

Malaysian Cultural Profile

PLEASE NOTE: This profile provides an overview of some of the cultural information relating to the diverse groups of Malaysian-born people who live in the Eastern Region of Melbourne. This description may not apply to all people as individual experiences may vary. However this profile can be used as a guide to some of the issues that may concern your clients. This is an update of the profile in the Home and Personal Care Kit developed by the MIC in 2004.

Introduction:

- A number of different ethnic groups live in Malaysia. There are three main ethnic groups of Malaysian-born people living in Australia. The largest group of the Malaysian-born population is the ethnic Chinese; the second largest group is the Malays and third is the Indians. There are also Eurasian living in Australia from Malaysia.
- In Australia, most Malaysian-born migrants are highly educated, young and have a high level of English.

Migration:

- Malaysians have a long history of migration to Australia. The first migrants were pearl divers in the early 1900s.
- 17,000 overseas students arrived in the 1950s with the introduction of the Colombo plan. The majority were Malaysians. Many of these students stayed in Australia, later sponsoring parents and siblings.
- In the late 1960s many ethnic Chinese left Malaysia after the government introduced affirmative action policies favouring indigenous Malays. Malaysians left the country during this period, escaping unfavourable socio-political conditions.
- The Malaysian-born population in Australia doubled between 1986 and 1991.
- Malaysians have one of the highest rates of intermarriage with Australians.

Local Demographics: Malaysian-born residents in the Eastern Region

Local Government Area	Total Malaysian-born Population	50-59 years	60-69 years	70-79 years	80 years and over	Total number of Malaysian-born people aged 65 and over	People aged 65+ as a % of the Malaysian-born population
City of Boroondara	2593	586	228	87	20	194	7%
City of Knox	1991	480	173	79	25	162	8%
City of Manningham	2638	660	303	98	24	237	9%
City of Maroondah	375	91	27	15	7	41	11%
City of Monash	4660	859	367	119	34	279	6%
City of Whitehorse	2659	520	215	90	37	209	8%
Shire of Yarra Ranges	158	39	18	9	3	21	13%
Eastern Region	15074	3235	1331	497	150	1143	8%

(ABS Census 2006 & MAV Data 2006)

- There were 30,476 Malaysian-born persons in Victoria at the last census (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008). 49% live in the Eastern Region of Melbourne.
- The median age of the Malaysian-born population is 37 years, as with the total Victorian population (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).

Language:

- The main languages spoken at home by Malaysian-born people in Australia include English (30.7%), Cantonese (30.3%) and Mandarin (21.0%) (ABS Census 2006).
- Other languages spoken may include Bahasa Malaysia (the Official Language in Malaysia), Hakka, Hokkien and Tamil.
- 4.1% of the Malaysian-born assessed themselves as speaking English 'not well' or 'not at all' (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008).

Religion:

The Malaysian-born population in Victoria identified with the following religions at the 2006 Census (Victorian Multicultural Commission 2008):

- Buddhism – 27.5% (8,394)
- Western Catholic – 12.8% (3,900)
- Uniting Church – 5.0% (1,525)
- Pentecostal – 4.5% (1,357)
- Christian – 4.3% (1,303)
- Other religions – 23.6% (7,816)
- No religion – 16.7% (5,077)
- Many of the religious observances are closely connected to specific events such as births, deaths and marriages.

Attitudes and Issues with Ageing:

- Traditionally in Malaysia children and family members care for their elderly.
- There is a respect for and a sense of duty towards elders and parents.
- Malaysians view age positively, age is seen as a sign of wisdom.

Attitudes to Disability and Mental Illness:

- Within the ethnic Chinese Malaysian-born community there is a strong stigma associated with disabilities and mental illness.
- Within the Malay (Muslim) community, people with a disability are protected and cared for by their family and the community.

Customs / Values:

- Malaysians may be influenced by or practice a variety of beliefs due to the diversity of their ethnic backgrounds.
- 'Saving face' or not being publicly embarrassed or causing shame to the family is important to Malaysian-born people. It is important to conform to family and societal norms.
- The family is the core social unit and is traditionally hierarchical and patriarchal in structure.

- Malaysian-born families tend to be very private and reluctant to discuss family issues or conflict with non-family members.
- Malaysian-born people highly value emotional self-control. Arguments or disagreements are kept to a minimum.

Communication Styles:

- Some Malaysian-born people may interpret assertiveness as aggressiveness.
- Malays (Muslims) may greet each other by clasping both hands together and bringing them to the chest.
- A soft handshake may be acceptable between men, but not women.
- For ethnic Chinese a western style handshake (soft) is an acceptable greeting for both men and women.
- For the Malaysian Indians handshaking is customary.

Naming Conventions:

- Malaysian-born women traditionally keep their family name on marriage. Some Malaysian-born people have adopted western naming conventions when marrying Australian-born men.
- Malay names are written with the first name preceding their last name.
- Ethnic Chinese Malaysians may use their family name or surname first followed by a two syllable given name or a personal English first name.
- The use of ranks, titles and proper address is very important to Malaysians, particularly older Malaysians.

Health Beliefs and Practices:

- Malaysians practice a western model of health in conjunction with alternative therapies. Alternative therapies are related to the particular ethnic background of Malaysian-born people. (mainly among the Chinese community).
- It is common to find Chinese Herbal shops around Malaysia.

Greetings:

English Greeting	Bahasa Malaysia	Closest English Pronunciation
Hello (How are you?)	Apa Khabar?	APA KHABAR
Good Morning	Selamat Pagi	SELAMAT PAGI
Good Afternoon	Selamat Tengah hari or Petang (depending on time of day)	SELAMAT TENGAH HARI
Goodbye	Selamat Jalan	SELAMAT JALAN
Yes	Boleh	BOLEH
No	Tidak Boleh	TIDAK BOLEH
Thankyou	Terima Kasih	TERIMA KASIH

Key Malaysian Festivals / Significant Dates:

- Chinese (Lunar) New Year *1st day of the 1st lunar month*

- Hari Raya Puasa - Festival of Aidilfitri
(Celebrates the end of the fasting month for Muslims) *1st day of the 10th month of the Muslim calendar*
- Hari Raya Haji - Festival of Aidiladha
(A Muslim festival for those who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca) *10th day of the 12th month of the Muslim calendar*
- Merdeka Day - Independence Day *31st August*
- Deepavali - Festival of Lights *7th month of the Hindu lunar calendar (Oct /Nov)*
- Christmas Day *25th December*

* To search for exact dates of key cultural and religious events, festivals and national days for this year, visit: <http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/a-diverse-australia/calendar-australia/>

* For other significant dates related to religious observances, refer to the Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim religious profiles.

Local services useful for Malaysian-born residents in the Eastern Region

Settlement Services

Provide information, referral and casework for refugees and family migrants who arrived in the last five years.

Name	Address	Contact
Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)	Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill, 3128	Ph: 9285 4888
New Hope Migrant and Refugee Centre	18 Chester Street, Oakleigh, 3166	Ph: 9563 4130

Aged Care & Disability Support Services

Migrant Information Centre Aged Care & Disability Services

Address: Suite 2, Town Hall Hub, 27 Bank Street, Box Hill, 3128

Ph: 9275 6905

The aged and disability team aims to increase access to aged care and disability services for CALD communities in the EMR through working with CALD communities to promote those services, provide information and referral and supporting organisations to provide culturally appropriate care. The team also receives funding for specific projects in this area.

***NOTE:** Because of the diverse nature of Malaysian-born population in Australia, the community accesses a wide range of groups based on either ethnic background or religion. For example, Chinese Malaysians will often participate in Chinese groups. For further information about these refer to the specific cultural profiles of those groups or religions.*

References:

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *Census of Population and Housing*, viewed 1 March 2010, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/d3310114.nsf/home/census>>.

Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), 2008, *Seniors from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds*, Demography on the 50 years plus Victorian population from the 2006 census, Victoria, Australia.

Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2008, *The Malaysia-Born Community in Victoria*, Fact Sheet No. A-40, viewed 20 April 2010, <<http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/stories/pdf/malaysiaafs-24apr08.pdf>>.