

## **ASEAN CROSS-CULTURAL EXTERNSHIP PLACEMENT COUNTRY BACKGROUND**

### **1. (Name of Country)**

Brunei/ Brunei Darussalam (Nation of Brunei, the Abode of Peace)

### **2. History/Background**

The origins of the nation are only dimly known. Local traditions speak of a set of ancient local Bornean culture heroes, including Hawang Halak Batatar, who adopted Islam and became the first Muslim sultan of Brunei, Sultan Muhammad (reigned 1405–1415), and his brother, Patih Barbai, who became the second sultan, Sultan Ahmad (reigned 1415–1425). These heroes gave rise to the Barunay nobles. Many Barunay aristocrats trace their origins to the Pagar Ujung area of the Minangkabau highlands of Sumatra. The third sultan, Sharif Ali (reigned 1425–1433), who married a daughter of Sultan Ahmad, came from Arabia and was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, as were all the following sultans. In 1990, a new state ideology was launched to promote the unity of the diverse groups within a plural society. Malayu Islam Beraja (MIB, or Malay Muslim Monarchy) is based on the idea of Brunei as a traditional Malay state, a long-established Islamic state, and a monarchy. All the ethnic groups in the nation have always been under the authority and rule of the sultan.

### **3. Population**

415,717

### **4. Main Religions and Ethnicities**

Sunni Islam

**Religious Beliefs.** The national religion is the Shafeite sect of Islam. Religious holidays have variable dates that are set according to a lunar calendar. Early Ramadhan marks the beginning of the holy fasting month; the Anniversary of the Al-Quran commemorates the revelation of the Holy Book of Islam; Hari Raya Adilfitri or Hari Raya Puasa celebrates the end of the fasting month; Hari Raya Aidiladha or Hari Raya Haji celebrates the Haj or holy pilgrimage to Mecca; Hijrah celebrates the journey of the Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alihi Wassalam from Mecca to Medina; Mulaud, or the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, celebrates the birth of the founder of Islam; and Israk Mikraj commemorates the ascendancy of Muhammad into heaven.

**Religious Practitioners.** The sultan is the head of the Islamic faith. For all Muslims, matters of marriage, *A young boy watches the adults as they perform the noon prayer at a mosque in Bandar Seri, Begawan. The Shafeite sect of Islam is the national religion.* divorce, and the family as well as some sexual crimes are governed by Islamic law and fall under the jurisdiction of the religious court system.

**Rituals and Holy Places.** Sixty mosques are maintained by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Tombs of sultans are often treated as shrines.

## **5. Main Languages and Dialects**

Official: Malay

Recognised: English

Other: Brunei Malay/ Tutong/ Kedayan/ Belait/ Murut/ Dusun/ Bisaya

## **6. Political System Important Information**

The political system in the country is governed by the constitution and the national tradition of the Malay Islamic Monarchy, the concept of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB). The three components of MIB cover Malay culture, Islamic religion, and the political framework under the monarchy. It has a legal system based on English common law, although Islamic shariah law supersedes this in some cases.

Under Brunei's 1959 constitution, His Majesty Paduka Seri Baginda Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah is the head of state with full executive authority. Since 1962, this authority has included emergency powers, which are renewed every two years. The country has been under hypothetical martial law since the Brunei Revolt of 1962. Hassanal Bolkiah also serves as the state's Prime Minister, Finance Minister and Defence Minister. The Royal family retains a venerated status within the country. The country has a parliament.

## **7. General Legal System and Laws of Everyday Importance**

The sultan appoints judges to the Supreme Court, which consists of the high court and the court of appeals, and the Subordinate Court, which consists of the magistrate's courts. In 1991, an intermediate court was given civil and criminal jurisdiction. Syariah courts deal with Islamic law.

Male and female homosexuality is illegal in Brunei. The country passed a law that came into force on 22 April 2014, allowing the death penalty to be administered by stoning for homosexual acts, such as sexual intercourse, given there is enough evidence pointing to the action (i.e. with 4 trusted, impartial, and truthful witnesses in attendance).

## **8. Cultural Do's and Don'ts**

The culture of Brunei is predominantly Malay (reflecting its ethnicity), with heavy influences from Islam, but is seen as much more conservative than Indonesia and Malaysia.

- As a Sharia country, the sale and public consumption of alcohol is banned. Non-Muslims are allowed to bring in a limited amount of alcohol from their point of embarkation overseas for their own private consumption.
- Bruneians shake hands by lightly touching the hands and then bringing the hand to the chest. Some people do not to shake hands with members of the opposite sex.

- You should not point with your finger; instead, use the thumb of your right hand with the four fingers folded beneath it.
- When visiting a mosque, all visitors should remove their shoes. Women should cover their heads and not have their knees or arms exposed. You should not pass in front of a person in prayer or touch the Koran.
- Gifts (particularly food) should only be passed with the right hand, although it is acceptable to use the left hand to support the right wrist. Do not to give or accept anything with your left hand.
- It is polite to accept even just a little food and drink when offered. When refusing anything offered, it is polite to touch the plate lightly with the right hand.
- During the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, Muslims do not take food from sunrise to sundown. It would be inconsiderate to eat or drink in their presence during this period.
- It is impolite to point with the index finger (use the right thumb instead) or to beckon someone with fingers upmost. Instead the whole hand should be waved with palm facing downwards.
- When sitting, the sole of your feet should not be pointed towards your companions.
- Please note that you should remove your shoes before entering the mosque. All women, regardless of religion, are required to cover their hair, arms and legs and therefore it is best to wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts plus carry a shawl to cover your hair before entering.
- If invited to someone's home for dinner bring good quality chocolates or fruit.
- Do not give anything made of pigskin.
- If giving foodstuffs ensure there is no gelatine or anything else which is not 'halal'.
- Avoid white wrapping paper as it symbolizes death and mourning.
- Gifts are generally not opened when received.

## **9. Work Place Culture Do's and Don'ts**

- Greetings should be formal and demonstrate respect and deference.
- It is important to introduce the most important person on your team first.
- Handshakes tend to be light. Bruneian men often raise their hands to the heart after shaking hands.
- Most Bruneians do not shake hands with members of the opposite sex.
- Foreign businesswomen should nod their head in greeting.
- Foreign businessmen should wait to see if a Bruneian woman extends her hand first.
- Titles are important and can be confusing. Bruneians can have as many as 20 words in their title.

- Titles such as “Pengiran” with several different words following it, “Awangku” and “Dayangku” indicate the person is related to the royal family.
- It is acceptable to address someone with a title by their title alone.
- Honorific titles are “Awang” for a man and “Dayang” for a woman. The abbreviations for these titles are “Awg” and “Dyg” respectively.
- Business cards are typically exchanged after introductions and handshakes.
- Present the card with both hands or with the right hand and the left hand supporting the right hand.
- Give a business card to each person you meet.
- Examine any business card you receive before putting it in your business card case.
- The respect you show someone's business card is considered to be indicative of the respect you will show the person in business.
- It is considered a breach of etiquette to write on a person's business card in their presence.

#### **10. Dress Codes Do's and Don'ts**

People in Brunei follow the traditional dressing. Women are dressed in bright colors and the attire usually covers them from head to toe. Men also prefer formal dressing both in workplace and in social gathering.

Tourists should observe the local dress code and dress modestly. Clothing comfortable for hot weather is acceptable, except when visiting places of worship or for social and business functions. It is better to wear long pants and non-sleeve shirt. Other than that, feel free to wear anything you please

#### **11. Cross Gender Do's and Don'ts**

Women in Brunei enjoy equal status to men. Many women hold senior posts in government and commercial enterprises. No special restrictions on women's freedom or dress code exist, although care in attire should be taken to observe local sensibilities.

Ethnic Malay men shake hands with one another, but men and women do not traditionally shake hands.

#### **12. Common Communication Challenges and Do's and Don'ts**

Bruneian communication is formal and respectful, especially to those senior in age or position. Hierarchy is revered, so older businesspeople should be greeted before younger ones.

As in much of Asia, group harmony is vital. Therefore, the communication style tends to be indirect and somewhat ambiguous. This is done to avoid embarrassing someone or causing either party to lose face. If you are from a more direct culture, you may find the use of evasive responses or insincere yeses frustrating.

Most Bruneians find emotions such as impatience, anger, or irritation embarrassing and try to avoid them. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the foreigner to refrain from showing his/her inner feelings.

Bruneians commonly ask what would be considered intrusive personal questions such as about wages or the like. If you are uncomfortable discussing such matters, it is important to handle the matter diplomatically so neither party loses face. Such conversations are meant to get to know you as a person, they are not meant to make you uncomfortable.

Tone of voice, body language, eye contact and facial expression can often be more important than what is actually said. Therefore, it is important to observe the person as they speak.

### **13. Types of Food (Delicious Foods and Foods to Watch Out For)**

#### Ayam Penyet:



Ayam Penyet is a classic Indonesian dish. It is fried chicken that is smashed down to give it a softer texture, and marinated with peppers and herbs. It's always served spicy, alongside a salad with cucumber, lettuce, tomato and lemon. This dish can be found in any local Bruneian restaurant, as well as other ethnic restaurants around Brunei. If you like spicy chicken, then you're in for a real treat!

#### Ketupat:



This is a kind of dumpling that is made of rice. It's commonly found in the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei. The rice is packed inside a special woven palm leaf pouch (yes, an actual leaf from a tree) and boiled. When the rice is cooking, the grains expand to fill up the pouch while the rice is compressed tightly. This unique method of cooking rice has been around this region for centuries, you can almost imagine caveman eating it. I recommend you to try it because it's not only cheap and delicious, but it's a great way to get an authentic taste of Bruneian cuisine!

Ambuyat:



This dish is actually native to Brunei. It is derived from the interior trunk of the sago palm tree. Let me warn you that it's not that tasty, but worth eating for the experience itself. The texture is like a sticky, slimy goo that is served in a set with many side dishes. Honestly, it is pretty bland and tasteless, but it is known as a local delicacy for Bruneians. There are several dipping sauces that you can choose from (spicy or sweet), which actually gives it some flavor. Try it, and let me know what you think of it!

Curry and Rice:



As I am sure that you are all aware, curry is a SouthEast Asian dish that incorporates spices/herbs with fresh (or dried) chillies. It is usually prepared as a liquid sauce, that you mix with rice and chicken (or another type of meat). There are many different varieties of curry that you can order, most of them being spicy and golden-yellow in color. Most curries are actually very healthy and is considered as one of the most flavorful dishes in the world. The mouth-watering flavor of curry can be enjoyed alongside any meal!

#### Roti:



Roti is a delicious baked flatbread made from wholemeal flour. It originated in India and it's commonly found in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh. The best part about Roti is that no two pieces taste the same! Every household/restaurant has their own recipe, to go along with the variety of meats and vegetables that they cook inside the bread. It's most notable characteristic is that it is unleavened- meaning that the baked dough has created a foaming texture when it is cooked. My favorite is vegetable Roti dipped in spicy sauce. Roti is very cheap and delicious, so you gotta try it if you see it on the menu!

#### **14. Eating Etiquette (Customs)**

The Muslims of Brunei follow the Islamic law and the traditions of the Muslim population of Brunei are dictated by Islamic culture. The traditions of Brunei are also applicable to eating habits and it is customary for the people of Brunei to eat with their fingers rather than using fork and spoons. Food and Drink is generally accepted with right hand and while refusing anything when offered it is polite to touch the plate lightly with right hand. In any sort of social gathering, people of Brunei prefer to sit in floor with legs tucked to one side.

#### **15. Body Language Etiquette (Customs) Do's and Don'ts**

The common greeting depends upon the ethnic origin and the age of the person. Younger Bruneians may shake hands with foreign women or they may merely bow their head in greeting. It is considered respectful to bow your head when someone who is

senior to yourself in age or position. It is considered disrespectful and rude to stare into another person's eyes, particularly those of a person who is senior to you in age or status.

## **16. Money/Shopping/Item Buying Customs**

Free import

- 200 g Cigarettes or
- 225 g Tobacco products

Non-Muslim passengers over 17 years of age can import the following \*

- 2 bottles of liquor (approximately 2 litres)
- 330 ml of beer approx 12 Cans
- 60 ml Perfume
- 250 g Scented Water

\*Alcohol should be for importer's personal use and not sold in any way.

Alcohol should be stored and drank at the importers home.

Liquor form can be obtained from any Customs Control Posts or Customs Branches of Passenger Ships.

Prohibited

- Guns, explosives and ammunition
- Knives and deadly weapons
- Fire crackers
- Cigarettes without health warnings written on the packages
- Domestic pigs exported from Thailand
- Plant and plant products – unless authorised
- Meat and meat products –unless authorised
- Pets and other animals – unless authorised
- Radioactive and hazardous materials
- Pin schedule, fruit machines, slot machines and any other schedule or machines of a like nature whether involving an element of change or not.
- Counterfeit money and coins
- Pornographic material

## **17. Housing/Accommodation Do's and Don'ts**

Shoes are generally removed before entering a house.

## **18. Visa Information**

The government of Brunei Darussalam requires all visitors to have a valid passport and onward tickets or sufficient funds to support themselves while in the country. Visa requirements vary by nationality:

90 days entry with no visa	<b>Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Slovakia, United Kingdom and United State of America</b>
30 days entry with no visa	<b>Iceland, Malaysia, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Singapore, South Korea, United Arab Emirates and Ukraine</b>
Visas granted on arrival for visits not exceeding 30 days	<b>Australia and Kuwait</b>
30 Days for Diplomatic and Official Passport only	<b>Iran</b>
14 days entry with no visa	<b>Canada, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Indonesia, Laos, The Principality of Liechtenstein, Maldives, Peru, Philippines, Switzerland, Thailand, and Vietnam</b>
Visas granted on arrival for visits not exceeding 14 days	<b>Bahrain, Qatar and Taiwan</b>
14 Days for Diplomatic and Official Passport only	<b>Cambodia, Pakistan, Myanmar and Russia</b>
14 Days for Diplomatic, Official Passport and Service Passport only	<b>Tajikistan</b>

14 Days for Diplomatic, Official Passport and Visa on Arrival only / for genuine tourists handled by Travel Agents while for "Business Visit" need Sponsors or "Counterpart" in Brunei Darussalam	<b>China</b>
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### 19. Country Information Websites

- Government of Brunei Darussalam Official Web Site, <http://www.brunei.gov.bn>
- U.S. Department of State. "Brunei Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998," [http://www.state.gov/www/global/human\\_rights/1998\\_hrp\\_report/brunei.html](http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1998_hrp_report/brunei.html)
- <http://www.everyculture.com/Bo-Co/Brunei-Darussalam.html>
- <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/brunei.html>
- <http://thehungrypartier.com/5-bruneian-foods-to-try/>