

# Safety Tips

## Introduction

This is specially written for AFS participants as a cultural and safety introduction to Malaysia. It is prepared for you to buffer you from extreme cultural shocks, as our society is very different from yours. It aims to help you adapt by answering some of the many questions that you must have in your initial stay here. It helps you to appreciate the diversity and color of this multi-cultural society and the incomparable warmth and hospitality of the people.

As situations change depending on time and place, we offer you four safety guidelines:

1. USE YOUR COMMON SENSE
2. COMMUNICATE
3. WHEN IN DOUBT, DON'T!
4. BE SENSITIVE AND PICK UP CLUES AS YOU GO ALONG

You would be surprised that many of the common-sense things that you do back home will also apply in Malaysia. As in all countries, the easiest way to be prepared when faced with problems is to carry with you at all times phone numbers of the national office, of host families as well as that of counselors.

## Malaysia in general

Malaysia is a multi-racial society. Three major races live within the country. This makes it more difficult for you to adjust when you live with a Malay family, have Chinese friends in school while your AFS contact person may be an Indian. This made the cultural shocks even greater. So, please read through this book once and then read through it again and again when you are not sure of how to handle the situations.

Malaysia is a relatively safe country

There are police stations in all towns and “kampung” (villages) with personnel on duty 24 hours a day. Anyone may walk in to ask for help.

## Safety at home

AFS Malaysia encourages you to ask your host family about the safety measures in their home. As Malaysia is a multiracial country and there are possibilities for you to be placed in Malay, Chinese, Indian or any other minor races in Malaysia, it is good for you to have the general knowledge of Malaysian – their way of life.

### General

- In Malaysia, doors are usually kept locked at all time. It is normal for Malaysian to lock (and sometimes chained) the doors even when they are at home
- Never open the doors to strangers, unless your family informs you that someone is coming (relatives or friends). If you are not sure who is it, ask them to come back later when your family is at home
- If your host family gives you their house key, you should keep it properly
- Ask your host family what are the things that you need to do before leaving the house (e.g. close the windows, what switch to turn off when you are going out or going to bed at night, and make sure you get the instructions correctly
- AFS recommends you to let your host parents know whenever you are concerned or frightened. Ask them what they suggest to help you feel safer
- Ask your host family of the house curfews, as whether you are allowed to go out at night and what time they expect you to be at home. If you have to delay your outing, call your family so they are aware of your safety and where about. Do not violate the curfew
- Never leave the home without informing your host family where you will be going and when you will be returning
- It is good to know if your host family has a first aid kit at home and where to find them
- Ask your host family how safe the neighborhood is during the day and at night
- Do not leave jewelry all over the place. It is not unusual for many people to go in and out of the house or even your room
- Do not leave your money openly at any place
- Please keep your passport in a safe place. Passports are in great demand in Malaysia's 'black market'.

### Telephone

- Get the important number of your family members and keep it in your wallet for emergency
- It is also important to know who you should contact in case there is problem when you are alone at home
- Ask your host family if you are allowed to give the home phone number to your friends, and ask them if they have rules about this issue

- Do not give your address, family information to strangers over the phone. Do not indicate that you are staying alone at home if you do not know whom you are talking to. Try to cut the conversation as short as possible if you received suspicious calls
- You may receive crank calls. Please do not respond
- International Calls are mostly very expensive. Ask your family before you call abroad and keep it short. We recommend you to use Skype or other phone software on your computer to call for free.

#### Toilet

- Bathrooms and toilets are most of the time wet and slippery. Be careful
- In rural area, although rarely, some toilets may have live-in frogs or worms. Check with your host family what to do if the situation arise.

#### Animal/ Insects/ Reptiles

- In rural area, some reptiles such as frogs, snakes and iguanas may enter the house. Do not panic. Alert other members of the family. They will know what to do
- House lizards, cockroaches and rats are common in most houses. They are usually exterminated by family members
- If a snake has bitten you, always seek medical help
- Dogs are not all friendly. Don't go petting strange dogs. A Muslim host family may not like you to touch dogs as it is against the Muslim religion to be contaminated by the saliva of a dog

#### Weather

- As we are in the equatorial region, it is common to experience bad thunderstorms. When this happens, switch off all power points, don't use the phone, don't bathe and don't stand under a big tree outdoor.
- Do note the possibility of water entering the windows during heavy rain and close all windows and even doors.

#### Emergency

- Energy for cooking is in the form of gas, which is sold in cylinders. Make sure the gas switch is off after use. If you smell gas, open all windows and check for leakage. Never lit fire. Inform your host family
- It is usual for homes not to have fire alarms, smoke detectors or fire extinguishers. Do not smoke in any part of the house

#### More Tips...

- Do not get involved in family politics.
- Always be polite to a guest of the house. It is considered an act of extreme rudeness not to greet a family visitor

- It is considered very bad manners to bare yourself in front of elders. Do exercise decorum when sitting in front of elders. Never put your legs on the table
- An AFSer is not Another Free Slave but neither is the host mother. Do your fair share of the house chores

## Safety in the community

- It is mandatory for Malaysians over the age of twelve to carry identity cards with them when they go out. It is an offense to go out without one. Always carry with you a photocopy of your passport in your purse or wallet at all times.
- When you are going out, tell your host family or leave a note saying where you are going, with whom, what are you going to do and when you will return home. If possible, leave the telephone number where you can be reached. Remember that your host family knows the neighborhood and the community and they are ready to give you advice about places that it would be better for you to avoid and which is the best way to get around. Please take their advice seriously and follow their recommendations
- In most Malaysian cities and towns, the main public transport consists in medium size buses and train. Only Kuala Lumpur city has a few types of sophisticated train systems. The trains are clean, safe and convenient, but during rush hours it can be very crowded. In any case, you should be aware of pick pocketing.
- There are a lot of public toilets in Malaysia, but normally you have to pay certain amount for entrance. Some of them are not properly maintain, and do not surprise if you can't find toilet papers in there! You can also go to department store or shopping malls should you need to go to the toilet
- To avoid unpleasant situations away from home, AFS Malaysia recommends the following:
  - When your friends or classmates invite you out, you should obtain permission from your host family before agreeing to go anywhere. Remember to ask your family if there is any risk related to the place you are going to
  - If possible call your host family as soon as you arrive at your destination so that they will not worry
  - Ask your host parents for a safe place to keep your passport at home
  - Students below 18 are not allowed to buy cigarettes or smoke
  - Do not take a ride with your school mates, since they won't probably have a proper driving license to drive. The license is given to 18 year old people or older
  - It is not advisable to take public transportation late at night
  - Try not to walk in the streets after dark. Even during daylight, try to walk along with other people. Avoid empty streets and dark alleys
  - It is advisable not to carry more money with you than you intend to spend that day. Also, be cautious when taking money out of a wallet. Do not wave money around

- Fast motorcyclists may snatch your bags while you are crossing the road
- Do not leave your bags unattended in public
- Do not give your telephone number or address to strangers who approach you in the street, bus, train or subway. Even if someone seems friendly and trustworthy you have no idea what kind of person they are. Try to cut the conversation short and walk away. Also, do not pay attention to any sales talk while walking through the streets
- Never ask or accept rides from strangers. Never hitchhike
- Never presume that a decently dressed person is not a potential threat. Thugs in Malaysia are well dressed
- Never carry a lot of money with you. You should only bring what you need for the day
- Be careful not to flash your cash or credit cards in front of people. It is a dangerous and an act of bad taste
- If any of your belongings are stolen, report to the nearest police station as soon as possible
- If being followed or harassed, approach a uniform personnel for assistance
- If you are in a situation where you feel suspicious or uneasy, please move away immediately
- When you have lost your way, it is best to approach uniform personnel. It would be a good idea to carry your dictionary with you although English is widely spoken here
- You will invite trouble if you dressed in very mini outfits

## Safety in school

- Be prepared to be the center of attraction because of how different you look from the locals
- If you meet students who are breaking the school rules regarding drugs, smoking, drinking alcohol or not attending classes, please keep away from them. AFS Malaysia will consider an Early Return situation if you are expelled from High School
- Do not leave school until classes is over
- If you are placed in Co-Ed school, do not pay too much attention to students of the opposite sex
- Do not give your phone number or address to all your fellow friends. Choose friends discriminately
- Do not bring valuables to school. Jewelry is not allowed in most schools
- Most teenagers have pre-conceived ideas of how people from certain countries are supposed to be. Be prepared for prejudice, after a while you will find good friends. Report to the school authorities immediately if you are being harassed by other students
- Stay out of gangs or notorious groups

## Illegal drugs and use of alcohol

- Malaysia has one of the strictest laws on drugs in the world. Trafficking in drugs carries a mandatory death sentence. Any type of drugs is illegal in

Malaysia. If caught with the possession of drugs, ABM and its students have no immunity from the laws

- It is forbidden under the Malaysian law for people under the age of 18 to consume alcohol and they are not allowed to enter pubs. However, family rules apply for AFS-ers above 18. Muslims are not allowed to consume alcohol. Never offer your Muslim friends a beer or hard beverage. Getting drunk and excessive alcohol consumption is strictly forbidden and can cause you to have an Early Return.
- Getting drunk is not acceptable by our society and therefore AFS students who get drunk deeply affect the AFS image at local level.

## Sexual harassment

- In some situations, you may be unsure if you are being sexually harassed or not. An important resource is your own instinct. Your siblings, host parents, counselor or friends will be able to advise you about the sexual behavior of people you don't know, and about cultural differences. You can also seek for advice from teachers at school. AFS volunteers and AFS Malaysia's National Office
- You should be aware of the possibilities of sexual harassment in crowded buses, or walking alone in some areas. The person may say rude words or lewd things or attempt to touch you. If it happens, try to get away and shout for help. You may also try to call the attention of other people, passers-by or policemen
- In the event of sexual attack, please tell your host parents what has happened. They will immediately contact the AFS local chapter coordinator or other representatives who will assist you in reporting the situation to the local police authorities and will take you to the doctor. AFS Malaysia will be notified and will tell your host family what to do next

## In case of emergency

In case of personal emergencies, contact either:

- Host family
- Liaison person
- AFS office 03-77224866 / 03-77254966
- AFS Emergency Cell Phone 017-2856500
- Host school

Dial 994 for fire, 999 for ambulance or assistance for thefts and crimes

Please ask your host family for the following local phone numbers and keep them in your personal phone book: Police Station, Fire Department, Hospital or Family Doctor.