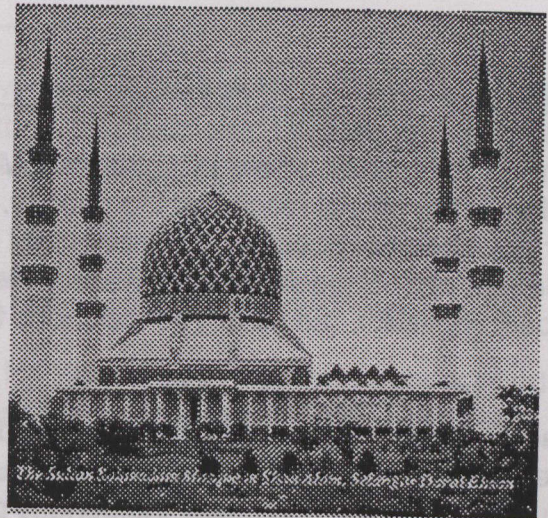


MALAYSIAN CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CUSTOMS

Malaysian society tends to emphasize the rights of groups rather than individuals. Family and social structures are usually more stratified than in Canada. Links between the private and public sectors are often close and may be facilitated through boards and business councils. Informal links are important.



Malaysians take pride in their country's rapid economic development and emerging role in international affairs, but they remain concerned about how Malaysia is viewed by foreigners. They are self-deprecating and modest. Malaysians are sensitive to Western conduct and attitudes that may be perceived as patronizing or neocolonialist. Malaysian society, like others in Asia, tends to be more group-oriented, less individualistic and less permissive than Western societies.

Sincere compliments about Malaysia, its development and food can be very useful. Bringing to the fore any positive commonalities or complementarities between Canada and Malaysia is a good way to bridge the East-West divide. It can also provide a lead-in to the services/products you are interested in selling.

Before entering a Malay's house, remove your street footwear unless the host is wearing footwear. Remove your shoes even if the host says you need not. He or she will appreciate the gesture, which signals knowledge of Malay customs as well as courtesy.

When handling or receiving something, a business card for example, the right hand or both hands should be used, never just the left hand. Women should not offer to shake hands with a Muslim man unless he offers his first. Men should avoid shaking hands with Malay Muslim women unless they extend their hands first; needless to say, men should not put their arm around the shoulders or back of Malay Muslim women in the Western fashion. It is impolite to point or extend the hand palm up.

The following terms are used when referring to Malaysia and its residents:

- Malaysian:** all citizens of Malaysia, regardless of racial or ethnic background.
- Malay:** a specific ethnic group. Other Malaysians sometimes identify themselves along ethnic lines, such as Malaysian Chinese or Malaysian Indians.
- Malaysia:** the country made up of East and West Malaysia.
- Malaya:** the present West or peninsular Malaysia as it was called until independence in 1963.
- East Malaysia:** the States of Sabah and Sarawak on the Island of Borneo.