

Study Abroad in Malaysia: Ethnography of Migrant Life in the City
June 14-July 14, 2019



Ipoh street art

**Sarah Lawrence College in partnership with
The Consortium on Forced Migration, Displacement and Education**

Study Abroad in Malaysia: Ethnography of Migrant Life in the City

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Director: Parthiban Muniandy, Professor of Sociology
Sarah Lawrence College

Introduction

Bard, Bennington, Sarah Lawrence and Vassar colleges have joined forces to form the *Consortium of Forced Migration, Displacement and Education (CFMDE)*. This consortium was formed as a response to the unprecedented acceleration of forced migration throughout the world due to war, political/ethnic/religious persecution and poverty. Our students will be engaging in a number of different learning initiatives including at the core, an innovative shared curriculum in Forced Migration across all four campuses.

As a signature project of CFMDE, the Malaysia program offers undergraduate students from across Consortium colleges to visit and learn about issues and challenges facing marginalized and displaced communities outside of a Western context. An estimated 150,000 Rohingya refugees live in Malaysia. Malaysia is also a major destination country for migrant workers from Indonesia, Thailand, India, Nepal, Philippines, Vietnam and Bangladesh. The unofficial count of undocumented workers and displaced peoples ranges from around 200,000 to 300,000.

Migrants (refugees, guest-workers, and undocumented alike) find themselves navigating the challenges of everyday in Malaysia in ways that require ingenuity, creativity and mutual trust between different cultural and ethnic groups. Informality becomes critical for those who seek to find resources and ways to secure a dignified life in the major cities of Malaysia. Migrants turn to informal means to finding homes, forming relationships, finding employment and building lives in the new country. In cities like Georgetown and Kuala Lumpur, different communities of migrants, including refugees, often live in the same spaces and neighborhoods, relying upon each other in forms of grounded cosmopolitanism for support and resources. These include taking care of children and elderly, caring for the sick, cooking for different families and providing financial assistance during emergencies.

The potential for Malaysia as an international field site will allow for greater engagement with issues of forced migration and displacement in that region of the world - for example, the ongoing crisis of Rohingya refugees from Burma and the major problem of human trafficking affecting the region. Everyday migrant life in Malaysia offers profoundly different perspectives on the experiences of different communities, allowing us to challenge commonly held beliefs and assumptions about migration. For instance, formal socio-legal categorizations that distinguish between documented and undocumented migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, are often not enough to help us understand the ambiguity and diversity of experiences and practices that such communities engage in. By turning the focus on informal and the everyday, we will pay attention to practices of place-making and community building that migrant communities from various backgrounds engage in, individually and collectively.

Admission Requirements

Students should contact their home school study abroad office for the following application materials due **March 1**:

- ❖ A completed application
- ❖ Statement of Interest
- ❖ One letter of recommendation (in the Social Sciences) and approval from the study abroad office
- ❖ An official transcript

Three students will be nominated by their home school to be interviewed by Dr. Muniandy who will select two candidates from each college to participate in the program. The third candidate will be considered an alternate participant should one of the other two candidates decide not to attend the summer program.

Program Costs:

- Air fare: \$1200 (estimated for travel to and back from Malaysia + internal program travel costs)
- Room and Board: \$1000 (hotel accommodation for Penang and Ipoh; homestays in Kuala Lumpur. Most meals are provided)
- Personal expenses in country: \$500 (estimated and may vary depending on student's travel and personal needs)
- International medical insurance: \$70 (for duration of study abroad program only)

Summer 2019 Calendar
Weekly Schedule (may be subject to change)

<i>Date</i>	<i>Mon</i>	<i>Tue</i>	<i>Wed</i>	<i>Thurs</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
<i>Weekend of June 15-16</i>					<i>Arrive in Langkawi</i>	<i>Orientation</i>	<i>Travel to Georgetown, Penang</i>
<i>Week of June 17-22</i>	<i>Monday thru Saturday Mornings: Seminar Meetings with Dr. Parthiban Monday thru Saturday Afternoons: Site visits and observations</i>						<i>Travel to Kuala Lumpur (KL)</i>
<i>Week of June 23-29</i>	<i>Getting to know KL</i>	<i>Tuesday thru –Friday Mornings: Seminar Meetings with Dr. Parthiban Tuesday -Friday Afternoons: Site visits and observations</i>				<i>Free Day</i>	<i>Morning: Seminar Meeting Afternoon: Site visit and observation</i>
<i>Week of June 20- July 6</i>	<i>Monday thru Friday Mornings: Seminar Meetings with Dr. Parthiban Monday thru Friday Afternoons: Site visits and observations</i>					<i>Travel to Ipoh</i>	<i>Orientation for Summer School at Pondok Perancis</i>
<i>Week of July 7-15</i>	<i>Monday thru Friday: Pondok Perancis Summer School</i>					<i>Wrap up at Pangkor Island</i>	<i>Depart Ipoh for Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA)</i>

Program Description

This intensive 4-week summer semester in Malaysia will be administered by Sarah Lawrence College under the direction of Dr. Parthiban Muniandy, professor of Sociology at Sarah Lawrence College. The semester abroad will begin with an orientation on the island of Langkawi followed by study and work with various organizations in Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh. Eight students (two from each consortium college) will attend workshops and lectures led by local experts and scholars in the region. In addition, they will also be visiting and working with local organizations.

- [Penang Peace Learning Center](#) (informal school for Rohingya refugee children)
- [Institut Pondok Perancis](#) (A French research center is dedicated to the social sciences in Malaysia)
- [Tenaganita](#)
- [Migrant88](#)
- [R.AGE](#) (Malaysian newspaper investigative journalism team)
- [Khazanah Research Institute](#)
- Other local organizations that work on migrants' rights, advocacy and activism

Under the guidance of Dr. Muniandy, the students will learn how to conduct mini-ethnographic projects in the city that will prepare them to carry out observations, interviews and properly document their findings and research.

Students will learn directly from local organizers, experts and the communities about the experiences of migrants, refugees and statelessness in this region. As a major destination and hub for transnational migration, Malaysia attracts a wide-range of people from across socio-economic, national and ethnic backgrounds - from international students from Nigeria to refugees from Burma. In particular, students will gain a better understanding of non-traditional destinations outside of the North American and Western European context and see how different experiences are shaped in the context of one of Asia's 'global cities'. Students will be visiting sites that have served as important centers for migrant life over the last two decades.

Through fieldwork and writing students will be prepared to:

- Conduct ethnographic research
- Be exposed to an extensive range of fieldwork sites
- Participate in daily collaborative writing opportunities
- Collaborate with local scholars, students and writers in the form of workshops who are based in Malaysia.

Study Abroad in Malaysia Curriculum

Fieldwork and Ethnography: 2 Credits (to be issued by the student's home institution)

During the program in Malaysia, students will be required to conduct visits to different sites for at least 2 hours each day. They will need to conduct mini ethnographic observations* at the sites, in addition to any interviews or conversations with professionals, experts and activists that they may be meeting. The group will then meet together each afternoon to share and discuss their experiences and work for the day, followed by an hour of writing of reflections and field notes. As part of their written assignment, these reflections will be shared within a private blog that each student will post to daily.

**please note that students will not be conducting interviews with any members of the groups, homes or schools they visit and will also not be interacting with any members of any groups, homes or school they visit without consent and supervision by the staff at these facilities.*

Course Goals and Expectations

The focus of this program is to provide students with the opportunity to learn how to conduct ethnographic research and writing in a non-western social and cultural setting. To prepare, students will be given a series of key texts to read beforehand on key elements of participant observation and ethnographic writing which they would then be expected to apply during daily site visits, observations and interviews. In addition, students will also read and discuss scholarship pertaining to migration, culture and society in Southeast Asia and Malaysia. As they travel between sites in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Ipoh. Students will spend two hours each day conducting observations at various sites listed for the program. At the end of each day, students will record their field notes and reflections which will become part of their term project. Students will also be expected to present and share their work as part of the Consortium's Annual Teaching Lab at one of the four member colleges.

Students will travel from Kuala Lumpur International Airport to Langkawi Island, for an initial three days where they will be provided an orientation and training for conducting ethnographic research in Malaysia. The group will then travel to Georgetown, Penang, where they will spend two weeks in hostels/homestay. While in Penang, students will meet with together with Dr. Muniandy every day in the morning before travelling as a group to different sites in Penang Island, including the Penang Peace School for Rohingya children and University Sains Malaysia. The group will spend ten days in Penang, before travelling to Kuala Lumpur (KL). In KL, they will be attending workshops and collaborative ethnographic writing exercises, at the Institut Pondok Perancis, a knowledge and research exchange center. Founded by the Embassy of France in Kuala Lumpur, the institute provide opportunities for intellectual exchange, research and translation work. Pondok Perancis will be organizing a 'Methodological Summer School' in Ipoh designed for students and researchers engaged in discussions of ASEAN (All South East Asian Nations) norms, values and politics. Consortium students will be able to participate in workshops and knowledge-sharing opportunities as part of the summer school.

Room and Board

Students are housed in hotels/hostels in Langkawi, Penang and Ipoh and with homestay families in Kuala Lumpur. While most meals are provided, on occasion students may need to purchase their own meals.

Required Readings Pre-departure

- Hoffstaedter, Gerhard. (2017) "Refugees, Islam and the state: the role of religion in Providing Sanctuary in Malaysia" *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 15(3).
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15562948.2017.1302033?journalCode=wimm20>
- Chin, Christine (2008) "Diversification and Privatization": Securing Insecurities in the receiving country of Malaysia" *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 9(4)

Required Readings Abroad

- Emerson, Fritz and Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes., 2nd edition.* University of Chicago Press.
- Miraftab, Faranak. Wilson, David and Ken Salo (2015) *Selected Readings from Cities and Inequalities in a Global and Neoliberal World Order.* Routledge Studies in Urbanism and the City.
- Muniandy, Parthiban (2015) *Politics of the temporary: ethnography of migrant life in urban Malaysia.* SIRD/Gerakbudaya
- Muniandy, Parthiban (2015) "Informality and the Politics of Temporariness: Ethnic migrant economies in Little Bangladesh and Little Burma, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia" *International Sociology* 30(6)
- Caldeira, Teresa (2017). "Peripheral urbanization: Auto construction, transversal logics and politics in cities of the global south" *Society and Space.*

Malaysia: Migrant Ethnographies in the City

Summer 2019 Calendar

Friday June 14	Students Arrive on Langkawi Island
Saturday, June 15- Sunday, June 16	Orientation in Langkawi
Sunday, June 16	Depart for Georgetown, Penang
Monday, June 17- Thursday, June 20	Studies in Georgetown
Friday, June 21	Depart for Kuala Lumpur, Selangor
Saturday, June 22- Friday, July 5	Studies in Kuala Lumpur
Saturday, July 6	Depart for Ipoh, Perak
Monday, July 8- Friday, July 12	Summer School in Ipoh
Saturday, July 14	Wrap up on Pangkor Island
Sunday, July 14	Program ends and students depart Ipoh for Kuala Lumpur Int'l Airport (<i>students to return home or pursue other travels on own</i>)