

Connecting Malaysia with Modern and Traditional Japan

Hafiz Othman first encountered JICA at the age of 13 when his secondary college was one of six in Malaysia selected to offer education in Japanese as a second language. His teachers were volunteers dispatched from Japan under the JICA-Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers program, and five years of study set the foundation for him to enter the University of Tsukuba and beyond. After graduation, Hafiz worked in a financial institution in Tokyo, later returning home to work with the Malaysian Government as part of its “Look East” program to increase the country’s engagement with the developed nations of East Asia. In this position, and in later positions at the Japan Foundation in Malaysia and since 2010 at the JICA Malaysia office, Hafiz has established a firm role for himself as a bridge between Japan and his home country.

Hafiz’s deep understanding of Japan has allowed him to assume this bridging role. The Japanese concept of “omoiyari,” a way of thinking and acting where one is aware of ones’ words and actions and considerate of others, has been highly influential for

Hafiz. His understanding of omoi-yari was refined through various club activities and part-time work during his student days, which helped him consider how his actions and words would affect other people or the shared situation. Hafiz is convinced of the power of this concept, “If you act with omoi-yari, a kind of ‘domino effect’ occurs, and your actions change your surroundings. Mysteriously, many things go well.”

Entranced by traditional Japanese culture, Hafiz is proficient in both the koto (Japanese harp) and the Japanese tea ceremony, as well as being well schooled in Japanese history, politics and economics. He believes Japan has much to share with the wider world. “Foreign students can learn that balance and harmony can lead to the building of a strong nation state - economically, socially and culturally.” He thinks that by understanding the history and people of Japan, one can learn more effective ways of communication with many people, not to mention the Japanese, and gain a deeper understanding of ways of communicating beyond mere words.



At JR Hokkaido to observe the maintenance process of Blue Train coaches for the used-coach donation project to Malayan Railways Ltd



Specially invited by the Imperial Household Agency of Japan to greet Emperor Naruhito (the then Crown Prince) during His Majesty's visit to University of Malaya in 2017



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