

UPM holds learning activities for Aussie students

CULTURAL LESSONS:

Pahang authorities extend help and support

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ANYONE who has lived four-and-a-half years in Australia would have seen the negative reporting of Malaysia by the media there. Many Australians get the wrong impression from these news reports, unlike those who know Malaysia.

To break the negative stereotypes being conveyed, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) introduced an edutourism programme in 2013 with the hope that participants of this programme would be able to tell their friends and families back home about the real Malaysia.

Globally, edutourism has become a popular form of recreational travel undertaken solely or partially for the purpose of study, self-improvement or intellectual stimulation.

UPM's edutourism programme comes in the form of 13 tour packages around its Serdang campus, while staff and students were also encouraged to take part in edutourism activities available elsewhere.

Last year, the Australians who came for the programme enjoyed homestays with families in Kampung Temai, Pekan.

They were tearful when it was time to leave for home and in their feedback on social media, they mentioned that the programme had helped to change their negative perspectives about Malaysia and Islam.

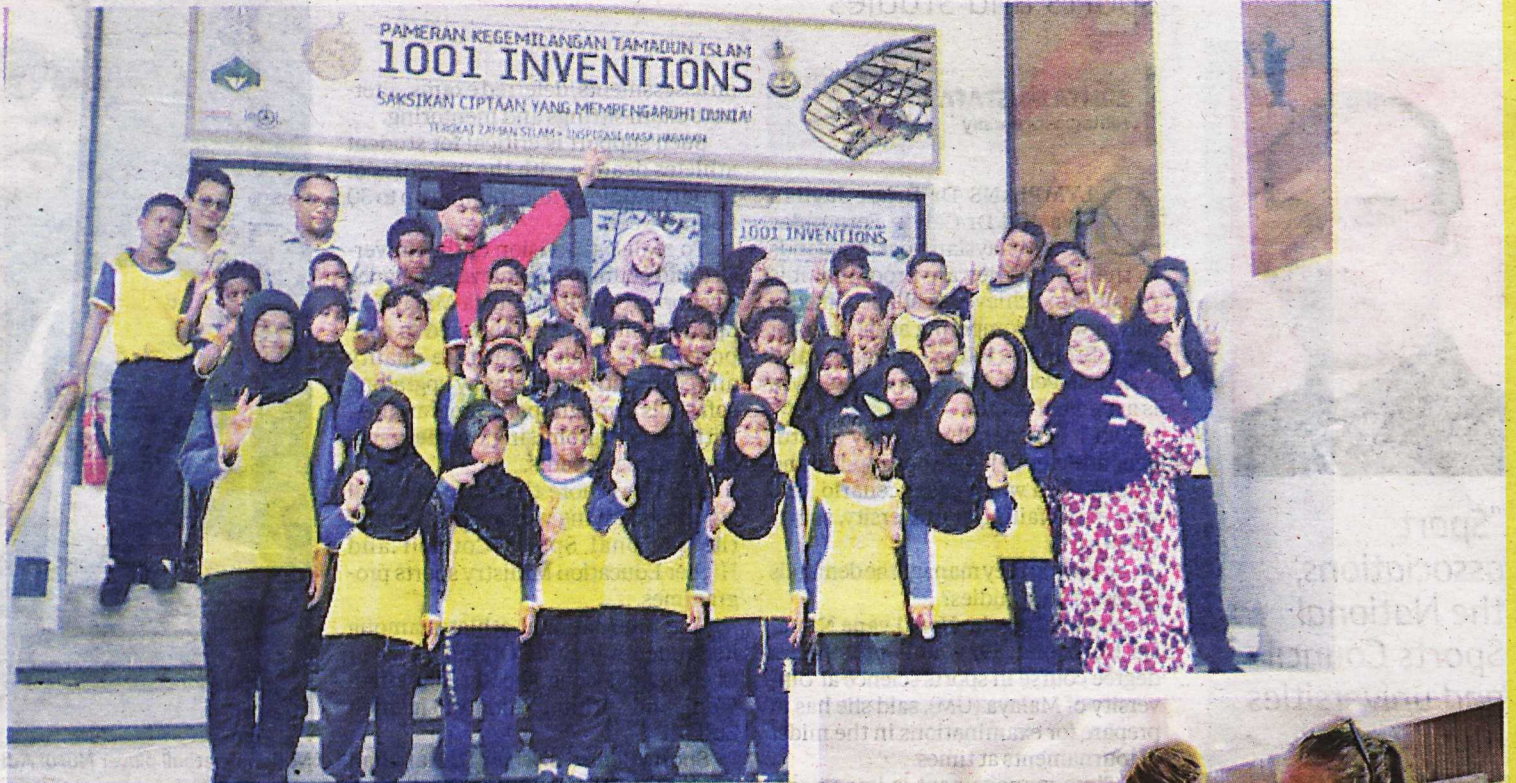
The nine-day programme with the edutourism concept was jointly pioneered by UPM Forestry Faculty's Department of Recreation and Ecotourism and Graeme Bagüley, the International Student Services manager from Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane, Australia.

The programme this year involved new edutourism activities in other parts of Malaysia, including the Sultan Idris Shah Forest Education Centre in Puchong.

Pahang was chosen because of the great support extended by a few of the government agencies from there.

This edutourism programme was specially designed based on what QUT had suggested, while also ensuring that the participants from both Malaysia and Australia would get the chance to learn from each other's culture.

Then, two months ago (in September), two lecturers and a group



The Orang Asli schoolchildren and their teachers at the 1,001 Inventions Exhibition in Pahang State Museum. PICTURES COURTESY OF BATIK & BUBBLES BLOG.COM

of undergraduate and postgraduate students from UPM's Faculty of Forestry, together with two lecturers and 10 undergraduate students from QUT jointly participated in edutourism activities in Sungai Lembing and Pekan, Pahang.

The programme was funded by the New Colombo Plan under the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Australia and UPM, with special collaboration from Pahang state government agencies including the Pahang State Museum Authority, Chief Minister Office and the State Assemblyman of Temerloh.

The programme began with a visit to the Kuala Gandah Elephant Sanctuary in Lanchang, Pahang.

While it was not the first visit for most of the Malaysian participants, it was an eye-opening experience for the Australian participants who thoroughly enjoyed their time at Kuala Gandah.

The highlight was probably when the participants had the chance to take a bath with the baby elephants.

Temerloh state assemblyman Datuk Seri Mohd Sharkar Shamsudin then hosted a Malay lunch which featured the famous Temerloh *masak lemak ikan patin* fish dish.

The following morning saw the group engaged in community service activity in the form of teaching English using IT and special gadgets for the Orang Asli children from SK Sungai Mas in Sungai Lembing.

The schoolchildren as well as their teachers enjoyed every moment with the Australians as well as their local visitors.

The visitors also found themselves learning from this experience.

At the end of the day, everyone learned about each other's culture and would be able to serve the role of mini ambassadors when they return to their homes.

Hopefully, everyone will have good things to share about their five-day teaching experience at the school.

The visitors as well as the schoolchildren and teachers were also invited for a special tour of the Pahang State Museum in Pekan.

Travelling to Pekan and going to the museum was also a first for the Orang Asli children, who were full of smiles and excitement.

At the museum, where the 1001 Inventions Exhibition was being held until next March, the guides were dressed up in traditional Arabic robes and costumes to reflect the Islamic Golden Era of that time.

The exhibition's interactive elements sparked great interest among the visitors, whose admission prices were discounted.

The visit also included a tour of the first-ever museum mosque in Malaysia.

Following an afternoon tea, the schoolchildren returned home while the visitors prepared themselves for the evening's royal dinner hosted by the Pahang State Museum Authority at the Art Museum Gallery in Kuantan.

On the eve of their departure home, the visitors also had the chance to tour the Orang Asli village and took part in a telematch game with the schoolchildren and the other villagers.

The rainy weather did not prevent the visitors from having fun. The



Participants from QUT trying the local Malay dishes.



Participants bathing with the baby elephants.

visit ended with a barbecue dinner and a sleepover at the school.

Due to the programme's successes, QUT has been able to secure funding from the New Colombo Plan under the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Australia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In addition, until 2019, the New Colombo Plan will give special funding for UPM's limestone forest conservation programme in Langkawi.