

## **Youth Lifestyles in Malaysia**

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According to the Youth Society and Youth Development Act of Malaysia, youth is defined as people that fall between 15 to 40 years old. This definition of youth is very different from other countries as most of them consider youth to be people still in the growing process, more vulnerable to influences and more receptive to changes. Thus, the definition is not very persuasive even among the Malaysians and is criticized by the general public.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports in Malaysia once developed an index, called Malaysian Youth Index, to measure the quality of the youth's lifestyle in Malaysia. However, the research group did not carry out further studies after carrying out a survey in 2006. This may be mainly due to disapproval of and doubts about the reliability of the data collected as well as the confusing definitions of several important keywords in the survey. Despite efforts related to research and development aspects, the Malaysia government also tried to provide some sports centres, facilities and programmes in order to improve the quality of youth lifestyle. Unfortunately, the responses for the programmes are not as good as expected.

Besides government, non-government bodies are also taking an active part in improving youth lifestyle in Malaysia. One example is the Malaysia's Youth Lifestyle Showcase which started in 2008. Since then, many people started to pay attention to this event and respond positively to it. It has now become one of the largest youth festivals in Malaysia. There are also conferences, competitions, art and design festivals, games etc. that all are related to youth lifestyles and their well-being.

The few major concerns for the youth lifestyle nowadays in Malaysia can be categorized into education, work, and leisure time activities. First of all, there are three sub-topics under education: after-school tuition classes, extracurricular activities and talent-building lessons. It is very common among the secondary school students in Malaysia to attend private tuition classes. Imagine that a secondary school student has to cope with about ten subjects which involve long hours and a heavy commitment. Subtracting time spent in schools and on homework, Malaysia secondary school students indeed do not have much time left for entertainment and leisure time. Other than that, most of the secondary school students are required to take part in

extracurricular activities. And most of the time, they are required to be part of at least one uniformed body (like scouts, cadet, St. John Ambulances etc.) and at least one club or sport activities (like Chess Club, Badminton Club etc.). Although some clubs only ask students to go back to school for a meeting on Saturday morning, additional time is needed in terms of uniformed groups for training, marching, camping and organising events and functions. Although it is time-consuming, attending co-curricular activities is a way for the students get to know each other better, foster friendships as well as building up skills and leadership. Another trend among youth lifestyles is to take up lessons to develop their interests and talents, either imposed by their parents or by their own will. The lessons range from skill-building courses like piano, painting, calligraphy, singing etc. to body-training like Taekwondo, swimming and badminton lessons. Thus, it is not hard to imagine where most of the time and energy of the youth among secondary school students group are spent nowadays. In the case of university/college students, they have more free time compared to the secondary school students because of their flexible timetable. Although no more private tuition is needed, many meetings among course mates are needed for group projects and assignments.

In terms of work, after graduation not only youth are involved, but pre-university school students and university/college students are also involved. Some of the students take up part-time job like sales promoter, clerk, restaurant waiter/waitress etc. during school holidays to earn extra pocket money. Due to the heavy work load, it is almost impossible for them to work during school days. Unlike secondary school students, university/college students are able to adjust their own time. And in the latter case, some of them start working to support their living and school fees as they do not want to become a burden for their parents anymore. Direct sales business is one of the most popular careers found among university/college students. Some students who are busy with their studies will only take up job at the short-term fairs. For those who work after graduation, many of them work outside of their hometown, which means they are not living with their parents. In this case, many of them like to hang out with colleagues or friends for meals or movies after work, if they do not have to work overtime. Some of them take up extra classes to learn more languages and skills. It is also common for them to take up courses at the gym or yoga classes as they usually do not have as much chances as before (during school time) to exercise and to involve in sports.

Last but not least, leisure time activities play an important role in youth lifestyles as well. Similar to youth in other countries, computer and internet are indispensable in

Malaysia's youth lifestyles. According to the data from Malaysia Youth Index Survey 2006, media penetration scored fairly well with 84.8 overall values. Besides watching television, browsing Internet and engaging in online social networks like Facebook at home, youth also likes to spend time watching movies at the cinema after school or work or during weekend. Other than that, shopping is also prevalent among youth. As a result of high media penetration, Malaysia's youth are highly influenced by Western cultures as well as fashion and entertainment news and updates from other countries like Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Province of China, etc. Compared to other age groups, youth spend a lot of time shopping especially for fashion. Another activity worth mentioning here is the habit among university /college students to hang out at Mamak (Tamil Muslims) restaurants at night for supper and chit-chatting.

Another important point concerns the National Service Training Program in Malaysia, which started in 2003. Unlike many other countries, instead of training military manpower, the main objective of this 3 month National Service Training Program is to foster friendships among youths of different races in order to cope with the problems of racial polarization at educational institutions in Malaysia. Both males and females can be selected as conscripts. This is because all youths at the age of 18 who are registered as Malaysian citizens will be selected randomly through a computerized process. Initially, many parents worried that the training program will be too tough for their daughters. But the program schedule seems like more or less the same as the school girl guides, boys scouts' camping, except for a longer period of time. The program turned out eventually to be acceptable for most people. And some youths, even female youths, instead of being scared of this opportunity, are hoping to be selected to join the training program for the precious experience instead of scaring of it.

Generally, Malaysian youth, both male and female, have equal rights and opportunities in school, work and in everyday life. In school, they are treated on equally in terms of being selected as representatives, committee members etc. While at work, both genders have the same prospects for promotion without discrimination. Both males and females have the same freedom to do and choose whatever they like to do during their leisure time. It is normal to have a female as a class representative; school club president or a leader or manager in the office. In short, it depends on an individual's choice and preference in deciding one's lifestyle regardless of their gender.

In nut shell, study and work take up most of youth's time. While secondary school

students are still involved in activities like camping etc, lifestyles for youth in the working group are dominated by media and shopping. Although this kind of lifestyle cannot be considered as healthy compared to others who spend time improving themselves and exercising, at least it is not considered to be destructive. According to the data from Malaysia Youth Index Survey 2006, deviant behaviours scored 87.4, indicating that most Malaysian youth are seldom involved in illegal activities like illegal racing, vandalism and drugs. It is hoped that Malaysian youth can spend more time on more constructive activities like voluntary works that can help others in need in the future.



Youth Cadet, one of the uniformed bodies joined by Malaysian secondary school students

(<http://image.search.yahoo.co.jp/search?ei=UTF8&fr=snmsie8&p=cadet%2C+malaysia>)



University/college students like to spend time chit-chatting at the Mamak (Tamil Muslims) restaurant nearby.

(<http://image.search.yahoo.co.jp/search?p=pelita+nasi+kandar+at+night%2C+malaysia&aq=-1&oq=&ei=UTF-8>)