

THE ADAPTATION OF INDONESIAN STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA (A Phenomenological Study of Indonesian Students at Universiti Sains Malaysia)

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Abstract: *Adapting to a new environment is not something that is easy for some people. Malaysia is a country that many people think has a very similar culture and language to Indonesia which makes many people think that adapting to the culture and language in Malaysia is an easy thing. This research aims to find out how Indonesian students studying at Universiti Sains Malaysia adapt to the culture and language that exist there. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative in which the researcher wants to examine this research without changing the actual conditions of the phenomenon to be researched. This research will also be conducted using the phenomenological method from Edmund Husserl which makes this research focus on the first-person view. The final result of the research obtained from this research is the discovery of varied methods from informants to be able to adapt to culture and communication in Malaysia, to be precise at Universiti Sains Malaysia. Unlike what we expected, the reality faced by the informants in adapting was something that was not so easy, even though the culture and language shared between the two countries were not that far apart.*

Key words: *Adaptation, Culture, Language*

Abstrak: *Beradaptasi dengan lingkungan baru bukanlah sesuatu hal yang mudah bagi beberapa orang. Malaysia merupakan sebuah negara yang banyak orang mengira memiliki kebudayaan dan bahasa yang sangat mirip dengan Indonesia yang menjadikan banyak orang mengira bahwa beradaptasi dengan budaya dan bahasa di Malaysia merupakan suatu hal yang mudah. Penelitian ini memiliki tujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana cara mahasiswa Indonesia yang berkuliah di Universiti Sains Malaysia beradaptasi dengan budaya dan bahasa yang ada disana. Metode yang digunakan pada penelitian ini adalah kualitatif deskriptif yang dimana peneliti ingin meneliti penelitian ini tanpa mengubah kondisi yang sebenarnya dari sebuah fenomena yang akan diteliti. Penelitian ini juga akan dilakukan dengan metode fenomenologi dari Edmund Husserl yang menjadikan penelitian ini berfokus pada pandangan orang pertama. Hasil akhir dari penelitian yang didapatkan dari penelitian ini adalah ditemukannya metode-metode yang bervariasi dari para informan untuk bisa beradaptasi dengan budaya dan komunikasi yang ada di Malaysia, tepatnya di Universiti Sains Malaysia. Tidak seperti yang kita duga, realita yang dihadapi para informan dalam beradaptasi merupakan suatu hal yang tidak begitu mudah, walaupun budaya dan bahasa yang dimiliki antar kedua negara tidaklah begitu jauh.*

Kata kunci: *Adaptasi, Budaya, Bahasa*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the process of sending and receiving information between two or more individuals (Setiawan, 2023). Communicating in this neighboring country is indeed a challenge for people who are coming to Malaysia for the first time, but in terms of communicating Indonesia and Malaysia have similarities. Based on the results of the researchers' observations, the speech of the languages used by Malays and Indonesians can be said to be almost the same, from the types of words and the arrangement of sentences. These similarities in communication are of course inseparable from the history shared by these two countries.

As we know, Indonesia and Malaysia define themselves as Malays, where they call themselves *serumpun*. Various literature published in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam often mention that they are Malay people and descendants. The origin of the word Malay first appears in historical records around the second century AD. Claudius Ptolemaeus or better known as Ptolemy (90-168 AD) mentioned that there was a *tanjong* in *Aurea Chersonesus* (Malay Peninsula) named *Maleuo-kolon*, which is believed to have originated from the Sanskrit *Malaya kolam* or *malai kuram*. Malay people can be said to have started coming to Indonesia in the 7th century, and this is reinforced by evidence that in 684 AD Malays had become part of the Sriwijaya Kingdom. This strengthens the evidence that the relationship between Indonesia and Malay Malaysia has existed since ancient times (Venus, 2015).

In the field of educational cooperation itself, Indonesia and Malaysia have been doing it for decades after they became independent countries. In 1960-1970, Indonesia sent teachers to Malaysia as a form of educational cooperation between the two countries. Not only from the Indonesian side, the Malaysian side also sent many of their students to go to Indonesia in the hope of getting a higher quality education (Sri Wiyanti, 2015). According to data published by the *World Population Review*, Indonesia is not included in the top 10 in the category of countries with the best education system in the world. It is noted that Indonesia has 277,534,122 population and unfortunately still ranks 54th out of 78 countries that have a good education system (Aisyah, 2022).

We can say that the recorded ranking is very low because Indonesia is a big country, has a lot of population, has a lot of resources, but having an undeveloped education is a big problem for this country. This is the reason why Indonesia has not been able to become

an advance country. This is reinforced by data which says that there are still 23.61 percent of the population or 65 million people who have not finished school. This discrepancy is very clear from the percentage of the population who have completed senior high school as many as 20.89 percent or 57 million people (Anggita, 2023).

This is caused by the quality of education in Indonesia which is quite apprehensive. This deplorable quality is also caused by a number of problems that come from the existing education system, for example such as weaknesses in education management, gaps between educational facilities and infrastructure in urban and rural areas, government support that is still uneven, old-fashioned mindsets of society, limited teaching staff, and weak learning evaluation standards. Reporting from detik.com (2021), Indonesia is ranked 4th in Southeast Asia in ranking the quality of education. The first rank is Singapore, which is ranked 21 in the world. Then followed by Malaysia in 2nd place in Southeast Asia by being ranked 38th in the world. In 3rd place we can find the country of white elephants or Thailand which is ranked 46th in the world. Finally, in the 5th rank in Southeast Asia, there is the Philippines which is ranked 55th in the world, exactly 1 rank below Indonesia (Aisyah, 2021).

According to data obtained from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2022), Malaysia is a country that is the best educational destination chosen by the Indonesian people. Not only in terms of health, but Malaysia is also superior in terms of education compared to Indonesia. There were 8,440 students from Indonesia who chose Malaysia as their destination to study. This has also been proven through data that researchers have included, that there are several universities from Malaysia that have better quality and predicate than universities in Indonesia (Unesco Institute for Statistic, 2022). Another attraction that arouses the interest of the Indonesian people to study in Malaysia is the many scholarships that present a lot of benefits for prospective scholarship recipients. These scholarships also come in various variations, there are scholarships presented by each university, some are presented through the Indonesian government, some are presented directly by the Malaysian government, and some are held by institutions or foundations.

In terms of its own language, Indonesia uses Indonesian which comes from Malay which is still used by the Malaysian people there to this day. At first, Indonesian students living in Malaysia thought that communicating there would be quite easy due to the

similarities in the languages we have. However, the reality is not as easy as people imagine. We need to know that in Malaysia there are 3 majority races living there, namely the Malay Race, the Chinese Race, and the Indian Race. Each race has its own language, the Malay race uses Malay, the Chinese race uses Mandarin, and the Indian race uses Tamil (Chepkemoi, 2020). This makes it difficult for Malaysians there to communicate with one another.

With the difference in language that is there, not once or twice Indonesian students are a little confused about how to communicate with the local people there. Therefore, based on the background described above, the researcher is interested in conducting research with the title “The Adaptation of Indonesian Students in Malaysia (A Phenomenological Study of Indonesian Students at Universiti Sains Malaysia)”. This research was conducted because of the communication phenomenon that occurred and was experienced by Indonesian students at Universiti Sains Malaysia. Communication is a very important thing for us to do to communicate with each other. Differences in language and dialect there are of great concern to researchers to make the discussion to be examined in more depth. The focus of this research is to find out the communication patterns of Indonesian students who are continuing their studies at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia. This is what makes this research different from previous studies which are almost similar.

METHOD

In this research, the researcher used a qualitative descriptive research methodology, in which this descriptive qualitative is defined as the type, design, design, research that is commonly used to examine natural objects or can be said to be in real situations and not mixed up like experiments. Descriptive itself can be interpreted as research results that are presented openly based on research that has been carried out by the researcher. Creswell in (Thabroni, 2022) said that the qualitative research method is a process to understand something in order to obtain data, information, texts of the views of respondents who use various methodologies in a problem or social phenomenon.

In carrying out the research, researchers used the phenomenological method. Phenomenology itself is a qualitative research method that is commonly used to see a phenomenon experienced by a person or group of individuals in their lives (Abdillah, 2022).

In this research, the researcher chose the phenomenology that was formulated by

Edmund Husserl because it was considered consistent with this research. The phenomenology formulated by Edmund Husserl is more focused on one's consciousness from the first-person point of view. Even though it focuses on the first-person view, this phenomenology formulated by Husserl also has the concept of meaning, which is an important content of human consciousness.

According to him, people's experiences may be the same, but the meaning resulting from each experience will be different. Edmund Husserl also said that intuitive experience of phenomena is a starting point for constructing meaning from one's experience (Rahmawati, 2022). Therefore, researchers took phenomenology from Edmund Husserl because researchers would examine the experiences experienced by informants who had the same experience, namely having continued their studies in Malaysia. However, researchers would like to focus more on the meaning stored behind these experiences for research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, researchers have selected 5 main informants. These informants were selected based on their experience in adapting and communicating with local students. These informants were also selected based on the duration of their stay at Universiti Sains Malaysia with a minimum duration of 1 year. The selected informants have different cultural backgrounds and ways of communicating, which means that their perspective on things is very different. Not only cultural and communication backgrounds, some of them also entered in different years, some still have experience of approximately 1 year to 3 years. With the difference in the duration of education, of course the experiences they experience must have significant differences, especially in terms of cultural adaptation and ways of communicating.

Table 1. Informant List

Informant List					
NO	Informant Initials	Gender	Age	Educational level	Origin
1	AM	Male	21	Undergraduate	Medan
2	RH	Male	21	Undergraduate	Medan
3	DA	Male	20	Undergraduate	Aceh
4	FA	Male	20	Undergraduate	Lampung
5	RP	Male	21	Undergraduate	Tangerang

The results of this research will also be elaborated on by the findings obtained during the analysis and typing process. These findings aim to add to the information needed to get better and valid results, as well as to add useful perspectives to make the results of this research even better. In this research, researchers have conducted interviews with selected informants regarding their process of adaptation to culture and communication in Malaysia and Universiti Sains Malaysia. Based on the results of this in-depth interview, quite varied results were obtained, in which the researchers selected informants who had different experience duration. Before entering the adaptation process, the researcher first asked the informants reasons why they chose Universiti Sains Malaysia as their next destination. The answers obtained were also quite varied from the informants.

The first reason why the informants would like to study at Universiti Sains Malaysia was because the informants had a desire to study abroad from the start. This was stated directly by an informant with the initials AM who said that he would like to study abroad. This was stated directly by AM who said that he had a dream to study abroad since he was still in high school. This was hindered by the wishes of his parents who would like AM to study at a public university in North Sumatra. However, AM began to see an opportunity when he conducted research on universities in Malaysia that he could enter. Due to AM's strong desire to study abroad, AM finally did everything possible to convince his parents to allow AM to study abroad, which in the end AM and his parents reached an agreement which in the end AM was allowed to study at Universiti Sains Malaysia by his parents.

Not only that, distance was also an important consideration for the informants because it could also determine the cost of the plane ticket they had to buy. This reason was stated directly by 3 informants with the initials AM, RH, and DA. The three informants came

from the island of Sumatra, more precisely in the cities of Medan and Aceh, which made distance one of the main reasons why they chose Universiti Sains Malaysia as one of their main destinations. The distance factor is indeed an issue that we must consider before we choose a university.

AM himself explained that he chose Universiti Sains Malaysia because the distance between Medan City and Penang Island was very close, where he only needed to spend about 30-45 minutes traveling by plane. RH also thinks so, where he also lives in the city of Medan which incidentally is very close to Penang Island. DA also has the same opinion as AM and RH because he also lives close to Penang Island, which causes him to think that distance is also the main reason he chose Universiti Sains Malaysia. However, distance was not the main reason for RP and FA to choose Universiti Sains Malaysia. This is because they live further away from the previous three informants. FA himself lives in Bandar Lampung, where he sometimes has to go to Soekarno-Hatta Airport first to be able to fly to Penang Island. For the RP case, he also lives in a place quite far away compared to AM, RH and DA, namely in Tangerang City, where it takes him 3 hours to travel by plane to reach Penang Island.

The next reason which is the main reason for all informants is a good rating. AM said that he chose Universiti Sains Malaysia because of its ranking, namely the top 10 in ASEAN and being the top 5 in Malaysia. DA and RH also thought so, saying that they chose Universiti Sains Malaysia based on ranking. This is also reinforced by a statement made by the QS World University Rankings which issued a report saying that currently Universiti Sains Malaysia ranks 6th as one of the best universities in Southeast Asia (QS World University Rankings, 2023).

A good rating is of course followed by the good quality that is owned by Universiti Sains Malaysia. FA and RP said that they chose Universiti Sains Malaysia because this university offered good quality learning, and this statement was also followed by RH who said that the quality held by Universiti Sains Malaysia had a higher standard than campuses in Indonesia. Not only in terms of education, according to informants and researchers, the facilities owned by Universiti Sains Malaysia are of quite good quality. These facilities include a library that is open 24 hours for students, a co-working space that is comfortable to work in, adequate dormitories, a free transportation system for students, a sports center, and many more (usm, 2023).

In the consideration process, the informants also thought about the cost of living. Basically, the cost of living in Malaysia is not too far from Indonesia. This was directly disclosed by the FA who said that the cost of living in Malaysia was not too expensive like other countries. FA himself once lived in a hostel provided by the campus where he had to pay RM 150 per month which is approximately equivalent to IDR 500,000. This price is still quite affordable for the FA and proves that living in Malaysia is not as expensive as other people think.

The next reason is the use of English used in the campus learning system. This was revealed by AM who said that he chose Universiti Sains Malaysia because he would like to improve his English skills and learn more about English. According to observations from researchers, local students at Universiti Sains Malaysia have fairly good English skills, this is also related to the status of Universiti Sains Malaysia which has gone international. Universiti Sains Malaysia itself has 17% international students from all students there (Times Higher Education, 2023). This is an encouragement for local students at Universiti Sains Malaysia to have adequate English skills.

Similar culture and language were also one of the reasons for the informants to choose Universiti Sains Malaysia. As we know, countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Singapore are countries that have similar cultures and are often referred to as *serumpun* (Venus, 2015). This has increased the interest of Indonesian students to study in Malaysia. This statement was directly proven by RH who said that he chose Universiti Sains Malaysia because he considered Indonesian and Malaysian cultures to have similarities that could make him adapt easily. This similarity was also felt by researchers when researchers conducted studies at Universiti Sains Malaysia, where researchers felt there were similarities in culture and communication between Indonesia and Malaysia.

The last reason the informants chose Universiti Sains Malaysia was because of its supportive environment. This was directly expressed by RP who said that he also had other reasons for choosing Universiti Sains Malaysia. Apart from good quality, RP also chose Universiti Sains Malaysia which has a supportive environment. RP heard this from Indonesian students who had previously studied at Universiti Sains Malaysia or alumni from Indonesia. They told RP that both local and international students at Universiti Sains Malaysia are warm and helpful, and what's more, the students there don't need to look at a person's background to be helpful.

In the process of interviewing informants, the researcher first would like to know their adaptation process to the culture they found in Malaysia. Of course, at first they said that Indonesia and Malaysia had quite identical cultures and thought that this would make it easier for them to adapt in Malaysia. However, as time went on they lived in Malaysia, that perspective slowly changed and most of the informants ultimately thought that adapting to the culture in Malaysia was not as easy as imagined, but there were several informants who thought that the process of adapting him to his new environment in Malaysia it's not that difficult.

In the end they also use their own methods to be able to adapt to the situation. RP said that he tries to behave like the locals in order to understand their mindset and culture. RP also started from the way they apply discipline. RP revealed that local people in Malaysia have a high level of discipline, this can be seen from the way they drive vehicles, queuing, respecting their interlocutors, and much more which makes RP admit that this condition is very different from what he found in Indonesia.

The method used by DA is also not that far from RP, what DA do is following what local people do. DA said that he tried his best to be able to interact with the local people there and pay attention to what they were doing and started studying their habits, one of which was following the activities they usually did together.

RH realizes that there are similarities between Indonesian culture and Malaysian culture, but these two cultures also differ in several aspects and perspectives. After realizing these differences, in the end RH also would like to learn Malaysian culture by conducting cultural exchanges. This is done by attending several cultural exhibitions held on campus and outside campus to get to know Malaysia's culture better.

FA informants have different methods of adapting to the culture in Malaysia. FA said that he was trying to get to know Malaysian culture through the culinary specialties there. It is easier for FA to adapt to Malaysian culture through their special food, and these special foods come from 3 different races, namely the Malay Race, the Chinese Race and the Indian Race. The FA also added that he also began to study Malay when he was exploring the culinary delights on Penang Island.

The majority of informants have their own problems in adapting to the culture in Malaysia, but this is not experienced by AM. AM admitted that he did not experience significant difficulties in the adaptation process. This is because he did not find significant differences in terms of culture. Therefore, AM said that it was easy for him to adapt to Malaysian culture.

After knowing the process of adaptation to the culture in Malaysia, then the researchers would like to know the adaptation process of Indonesian students at Universiti Sains Malaysia through selected informants. Based on the observations of researchers, Universiti Sains Malaysia is inhabited by students from all over Malaysia. This causes the many different ethnicities that researchers can find within the Universiti Sains Malaysia, many of these ethnicities come from Perlis, Terengganu, Sabah, Sarawak, Penang, and others. This also resulted in many cultures and languages entering the campus so that informants and other Indonesian students had to adapt to all these differences.

After going through the interview process with the informants, various answers were obtained from the informants regarding how they adapted and their responses to the culture that existed at Universiti Sains Malaysia. AM said the same thing when he was asked about the culture in Malaysia, AM replied that he did not find significant differences in the culture of Malaysia and Indonesia, so he was also easy to adapt to the environment on campus. However, AM admits that there are differences from the disciplinary aspect. AM said that local students at Universiti Sains Malaysia had discipline in driving and queuing. AM and RH consider that the patience and discipline that he witnessed are different things. Even RH also said that the discipline possessed by local students was better than what he found in Indonesia.

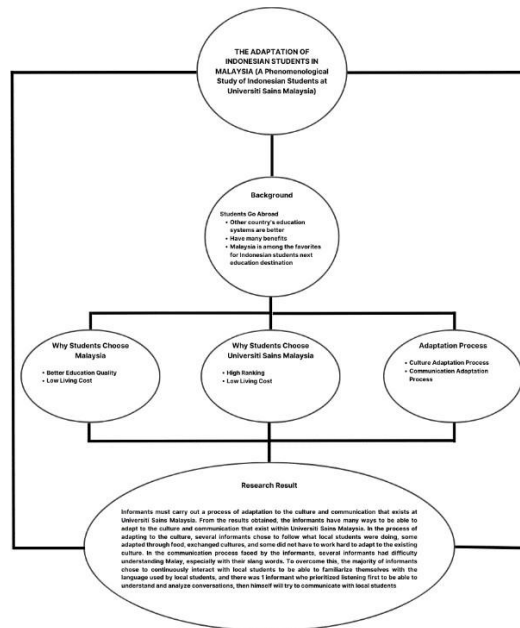
Still related to the culture at Universiti Sains Malaysia, RH and FA also said the same thing as AM, that they did not find significant differences that made them able to adapt to the culture at Universiti Sains Malaysia easily. FA also added that the food he found at Universiti Sains Malaysia had a slightly different taste from the food he often found in Indonesia. Not only food, he also found a slight difference in terms of language. But he emphasized that this did not make it difficult for him to adapt to the culture that existed at Universiti Sains Malaysia.

RP also added that he was quite comfortable in adapting to the culture that existed at Universiti Sains Malaysia. This is because local students do not look at the backgrounds of other students which makes RP able to learn about the culture that exists in Universiti Sains Malaysia easily and comfortably. DA also agreed with the opinion of RP which said that local students did not look at the backgrounds of other students. What's more, we often find disputes in cyberspace between Indonesian and Malaysian netizens which can make Indonesians have some worries when they come to Malaysia. However, this was not proven by RP and DA who said that local students there did not have a problem with students who came from Indonesia.

Furthermore, AM also highlighted the culture at Universiti Sains Malaysia in terms of the fashion worn by local students, especially men. AM said that in general the men he met in Indonesia would wear shorts when they were doing sports activities. However, this was very different when AM arrived at Universiti Sains Malaysia where he often saw men wearing trousers when they were doing sports activities and this was often seen by AM seeing local students from Malay Race.

After asking a number of things about the culture in Malaysia and Universiti Sains Malaysia, the researcher then asked questions related to the communication adaptation process carried out by the informants. After conducting interviews regarding the process of adapting their communication, researchers get various ways of how they adapt to existing communication in the Universiti Sains Malaysia environment. We need to know that Indonesian is a language that comes from Malay which is why the two languages have a lot in common (Al-Amin, 2022). Although they have many similarities, there are differences that can be found between the two languages. Knowing this, 4 informants chose to interact directly with local students to be able to adapt to the language that local students use while learning Malay in more depth, those informants are AM, RH, DA, dan FA. However, RP has a slightly different method from other informants, in which other informants always interact continuously with local students, but RP is more concerned with what he hears through local students before he interacts intensively with them. This is done by RP to be able to understand what local students say in a conversation and RP will make adjustments to the process. From this process, RP can also adapt to the communications made by local students at Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Picture 4.1 The Adaption of Indonesian Students in Malaysia



Source: Analyzed by Researchers (2023)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

According to the existing problem formulation, this research has 2 problem formulations. The first problem is how are the experiences of Indonesian students who have communicated with Malaysian students at Universiti Sains Malaysia. The second problem is what are the adaptation processes carried out by Indonesian students who continue their studies at Universiti Sains Malaysia. This research aims to find out both of these things, here are the conclusion that the researcher can get from the results obtained:

1. Based on the results obtained from this research, the informants had a safe and comfortable communication experience. The informants said that communicating with local students at Universiti Sains Malaysia was not an easy thing to do at first, but over time the informants had started to get used to the language used in Universiti Sains Malaysia, and that is Malay language. The informants also emphasized that there is nothing to worry about when we communicate with local students in Malay language and have a language barrier in the middle of a conversation. This can be handled by using english to be able to convey our communication messages that we cannot convey in Malay language. The attitude of local students themselves is very good towards foreign students who want to try to learn Malay language and use it to communicate with local students there. The majority of informants also emphasized that local students

would understand if we still had problems communicating in Malay with them, and not infrequently they would provide suggestions and input to help us improve the Malay language skills of foreign students.

2. When the informants arrived at Universiti Sains Malaysia, the informants had to adapt to the culture and communication that existed at Universiti Sains Malaysia. According to the research results, the informants have their own way of adapting to the environment at Universiti Sains Malaysia. There were several informants who did what local students usually did to be able to understand what habits local students did in their daily lives. This helps informants to get used to or adapt to the habits of local students. The results of the research also said that there were informants who adapted to the culture that existed at Universiti Sains Malaysia through the types of culinary they had. It is known that informants tasted food from the Malay Race, Chinese Race, and Indian Race to find out the uniqueness of each dish. In the process of adapting to the communication in Universiti Sains Malaysia environment, the informants also have their own way of being able to adapt to it. The majority of informants choose to interact intensively with local students to improve their Malay language skills, and conduct independent studies when they have free time. However, it was also found that there were informants who prioritized listening first to understand the language and communication patterns that local students used to be able to create suitable communication patterns to be applied when having conversations with them. After the informant found a suitable communication pattern so that communication could run smoothly, the informant would try to interact with local students.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results of data analysis conducted by researchers and conclusions regarding research that has a title “The Adaptation of Indonesian Students in Malaysia (A Phenomenological Study of Indonesian Students at Universiti Sains Malaysia)” There are several suggestions that the researcher would like to convey, both academic suggestions and practical suggestions, as follows:

5.2.1 Academic Suggestion

- a. This study aims to become a reference for communication science students that can be used for further research on intercultural communication between Indonesian and Malaysian students.

5.2.2 Practical Suggestion

- a. For students who wish to continue their studies in Malaysia or other countries, they can do previous research regarding the culture and language in that country to be able to add information for people who would like to go to that country to continue their studies.
- b. There needs to be a further research process when students have arrived in the country to determine whether the information received by the person is true or false. This can be done by asking local students in that country.
- c. It is hoped that students who wish to go abroad to continue their studies will be patient in the adaptation process they will face. Do not be too hasty to make decisions that are usually done in the country of origin, but we must think before doing something to avoid misunderstandings with the locals.

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