

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.

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	3,329	611	569	240	79	588	18%
City of Knox	3,254	651	522	186	59	460	14%
City of Manningham	3,885	665	617	286	91	648	15%
City of Maroondah	980	125	95	32	22	89	31%
City of Monash	6,077	986	813	368	120	869	14%
City of Whitehorse	4,432	619	544	222	98	579	13%
Shire of Yarra Ranges	308	61	46	14	6	37	12%
Eastern Region	22,265	3,718	3,206	1,348	475	3,270	15%

(ABS Census 2016)

- There were 50,049 Malaysian-born persons in Victoria at the last census (ABS 2016). 44% live in the Eastern Region of Melbourne.

- The median age of the Malaysian-born population is 37 years, as with the total Victorian population (ABS 2016).

Language:

- The main languages spoken at home by Malaysian-born people in Australia include English (28.4%), Cantonese (21%) and Mandarin (32.1%) (ABS 2016).
- Other languages spoken may include Bahasa Malaysia (the Official Language in Malaysia), Hakka, Hokkien and Tamil.
- 6.7% of the Malaysian-born assessed themselves as speaking English 'not well' or 'not at all' (ABS 2016).

Religion:

The Malaysian-born population in Victoria identified with the following religions at the 2016 Census (ABS 2016):

- Buddhism – 26.4% (13,207)
- Catholic – 10.3% (5,171)
- Christian – 5.9% (2,961)
- Pentecostal – 5.6% (2,790)
- Islam – 4.3% (2,139)
- No religion – 21.3% (10,674)
- 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:

Festival	Date	Description
Chinese (Lunar) New Year	1st day of the 1st lunar month	
Merdeka Day	31st August	Independence Day

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

* 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 and 18 Bond Street, Ringwood 3134	Ph: 9285 4888 (Box Hill) 9870 1351 (Ringwood)
New Hope Foundation	Grattan Gardens Community Centre 40 Grattan Street, Prahran 3181	Ph: 9510 5877

Aged Care & Disability Support Services

Migrant Information Centre Aged & Disability Services

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

Ph: 9275 6901

Email: wzhang@miceastmelb.com.au

Website: <http://miceastmelb.com.au/our-services/elderly-people-younger-people-disabilities-carers/>

The Access & Support Program provides short term support to help people access aged care and other services so they can continue living at home independently. The Program provides information, referral, support and monitoring. The aged and disability team generally 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.

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:

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