

MALAYSIA HOMESTAY PROGRAMME – LIFE IN THE COUNTRY

Fancy a holiday where you stay in a traditional house at the countryside, enjoy a laid-back lifestyle surrounded by plenty of fresh air? How about waking up to the sound of birds and cockerels and savouring local food?

Your day will then be filled with various activities that you can only dream of doing in the city – pluck tropical fruits in an orchard and learn to play traditional musical instruments or the steps of a cultural dance.

Other interesting pursuits that await visitors include harvesting local crops, visiting fish farms, and indulging in traditional pastimes, such as kite-flying and top spinning. You might even get to witness a mock-wedding that showcases the local customs and rituals.

Unlike an ordinary holiday, the Malaysia Homestay Programme whisks visitors off to an oasis of tranquility and rustic charm.

Clinching the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 2012 Ulysses Award for Innovation in Public Policy and Governance, the truly unique programme offers tourists a first-hand experience of life in a traditional village.

The Malaysian Homestay is more than a form of accommodation. Rather, it is a unique and authentic Malaysian experience that encompasses village lifestyle, culture, agriculture, cuisine, and more.

Under the homestay programme, tourists get to live with a local family in a village (known as *kampung* locally) house and learn about their close-knit family relationships, enjoy sumptuous home-cooked food, and discover the simple lifestyle in the country.

In brief, they get to experience the daily life outside of bustling cities and put them closer to Malaysia's natural assets and culture, as well as the friendly locals.

Since its introduction in 1995, the Malaysia Homestay programme is becoming increasingly popular among local and foreign tourists. The villages that participate in the programme are carefully selected and comply with the strict guidelines set by the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism. To date, there are a total of 159 homestays that spread all over the country, in every state.

Some homestays are tucked away cosily in the hinterland, while others are situated in the vicinity of major towns and are easily accessible. The Banghuris, Sungai Sireh and Sungai Haji Dorani homestays for instance, are situated only an hour's drive from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city.

Given the varied locations and settings, every homestay presents a different experience. Visitors to Kampung Pelegong in Negeri Sembilan can savour tropical fruits freshly plucked from the orchard, while a stay at Kampung Seri Tanjung, Melaka, enables visitors to make a trip to the many Dutch and Portuguese historical landmarks there.

For a taste of island life, visitors can head to the Desa Wang Tok Rendong and Pulau Tuba homestays in Langkawi. Cottage industries, such as batik-painting and songket-weaving are commonly found at homestays in the east coast states of Kelantan and Terengganu.

Needless to say, there is always something to do or learn in a homestay. The friendly villagers will eagerly invite you to join in their activities and you will eventually find that their enthusiasm is infectious!

As rail tourism is also fast becoming a trend and attraction among travellers, some homestays are packaged with authentic rail journey. It promises tourists an enriching experience throughout their journey to the participating homestays.

This programme is suitable for all types of holidaymakers, be it families, students, or corporate groups. The simplicity of the *kampung* folks, along with their engaging pastimes, will create a unique and memorable holiday.

Experience genuine Malaysian warmth and let the homespun hospitality work its charm!