

## Living in Malaysia in 2002

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I got my sabbatical the sixth time I applied. I applied 5 times and they rejected it. My sabbatical started spring, i.e. February 2002 and ends February 2003 (Spring, Summer and Fall semester). It is a sabbatical without any benefits like tickets. I had to ask for a leave to be spent within Riyadh and that's how I get it. Some of my colleagues were so mad at me because of that because they think I gave up some of my privileges, but I thought about it and had to do what I did. I was planning to go to the states and I was thinking of Oregon. But because of September 11, my plans changed. I did not go anywhere in the first few months because my family would worry about me. I was thinking of another option. So I decide to go to Malaysia because it is a Muslim country, I do not need a visa, they would treat me nicely and my family would not worry about me. Their educational system is also different. So I searched the internet and finally decided to affiliate with the International Islamic University. I sent an e-mail to the dean towards the end of Ramadan and in 2 days, he e-mailed me back and said that I was welcome and asked for what I needed.

I was planning to go at the end of January 2002. I made reservation and was getting ready for my travel. I searched for my travelers checks three times but I did not find them. So I had to notify my bank and they in turn notified Thomas Cook in London. I could not leave before getting a refund. I reported the loss of my TC's Jan 7, and got the refund 3 months later after they gave me a hard time and they requested too many things.

While waiting for a refund, I stayed home and wrote 2 books instead. Wow! I also shopped around for a printing press and gave each book to one. One book was finished fast but the internet book took longer. They gave me a hard time because of the webpage and I even left for KL before it was really finished. I was not happy with how they glued the book cover. So my cousin Ayman took care of the rest. Of course I had to pay for the cost. Having

someone like the university print it, would take too long at least a couple of years for their committee to meet and I have to wait for my turn. In addition I would get peanuts as the author despite the long hours of hard work and neck pain. I do not know how the book would sell. Arab people are not readers and do not like to spend money on books. Of course, while working on my books, I was thinking of going somewhere for the rest of my sabbatical as it would be boring to stay home 24 hours and just work on the computer or watch television. There is no place to go to work on my project.

In April, I came to Salt Lake City for 2 conventions. I presented at one and attended the other. I was in SLC for 3 weeks. When I left Saudi for SLC, I had not had gotten the refund yet. But when I got back to Riyadh, the bank called and told me that I got the refund. So I made reservation for Malaysia (May 9) but I changed it several times because of my **internet book** and problems with the printing press. They were cheating me and did not stick to their deadlines. I was so nervous because I had another convention in San Antonio on June 17 and I wanted to find an apartment before flying out to San Antonio from KL. Finally I was so mad at the printing press and had to leave everything to my cousin Ayman to take care of no matter what happens and of course, I do not know how it looks like. There is nothing more I could do. I always have to struggle and suffer.

When I came to KL May 26, I stayed at a hotel. The next day I went to the university, but it was closed as they were having a national holiday. I e-mailed the dean, but he e-mailed the dean. He e-mailed me back saying the he was taking a week off from work and would be back May 30. He gave me the names of 2 professors whom I could contact for help. I went to university for a second time and asked about one of the two professors. He came down to see me and was nice. But the man who could help me with housing was also off and would return June 3. I waited until June 3 and went back. I started searching for an apartment. I looked at local newspapers, went to the Tourist info Office. I even asked the hotel bellman

for help. Although I was in KL 12 years ago, I did not recognize a thing,. It has changed a lot and had grown bigger of course. It has become too crowded and I hate the traffic jams. The underground makes life easier. At first I hated it. I hated the people because once they see me, they realize that I am a foreigner and they try to cheat me and once they know I am Saudi, it is even worse. The first question they ask you even before they have talked to you (even the cab driver) is “where are you from”. At first I was dumb and tried to be polite and honest, so I answered. But now, I don't. I say “I am from China, or Japan or Indonesia, or Turkey”. They know I am not telling the truth but do not say anything. Once one said but you look European, you cannot be Chinese. I said because my mother is French and my father is Chinese. He argued with me and finally had to accept it.

After a big hassle I found a fully furnished two-bedroom apartment by an underground station. It takes 30 minutes by train and then 5 minutes by cab and costs about \$2 to get to the university one way. It is o.k. but too noisy as it is by an intersection of 2 main roads. Cars and especially motorcycles do not stop running day or night. But I am trying to get used to it. I was about to move in to a much nicer apartment at a more convenient location. I took my luggage and withdraw cash money for the deposit and advance payment of one month rent, but the manager tried to cheat me. I went there according to the appointment but the lease was not ready. I waited for her for 3 hours but she did not finish it. She asked me to bring my luggage from the hotel. So I checked out and had to go three times to drag my luggage as the building was behind the hotel. She said give me the money so that I give you the key and you put your luggage in the apartment and the lease take few days to prepare. I said no. We have to sign the lease before I give you the money. Try to finish the lease. I can wait. She was wasting time so that I give up. She wanted to charge me for the key and wanted to charge me \$M 200 instead of 10. But I refused to do and finally I had to leave when she told me the landlady had left. Imagine yourself in that position, having checked out of the hotel and having one big suitcase and 3 small pieces of luggage to take out.

Well, the next day I met the dean, the secretary gave me the key to my office (with my name on). I have a computer with internet access. I do not use their internet as it is so slow. I have my own internet at home which is pretty fast. The university is beautiful. The architecture is unique. It is located in a valley with green mountains all around. It has a big mosque in the middle. Girls are required to wear hijab. I do like it but I am still exploring. The faculty are nice and so are the secretary. There are Arab professors from Egypt and one of them helped me a lot and even invited me to his house twice. Now he is back in Egypt with his family and will be back soon. The university calendar is different from Saudi or US. The fall semester started June 24 and the university is full of students from all over the world. They teach Arabic and they have a graduate program in Arabic.

I go to my office at the university everyday until 7 p.m. I get home about 8. Then I cook dinner and by the time I eat and do the dishes it is late and I feel tired too do anything. On Sat I go to a yoga class for one and a half hours and also go grocery shopping. On Sunday I clean my apartment. Time flies so fast. By the time the week begins, it is over so fast and so on. The weekend here is Sat and Sun and Mon is the first day of the week. It takes you a while to get used to that. They work on Friday. They teach and have classes. They stop teaching and working and shops close for about 2 hours for Friday prayers. Everybody goes to the university mosque for Friday prayer. As soon as the prayer is over, they come back to their offices and start working again. It is amazing. Everybody prays here more than in Arab countries like Egypt or Jordan. They have a beautiful mosque with 2 minarets in the middle of the university buildings. It is nice to hear the call to prayer 5 times a day when you are abroad. When in America or Europe I miss that. They are having school right now. Their first semester starts June 24 not in September like us. Everybody goes to school and college. June, July and August are not holiday like in the Middle East or America. You can come for a short visit if you want to. I have an extra bedroom. You can

sleep in it. It is very safe and things are very cheap. It does not cost a lot to come here for 2 weeks or so. Think about it and let me know what you think.

Of course Malaysia is a beautiful country especially the islands. The weather is hot and humid. I found it suffocating. But I always remind myself of Riyadh weather which is even hotter but dry. I have not gone anywhere outside KL not even within KL. But I will inshalla. Everything is cheap here: food, clothes, shoes, even taxis and trains. Sizes are too small even for me. I also do not like the quality. I love their tropical fruits. Our fruits and vegetables that they sell here are either tasteless or taste different and are mostly imported from the US or Australia. Milk, chicken, and meat also taste different. They have a lot of Chinese and Japanese vegetables but I do not know what they are or how to cook them. They have lots of sushi restaurants. You see all kinds of sushi passing on a small conveyor belt. You can also buy fresh sushi at the grocery store. I like to browse when at the grocery store, because they have condiments, spices, nuts and dry things, juices ... that we do not have in Saudi or US (Saudi is like US in everything). They also have all kinds of fast food restaurant like McDonald's, Pizza Hut and KFC. At the Twin Towers Mall, they have all kinds of western boutiques but everything is expensive. Every time you go out, you spend, spend, spend money. Their Ringgit is equal to the Saudi Riyal (1 US dollar = 3.75 Riyals). I have no problem converting currency. I am learning to adjust to a whole new lifestyle. It is a bit tough as I am too old to readjust. Sometimes I regret coming here and wish I went to the US instead as I find it easy to live there. But I keep telling myself that this is part of living in and learning about a different culture and that I will soon get used to it. I try to think about nice things.