

60 INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS GOT THE TASTE OF KAMPUNG LIFE IN CHEROK PALOH

They came from different countries, practicing different cultures and spoke different languages but it did not deter 60 international students from Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) from having fun and socialising with residents of Kampung CheroK Paloh in Pekan on July 3, 2011.

The programme was organised by the university's International Office, aimed at exposing the students on life in rural area.

They were also involved in 'gotong royong' to clean up the village, surau, beach and cemetery and took part in a telematch where the students and villagers participated in some traditional games of 'congak', 'sepak raga', 'tarik upih', coconut bowling, giant-wooded shoes, tug of war and one-legged race.

According to UMP vice chancellor Professor Dato' Dr Daing Nasir, the programme was the best platform to get them to interact and mix with the locals through communal activities.

"Programmes such as this will expose the students to the lifestyle of local people and can help foster close ties among them.

"The students will be able to gain knowledge, experience and share their cultures and this can help mould them to become better persons," he said.

International Office director Dr Wan Norlidah Al-Qadri said the students were divided into groups according to colours – blue, green, red and yellow.

She added that the villagers also took part in the games to forge closeness among them.

"Apart from inculcating volunteerism among the students, the programme can help promote UMP among the local community," she said.

On the stay in the village, Pakistani Salman Ahmad, 32, said it was the first time he learned how to use a fishnet and was happy to have caught three fishes.

Salman, who loved the 'ayam masak lemak cili api' (chicken cooked in coconut milk mixed with spices and bird chillies),

said he was really taken by the warmth and hospitality displayed by the villagers.

His friend from China, Feng Li@Halimah Daud, 22, said she would not forget the experience of sleeping inside a tent set up not far from the sea.

She added that it was really a joy to know the villagers who were mainly fishermen.

Halimah, who took part in cleaning a mosque, said most mosques in Malaysia provided 'telekungs' (women's praying attire) and it was different in China.

"Muslims in China just use multi-coloured head scarves during prayers and not 'telekungs' in mosques," she added.

Villager Zaharah Harun, 57, said the residents were happy to see the closeness that had forged among the children and students.

There appeared to be an understanding among them when going about with their activities and this could help brush up the children's English, she added.

"It motivated them to speak in English and to do well in their studies," she said.

Zaharah noted that some of the international students attempted to speak in Malay, adding, the programme helped them to learn more about the language and culture.

State Tourism, Arts, Family Development and Women Affairs Committee chairman and Inderapura assemblyman Yang Berhormat Dato' Shafik Fauzan Sharif officially opened the programme.

Also present was Kampung CheroK Paloh village chief Ali Adam.

The programme was made possible with the cooperation from the Malaysian Royal Police, Rela, Maritime Department, Kuantan Municipal Council and Fire and Rescue Department.

To date, UMP has 162 students from 13 countries including Indonesia, China, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, India, Bangladesh, Sudan, Uzbekistan, Libya, Somalia and Republic of Chad.

She added that they camped for three days on the island and although it was exhausting, it was still fun and effectual.

The undergraduate also said she could not believe that she was able to complete the three-hour canoeing trip.

"There were some anxious moments when riding the waves under the really hot sun.

"We were tired but we were also grateful that all of us made it safely to the island," she added.

Her colleague, Mohd Izzat Fauzi, 20, an undergraduate of the Faculty of Electrical and Electronics Engineering (FKEE) said many of the activities carried out required physical and mental endurance.

"The activities instilled disciplinary, courage and team work," he added.

Other activities conducted were water sports, beach run, base defence training, jungle trekking, compass marching, general drill and religious talk.

The experience gained during the three days and nights and canoeing around the island would definitely leave a lot of unforgettable memories when they graduated.

It would also help to mould them into being leaders of calibre in guiding the next generation.

Other agencies involved in the programme were the fire and rescue department, marine polis and UMP staff who accompanied the cadet officers throughout the expedition.