off evil spirits. As a part of the 15 day long celebration lion and dragon dances accompanied by fireworks are performed across Malaysia. Family get together, cooking of numerous dishes on the same day, and decorating houses are a few things that happen during the Chinese New Year.

Thaipusam

Thaipusam is largely celebrated by the Tamil community in Malaysia. Thai means the month and Pusam means star, Thaipusam is celebrated in January / February when the star is at its highest. The celebrations in Malaysia start off by visiting the Sri Mahamariamman Temple and proceeds to the Batu Caves. This festival sees a footfall of over a million devotees from across the globe. Some devotees go to an extent of piercing their bodies and carrying sacrificial burdens called Kavadis to beseech their blessings.

Wesak

Wesak is a Buddhist festival celebrated to pay tribute to the birthday, enlightenment and the attainment of Nirvana in the life of Lord Buddha. The festivities begin at dawn by gathering at Buddhist temples and meditating, offering food and charity to the poor and praying. A grand float procession takes place during Wesak, it is a sight to behold and it usually has a giant statue of Buddha.

5 Chinese Customs that Originated in Malaysia

Malaysia is an amalgamation of cultures and a melange of different ethnicity. Most Malaysian traits are an adaptation of food and culture from various regions/countries and hence these adaptations are now integral part of Malaysia

Here are 5 interesting Chinese Customs that originated in Malaysia:

1. The famous Yusheng Toss, has its roots in the Chinese cultural practices. However, the modern Yu Sheng (Yee Sang) originated in central peninsular Malaysia and is different from its original version, including the ingredients used, how the food is served and of course, all that shouting during the Chinese New Year is a Malaysian Chinese creation. The modern Yusheng is an a adaptation of a dish from the Southern part of China. The Malaysians added a twist to it and popularized it and were eventually able to call it their own.

2. The Chingay parade, a famous annual street parade held in Malaysia is celebrated to mark the birthday of the Goddess of Mercy (Guanyin). Chingay was brought over to Malaya by Hokkien immigrants and celebrated initially in Penang which later spread to other parts of Malaysia and Singapore.

3. The Tanjung Tokong Tua Pek Kong temple in Penang is dedicated to Zhang Li which marks the origination of Chinese based practices in Malaysia and was built in 1799, making it one of the oldest Chinese temples in Penang. Tua Pek Gong, a Chinese god was originally a Chinese scholar named Zhang Li.

4. Chap Goh Meh, in the traditional Hokkien dialect of Penang, means the 15th night of Chinese New Year. It originated in Penang and is celebrated with prayers and offerings to mark the end of the Chinese New Year. In the modern times Chap Goh Meh is known as the Chinese Valentine's Day, to keep up with the quaint tradition of the festival, young unmarried girls are seen throwing oranges in the sea to find the right boy. The boy who catches it would be the man of her life.

5. The lion dance is seen as a symbolic part of Chinese culture in many Chinese communities across Southeast Asia. In Malaysia it is rather celebrated as a new art form known as Pole lion dance by the famous lion dancing troupe that invented the first set of poles, called 'Plum Blossom Poles', which took the other lion dancing troupes by a storm and the entire clan of other lion dancing troupes and lion dance costumes started adopting the same by standardizing the custom of Lion dance in Malaysia

All about Malaysian Indian Culture

The Indian community in Malaysia is one among the three main ethnic groups: Malays, Malaysian Chinese and Indians. The Indian community accounts for about 7-10% of the Malaysia's population and the first wave of Indians are known to have migrated to Malaysia during the reign of Asoka's invasion towards Kalinga and Samudragupta's expedition and the influential Tamil Chola dynasty of the 11th century.

How the actual settlement happened?

During the British rule, the Indians came to Malaysia as labourers and worked on rubber and coffee plantations and also to work in the palm groves to produce palm oil. Some of them are also known to have come to work on the construction of buildings, roads and bridges.

Majority of Indians who live in Malaysia are mostly from Tamil Nadu and Kerala and speak Tamil and Malayalam while also speaking Telugu and Hindi.

Similar to Baba and Nyonyas the Chitty community in Malacca is the result of an amalgamation between the Indian immigrants and local culture. Though they remain Hindu, the Chitties speak Bahasa Malaysia and their women dress in sarong kebayas instead of sarees.

Festivals celebrated by Indians

The Indian community celebrates two main festivals – Deepavali, the festival of lights and Thaipusam, an annual fair of the Hindu deity Murugan, held at Batu Caves along with many other smaller religious events every year.

Influence of Indian Culture on Malaysian Cuisine:

The Indian community in Malaysia has enormously influenced the Malay cuisine resulting in a variety of popular dishes. The use of spices makes it unique and Indian food is well received by Malaysians from all ethnic and religious backgrounds. The confluence of Indian and Malay cuisine is called Mamak, and the restaurants and stalls refer to eateries owned and staffed by Indian Muslims which is a popular hangout among the youth. They sell Indian dishes like Roti canai, nasi kandar, maggi goreng and pasembur (Mamak rojak) unique to Malaysia.

10 Interesting Malay Customs and Traditions

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural land with Malays, Chinese and Indians and orang asli/indigenous people. Yet it has a unique cultural identity. The Malays as we know form the majority of the population and have their own customs and traditions that are followed vigorously by the Malay community.

- 1 The children of a Malay household are strictly bound by custom to look upon their parents with respect and total obedience.
- 2 Friday (Jumaat) prayer is an important day for the Malays. It is also an occasion for people to meet each other from the same neighbourhood.
- 3 The traditional Malay dressing is quite conservative as per the laws of Islam. The Malay formal dress for men is the Baju Melayu, a loose, long-sleeved shirt which is worn over a pair of trousers. A white cap known as Kopiah is worn while going to the mosque for prayers. A velvet cap called as Songkok is also worn along with the formal dress with a leather shoes.

4 A Malay woman does not leave the house for forty days after the birth of her child. At the end of this period a ceremony called Berchukor is conducted where the child's head is shaved.

5 Traditionally Malay houses in the villages (kampung) are constructed of wood (timber) and palm-leaves (attap) this was done to protect from the floods, wild animals and reptiles.

6 When a guest visits a home the host greets them with a phrase Assalamu Alaikum which means, may peace be upon you.

7 During the festive celebration of Hari Raya, the Muslims undertake a month long fasting known as Ramadan. The fasting begins from the sighting of the new moon and ends on the last night of the same moon. During that month the Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset.

8 Women on the other hand wear Baju Kurung, a loose tunic worn over a long skirt, which is usually made of batik, silk or sungkit material. A shawl known as Selendang is used to cover the head.

9 Malays always use the right hand while eating even when they use forks and spoons. In fact all good things are done with the right hand including holding the holy book of Quoran

10 Malay weddings are a grand affair, the most important part of Malay wedding is the Bersanding where the couple sit next to each other on a sofa called the Pelamin. This is a mark of approval and blessing. Loved ones and guests sprinkle the couple with scented water and yellow rice. The guests are given a Bunga Telur, an ornamented egg festooned with a flower, as a sign of fertility.