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Living next door to the PM

Malina Shamsudin

The Prime Minister and his wife live here. So do many other VIPs. And we're sure they love the beautiful place. But what's life really like for the teens living in Putrajaya, the country's new administrative centre that turns three on Sunday?

MALINA SHAMSUDIN finds out.

Go, go, go, go

Go, go, go shawty

It's your birthday

We gonna party like it's your birthday- In Da Club, 50 Cent

WELL, congratulations and a big birthday hug to our Federal toddler Putrajaya as it extinguishes its third candle this weekend. And my, how you've grown!

Sporting sophisticated steel suspensions, magnificent architecture across rippling lakes and lusciously landscaped grounds... our techno-savvy metropolis is the epitome of its dual-project theme: Garden City, Intelligent City. Since the ribbon-cutting ceremony of our spanking new suburb, parental units have been eagerly flocking into the administrative apple - brainchild of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and named after Malaysia's first Prime Minister, the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj.

Not always so dazzled is the younger generation that's dragged along, it seems.

The recent case of the Hamster Gang - a group of 10 young repeat offenders ranging from ages seven to 15 years - who broke into a shop two weeks ago and made off with nine pet hamsters and about RM60 in cash - was quite something.

Not really a crime that deserves a hanging, but still... why would one resort to abducting furry lil' rodents for kicks? Granted that there might not be as many shops here as in the KL or PJ, but could life in Putrajaya truly be that boring?

Intrigued, YouthQuake decided to track down a number of teens willing to spill all about the place they call home. Welcome to the lives of the young and restless in Putrajaya.

The kinks

Moving into a new town is never easy and it takes a while to iron out the initial kinks.

"I guess what I miss most about Melawati (his old home) are the friends. Here, I stay in the "prestigious" Precinct 10. It's the place most big shots live. The kids were a bit "action" (stuck up) at first, but have since loosened up. I've only been here a while so I'm not too close with them yet," sighs Wan Amir Zarin, 19.

"The pace is pretty slow. Everything dozes off by 10pm. I don't really think it's my cup of teh tarik."

Safety

When it comes to safety, there's a lot of trust in Putrajaya. This is emphasised by the lack of barriers between each residence. Which is probably why the Hamster Gang managed a string of petty crimes before getting caught.

"It doesn't change a thing," says Wong Jian Zhi, 16, originally from Kuala Lumpur. "Those kids just didn't know what to do with themselves. It's still a safe place to live. There is constant police surveillance." Back to nature

"I like to think of Putrajaya as a naturephile's paradise. There are so many things you can do outdoors, be it water sports or trekking through the wild wetlands (it's the size of 10 football fields) or just hanging out in one of its 13 gardens," says Sophia Lee Ai Lee, 16.

"Yeah, I like the fact that it's eco-friendly... the freshness of the environment as well as the peaceful orderliness of everything is such a vast difference from the bustle of Kajang. Everything's so CLEAN," says Kavitha Manuharan, 16, laughing.

As it should be. With one-third of this carefully crafted city devoted to sustaining the urban green lung, outdoorsy-types can while away the hours not only by indulging in old-fashioned camping and trying to identify the various exotic species of greens that thrive there.

It's during the annual treasure hunts and merentas desa (cross-city run), that teens begin to realise that there is much more about the fruits of the earth there is to experience than merely flicking waxy pages.

Adds Nurashikin Mohd Khalid, 16: "There's also this (Fragrant) Garden where you literally luxuriate in seductive scents wafting from left, right and centre. It's quite enchanting. And the flora here is never boring. In fact, each flower bed gets a regular make-over. So, one morning your streets are lined with yellow blossoms, and tomorrow they could be blue!"
Wet 'n' wild

With over three lakes, it's no wonder aqua sports is such a fascination. Besides the usual swimming (in a hygienic pool, of course) there is also kayaking, sailing, sampan rides, canoeing and even a mini cruise. The latest addition is the innovative water polo on kayaks!

"It's not as expensive as you think because, if you're a member of the (Putrajaya) Lake Club you usually get all equipment, inclusive of safety gear at half price," says Navinderan Mageswaran, 15, originally from Banting.

"But what's really fun are the triathlons that they have yearly which involve trekking, cycling and water sports," adds Wong, an avid participant and often a champ.

However, if water isn't exactly your element, teens can opt for horse trotting, cycling, basketball, football and even skateboarding. In fact, it was Precinct 16 that hosted the X-Games complete with wild skating ramps. Cool times.

Shoppin', eats and transportation

While still in its infancy, Putrajaya boasts its very own mini Suria KLCC, known as Souq, and another retail haunt known as Anjung.

"The Souq's not bad. It's a promenade facing the 600-hectare man-made lake and has a good food court with fast-food outlets. That's also where you can go for boat rides. But as cash is an issue, I usually spend time at the mamak, nursing a teh tarik and watching football," says Wan Amir, with a laugh.

According to Nurashikin, as SPM is around the corner, most students spend their time at the Pusat Pembelajaran (a fancy term for library). So, the usual chow joint is the affordable food court next to their school or a pick-me-up Slurpee at 7-Eleven.

Getting around the hub is pretty painless, helped immensely by the Nadi Putra bus service and the refreshingly zilch traffic situation.

However, should one ever miss "living it up", Kuala Lumpur is only an Express Rail Link (ERL) ride away. There's even a bus that ferries one to and fro the Mines hourly to catch the latest flicks.

"As we're usually stuck in school with co-curricular activities until 5pm, the real shopping gets done during the weekend with parents. That's when we hit Bukit Bintang, KLCC and so forth," explains Lee, fingering a star-shaped earring.

Kampung kinda life

Since life in Putrajaya tends to get quiet, most teens spend their time at home or in those of others. As a result, one tends to form a closer bond with the family.

"It's because our parents work so close to home, that they get home quickly and aren't as exhausted because they don't get stuck in jams. So more time and attention is given to foster a relationship between parent and child," says Wong.

Thankfully, this unity is not confined to the four walls of the home.

Navinderan chips in: "Also, because most of the adults work together, you find that the whole neighbourhood is pretty close-knit. The feeling is fuelled a great deal by the fact that there are no gates or fences to divide our land. Therefore, you tend to feel like a huge family.

"For example, during weddings or other festivities, all the neighbours pitch in not only to consume but to help too!"

According to Nurashikin, the neighbourhood is also a very mixed one.

"Unlike Kuala Lumpur, where most suburbs are pretty race-segregated, here almost anyone will be your neighbour," she says with enthusiasm.

However, in true kampung style, there's one drawback: everyone knows you.

"Yes, you kind of have a lot of `eyes' all over the place. Sometimes, should you sit too close to a friend of the opposite sex when the hour grows late, someone - be it a guard or an attendant - will come up to you and ask you how your family is doing," says Lee.

Wan Amir recounts a similar tale: "You can't stay out too late in Putrajaya. Even at the 24-hour mamak shop, there was an incident once at 12.30am, when a polis ronda suggested I call it a night. Maybe it's because we're supposed to be an exemplary town, so authorities don't want any irresponsible displays... or something."

However, while Wan Amir isn't the only one missing his old lifestyle of places to go and friends to visit, the young residents remain optimistic.

"One thing about Putrajaya, it brings you back to your roots. With Taman Warisan Pertanian and so forth... it's amazing. Honestly, when was the last time a city kid actually saw vegetation in the GROUND?"

"The whole experience reinforces who I am. I'm fortunate. I feel like a true Malaysian," says Noor Nashima Asrab Ali, 17.

And of course, there is that other thing.

As Eddy Effendy, 20, puts it: "It's not everyday you can say the Prime Minister's my `homie' and not everyone who can say the Prime Minister lives up the road.

"I give Putrajaya five years. There's a huge shopping mall on its way. Putrajaya is gonna be happening. Until then, I'm biding my time..."