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[GREETINGS FROM THE AMBASSADOR](#)

Wintery greetings from the Embassy of Malaysia in Helsinki!

We are welcoming 2017, a year of big celebrations. This year Finland celebrates its centenary, the 100th anniversary of independence, while Malaysia on its behalf celebrates its 60th year of independence. We foresee these milestones as opportunities to bring momentum in our bilateral endeavours also.

Finland's celebration year was launched on New Year's Eve in a grand way with festivities, performances and fireworks on the citizen's square in central Helsinki. In Helsinki we also braced ourselves for a period of frosty cold close to minus twenty degrees to kick start the year!

This issue of our quarterly newsletter will provide you with an overview of our activities from the final quarter of 2016, among them the visit of Malaysian comedian, now the World's Funniest Person, Harith Iskander to Finland and the first ASEAN Food Fair held in Helsinki. Upcoming activities this year among others include the annual Matka travel fair in January and a planned visit to Oulu in March.

As always, please feel free to give us feedback and be in touch in case of collaboration opportunities to promote the bilateral relations between Malaysia and Finland, Estonia and Latvia.

With warm wishes for 2017,

H.E. Dato' Blanche Olbery  
Ambassador of Malaysia to the Republic of Finland  
accredited to the Republic of Estonia and the Republic of Latvia

NB: If you would prefer not to receive the newsletters in the future, please click the link to unsubscribe from the list at the bottom of this newsletter.

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## UPCOMING EVENTS AND PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

- **20-22 January 2017:** Matka travel fair
- **28-29 January 2017:** Chinese New Year public holiday (Embassy closed on 30-31 January 2017)
- **4 February 2017:** Embassy Chinese New Year celebration
- **24 February 2017:** Estonian Independence Day
- **March 2017:** Visit to Oulu University (tentative)
- **March 2017:** MIDA seminar

For the full list of Embassy closure dates on public holidays, please see the list on our website from this [link](#).

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## CONSULAR INFORMATION NOTICE

Consular and visa fees to be paid via bank transfer

Please be advised that since the end of October 2016 all consular and visa fees to the Embassy of Malaysia are to be paid in via bank transfer to the Embassy's account due to recent admin charges imposed by the Nordea bank for cash payments.

Should you be unable to pay via bank transfer, we will charge an additional 10€ to cover for the bank charges. However, please note that we strongly encourage bank transfers to avoid excess fees.

In case of further queries, please contact: [consular\(at\)malaysianembassy.fi](mailto:consular(at)malaysianembassy.fi). Thank you!

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## EMBASSY ACTIVITIES

The Embassy's activities support its mission of strengthening bilateral relations between Malaysia and the countries under our coverage, namely Finland, Estonia and Latvia; of promoting Malaysia; and of providing consular services.

In the fourth quarter (October–December 2016) the Embassy's activities included, among others an ASEAN Food Fair, visit by a Malaysian comedian as well as company and social visits. Read more about our activities in this section.

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## HARITH ISKANDER – THE WORLD'S FUNNIEST PERSON

Malaysian comedian Mr. Harith Iskander visited Finland for the World's Funniest Person competition 2–13 December 2016. The competition was organised by the American Laugh Factory comedy club. The semi-finals were held in Helsinki on 5 December and finals in Levi, Lapland on 8 December 2016.

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Malaysians in Finland with Mr. Harith Iskander, World's Funniest Person 2016

### Warm welcome to Finland

Harith Iskander had a warm welcome to Helsinki with an afternoon tea organised at the Embassy for his arrival on 2 December. Malaysians had a chance to meet and welcome him to the Nordic country. Malaysian as well as Finnish food was served as a welcome to Harith and his team.

The local Malaysian community was well represented and waving flags in the audience during the semi-finals at Teatteri Forum in Helsinki on 5 December, giving confidence and support for the Malaysian contestant.

Malaysia gained good visibility in the comedy scene with many of the other international comedians also remarking the representation of Malaysia in the house during their routines. Harith's performance was considered by the judges to be of a high professional comic's standard, gaining him two tens and a nine from the three judges.

The online vote later got him to the final round and the contestants were flown over to

### Victory celebration for the Funniest Person in the World

Malaysians were elated and proud to see Harith Iskander win the competition gaining the title of the Funniest Person in the World!

Malaysians in Finland got another chance to meet up and congratulate Harith and his team at a Victory Celebration Party hosted on Monday 12 December 2016 before the group returned back to Malaysia. Also present at the victory celebration was his wife, Dr. Jezamine Lim Iskander and his support team.

Harith was very appreciative of the efforts undertaken by the Embassy and the large crowd of Malaysians who attended the semi-final and gave him maximum encouragement. He was excited to return back home and felt grateful for all the support he had received from his fans and the media.

Following his win, Harith is expected to do several tours in the US beginning 2017 together with Laugh Factory, the organiser of

Levi, Lapland for the finals. In Harith's words, arriving to Lapland, he felt like an excited little kid inside seeing snow for the first time but acted cool on the outside. His memorable experience in Lapland also included skiing for the first time and seeing reindeers and huskies.

Overall Harith told us he had had a lovely time in Finland and at the competition. He noticed similarities between Finns and Malaysians, for instance in the understated nature of both nationalities. He also made many friends among the group of comedians and will now have a place to stay in 19 countries represented by the contestants.

the competition.

\*\* \*\* \*\* \*\*

Harith Iskander's performance in the final of the Laugh Factory can be viewed here on [Youtube](#)

[Article by the Star](#) on Harith Iskander's victory

[Malaysian Harith Iskander is the Funniest Person in the World – finale was held in Levi](#) (article in Finnish in the Lapland newspaper)



Ambassador Blanche Olbery presenting a congratulatory present to Mr. Harith Iskander

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### **MALAYSIAN COMMUNITY EVENTS: Little Christmas party**

The Embassy of Malaysia in Helsinki hosted the traditional Little Christmas Party together with the Finland-Malaysia Association (FMA) on Saturday 17 December 2016.



Participants at the Embassy and FMA Little Christmas party

The event began with speeches by HE Dato' Blanche Olbery, Ambassador of Malaysia followed by the outgoing chair of the FMA, Ms. Priya Sreenganthan.

The traditional Christmas gathering was once again a nice occasion for the Embassy and the Malaysian community to gather and catch up in approaching holiday spirits to round up the year.

Later everyone joined in some Christmas carolling led by the FMA choir, and a cake cutting before digging into the variety of plentiful delicious dishes and treats. The young ones were also delighted to be greeted by good old Santa Clause.

#### **MALAYSIAN COMMUNITY EVENTS: Diwali Luncheon**

HE Dato' Blanche Olbery, Ambassador of Malaysia to Finland hosted a small Diwali Luncheon at Rumah Malaysia on Sunday, 30 October 2016, to mark the Hindu festival of lights, one of the major official holidays celebrated in Malaysia.



Initiating the Deepavali Luncheon with Finnish dancers from the Bollybeat dance school

The celebration included the traditional lighting of the oil lamp, a mesmerizing Bhratanatyam performance, a classical Indian dance, by Finnish dancers from the Bollybeat dance school, and a luncheon with traditional food.

Deepavali, the Hindu festival of lights, is one of the major festivals of Hinduism, which spiritually signifies the victory of light over darkness, good over evil, knowledge over ignorance, and hope over despair.

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### Diplomacy: ASEAN Family Day

Members of ASEAN Embassies in Helsinki and their families got together on Saturday, 1 October 2016 for an ASEAN Family Day at the Laajasalo sports park in Helsinki.



Members of ASEAN Embassies in Helsinki and their families on ASEAN Family Day 2016

This is the second time that the event was organised since last year where it was held at the Chancery of the Indonesian Embassy.

In her capacity as the Chair of ASEAN Helsinki Committee (AHC), Malaysia hosted the event this year. The day included traditional games and food from each of the represented ASEAN countries. The mood was friendly and jovial. Participants enjoyed fun, games and good food in the fresh outdoors and greenery.

The informal event was an opportunity to reinforce the friendship and solidarity among the ASEAN community in Helsinki.

The ASEAN countries with resident missions in Helsinki include Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

### Diplomacy: Visit to the European Commission office in Helsinki

The ASEAN Embassies in Helsinki undertook a familiarisation visit to the European Commission office in Finland on Thursday 29 September 2016.



ASEAN Embassies visit to the European Commission representation in Helsinki

The delegation was received by Ms. Sari Artjoki, Head of the European Commission Representation in Finland.

The visit was organised by H.E. Dato Blanche Olbery, the Ambassador of Malaysia in the capacity of the chair of the ASEAN Helsinki Committee. The committee consists of the Ambassadors of ASEAN countries resident in Finland, namely Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam.

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### ASEAN FOOD FAIR

A breeze of Southeast Asia was felt in wintery Helsinki on Thursday 17 November 2016, at the ASEAN Food Fair, held at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences campus on Bulevardi.



ASEAN Ambassadors (Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam) and Chargé d'affaires (Thailand) in the ribbon cutting ceremony for the ASEAN Food Fair

About 200 people attended the food fair celebrating Southeast Asian food cultures organised by some of the ASEAN Embassies in Helsinki in the concept of the Restaurant Day. The main organiser of the event was the Embassy of Malaysia in Helsinki as the chair of the ASEAN Helsinki Committee. The event included booths selling Malaysian, Indonesian, Thai, Philippine and Singaporean food.

The atmosphere was tropical and crowded reminiscent of Southeast Asian street food night markets. Participants enjoyed sampling the variety of the delicious ASEAN dishes prepared by the talented cooks of the members of the local community of ASEAN nationals.



Malaysian food stand at the ASEAN Food Fair

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### Visit by Ambassador Syed Sultan Idris

H.E. Dato' Blanche Olbery, Ambassador of Malaysia to Finland hosted a dinner in honour of H.E. Dato' Syed Sultan Idris, Ambassador of Malaysia to the Republic of Ireland, and former Ambassador of Malaysia to Finland (11 February 2004 - 20 August 2008) and his wife, Ybhg. Datin Zarinah Hussin during their personal trip to Helsinki, at Rumah Malaysia on Tuesday 8 November 2016.



Participants at the dinner hosted by Ambassador Blanche Olbery for the visit of Ambassador Syed Sultan Idris

It was an informal and warm occasion reminiscing the journey from the establishment of the Embassy in 2004 to current times, and for Ambassador Syed Sultan Idris to meet with Malaysians from his time in Finland. The dinner also marked the 30th wedding anniversary of H.E. Dato' Syed Sultan Idris and his wife, Ybhg. Datin Zarinah Hussin.

### Independence Day reception

Her Excellency Dato' Blanche Olbery, Ambassador of Malaysia to the Republic of Finland attended the Independence Day Reception hosted by President Sauli Niinistö, and his spouse, Jenni Haukio at the Presidential Palace.



HE Blanche Olbery with Finnish Foreign Minister Timo Soini and Slovenian Ambassador HE Tone Kajzer (right to left)

Finland celebrated its 99 years of independence. Around 1,800 guests were invited to the President's Independence Day reception, including Finns with accomplishments in a range of fields, war veterans, politicians, diplomats, athletes, entertainers and activists.

This year, 2017, the country is celebrating its centenary anniversary. The centenary year will include various forms of celebrations all along the year around the theme of Together!

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### Local companies: Visit to Fiskars

Dato' H.E. Blanche Olbery Ambassador of Malaysia to Finland and members of the Embassy of Malaysia visited the Fiskars Group campus in the Arabianranta district of Helsinki on Tuesday 22 November 2016. An informative presentation on the company and its history was given by CEO Mr. Kari Kauniskangas, after which the group was given a tour of the recently opened Iittala & Arabia Design Center.



Dato' H.E. Blanche Olbery Ambassador of Malaysia with Mr. Kari Kauniskangas, CEO of Fiskars

Founded in 1649, Fiskars is Finland's oldest company, which first began as an ironworks and has along the years expanded into gardening products, tableware and other consumer products, such as scissors, one of Fiskars' staples. The Fiskars concern today includes a host of iconic brands such as Fiskars, Iittala, Arabia, Royal Copenhagen and Wedgwood.

More information on [Fiskars](#) from the company website.

### Community effort: Visit to Reception centre

The Embassy of Malaysia made a humanitarian goodwill visit to the Helsinki reception centre in

Punavuori on 22 December 2016.



Embassy visit to the Punavuori reception centre

The group was received by Deputy Director, Ms. Minna Tuovinen at the Punavuori reception centre. During the visit, the group met with refugee families from Syria, Albania, Ghana, Nigeria, and Myanmar. The reception centre organised a cutting of paper snowflakes together with the families.

The Embassy together with Malaysians in Finland contributed a collection of winter clothing and toys for the residents at the centre.

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### Visit to the Keski-Uusimaa Rescue Department

Ms. Fatimah Said, Third Secretary and Ms. Ann Kekkonen, Admin Assistant from the Embassy of Malaysia visited the Keski-Uusimaa Rescue Department on 13 October 2016. The visit had 38 Embassies represented.



Ms. Fatimah Said, Third Secretary (middle) and fellow participants at the visit to the Keski-Uusimaa Rescue Department

During the visit representatives of the Embassies were introduced to Finnish rescue operations in case of an air-traffic accident, about the organisations involved in the rescue operations as well as their tasks and leadership responsibilities.



Participants at the visit to the Keski-Uusimaa Rescue Department

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## LOCAL EXPERIENCES

HE Dato' Blanche Olbery, Ambassador of Malaysia together with members of the Embassy staff visited the recently refurbished Helsinki city museum. The group was given a guided tour by the museum director Ms. Tiina Merisalo.



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### Helsinki city museum lobby with unique design furniture

The Helsinki City Museum opened its new museum in the market blocks on 13 May 2016. The museum is an overall experience with the milieu, exhibitions and indoor decoration telling about daily life in the Helsinki of the past.

The museum has free entry and is well worth a visit for an informative and enjoyable experience into different perspectives on Helsinki.

[Helsinki City museum website](#)

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**MALAYSIAN PROFESSIONALS IN FINLAND:**

**EVON SÖDERLUND, CEO OF HUONE EVENT HOTEL**

This feature series introduces Malaysian professionals in Finland to give an insight to the career stories of members of the Malaysian community in Finland and their impressions of living here. The archive of previous stories can be viewed here: [Malaysian professionals in Finland](#).



Evon Söderlund, CEO of Huone Events Hotel, is a Malaysian born entrepreneur living in Finland. Evon's career in her new home country started out working at the Embassy of Malaysia. Since then, with hard work and determination, with her innovative event hotel concept she has created a business model bringing the best out of both worlds, Malaysia and Finland.

Ms. Evon Söderlund is an inspirational Malaysian success story in Finland. Originally from Johor Bahru, Malaysia, Evon has been in Finland since 2005. Today she is the CEO of Huone Events hotel, a successful business, embarking on international expansion, with Singapore as the first stop.

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Front row lessons from the Embassy on event planning and ideas for a start-up

The Embassy recently caught up with Evon during the personal visit of H.E. Dato' Syed Sultan Idris, former Ambassador of Malaysia to Finland and his wife, Ybhg. Datin Zarinah Hussin to Helsinki, at a dinner held at Rumah Malaysia in November.

Meeting up with her first boss in Finland was an opportunity to reminisce the starting points of Evon's career path. She is grateful for the experience gained at the Embassy. As 'a Malaysian Chinese girl with a high school education and broken English', as she described it, the Ambassador took a chance on her, which she made the most of.

Over the two years at the Embassy she learnt a lot about attention to service, loyalty, event planning and protocol, as well as brushing up on her English skills. The work at the Embassy formed a foundation for what later became her business idea around organising

Business idea comes to life - creating Huone, events hotel

After the Embassy job, Evon studied hospitality management at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki and applied her studies directly to her business plan. Following her graduation she began to pursue that plan, together with her Finnish husband Jussi, and established Huone, a creative events hotel, in 2012. [Huone= room, in Finnish.]

The first couple of years of the entrepreneurial journey were an uphill struggle. Building the business from zero, the couple faced many obstacles such as troubles getting funding, getting the business known and establishing a customer base, even facing bankruptcy at one point.

The company's rise was eventually boosted after being recognised as the Best Event venue in Finland in 2014, Evon's story being featured in a book on entrepreneurship called Taivas + Helveti [= Heaven + Hell],

events and attention to service, having noticed a gap in the demand and supply of the service market in Finland. She also gained front row insight of setting up a diplomatic mission as the Embassy was being established then, which came useful later setting up her start-up from nothing.

and having gained the PriceWaterhouseCoopers –award for Most Valuable Entrepreneur of the year 2014. Today Huone is a growing successful business, and has begun its internationalisation journey starting from Singapore.

Despite moving to Finland, Evon maintains her links to her origins back in Malaysia. Huone has supported her country of origin by using Malaysian sources and designers, as well as serving Malaysian food.



### Starting a business in Finland – appreciation and leading with values

Having managed to establish a successful business in Finland, we asked Evon for her tips for other Malaysians interested in pursuing their business here. For her learning the language and remaining humble are among the most valuable things to remember.

Despite the high level of English in Finland,

### Giving back to the community

Gratitude and giving back to the community and the world are also the basis of Evon's leadership in her business. Huone pays attention to sustainability concerns for instance, and has decided to not serve beef due to environmental considerations. The company also contributes to charity by its employees adopting a sponsor child from developing countries instead of a bonus, out of their own choice, and caring for the

learning Finnish, an area she herself feels she is lacking in, still makes it much easier to deal with practical matters such as taxation as well as integrating into the society, networking and following the local media. She recommends also making an effort to learn basic conversation as people appreciate the effort made by foreigners and showing sincere appreciation for Finland.

Evon considers it important to be humble coming from the outside and feels fortunate of having had the chance to study and start a business in Finland. She particularly praises Finland for its equal chances, gender equality, innovative society, education and health care systems.

Moreover, she has embraced one of the fundamental concepts of Finnishness, that of 'sisu' [=gut, perseverance, in Finnish]. For her personally it means to admit your own weakness, willingness to show it, and deciding to fight it is when sisu kicks in. Evon's story was featured in a book of that name, 'Sisu', telling stories of people overcoming tough obstacles and following their passions, published in 2015.

elderly. The people working at Huone share the same values of wanting to contribute to a better world.

Evon feels concerned about the realities of those living in hardship around the world without access to water or education, for instance, often forgotten by people in advanced societies living in their bubbles. From her own example she has experienced how education has the potential to unlock obstacles. For Evon Huone is a small company that in the end is not about 'fast cars' and making more money but more about creating a caring culture and making an impact in the wider world.

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Article on Huone in [Goodnews Finland](#)

Read more about the business from the [Huone website](#)

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## LOCAL STAFF INTRODUCTIONS

This section of the newsletter includes introductions of the local staff at the Embassy of Malaysia in Helsinki. The local staff bring added value with their local understanding and language skills as well as improving communication and connections with the host country. The archive of previous introductions can be viewed here: [Local staff introductions](#).

Mr. Mourad Sayah, the Embassy driver, has been with the Embassy of Malaysia since 2007. Mourad is the office driver who helps in the logistics part of the Embassy's operations. Thanks to his knowledge of Helsinki and Porvoo, he is known to be a helpful source of local information for the diplomats as well as visiting delegations. Mourad is also often giving a helping hand with IT issues at the office thanks to his practical know-how. He has a nine-year-old daughter and a Finnish wife, who he respects and values highly. Mourad originally comes from Algeria. He has been in Finland for 26 years. Prior to the Embassy he worked and studied in a variety of fields.



Mourad has not been in Malaysia but while working for the Embassy he has had a chance to meet wonderful Malaysians from varied backgrounds and feels he has become a member of the Malaysian community. He plans to visit Malaysia and the neighbouring countries such as Indonesia in the future. In Malaysia he hopes to meet up with all his former colleagues and Ambassadors.

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## FINLAND, ESTONIA & LATVIA NEWS LINKS

This section contains web links to news about current affairs topics, trends and lessons to learn from Finland, Estonia and Latvia, as well as links to articles that feature Malaysia in the local press to provide impressions of the three countries under the Embassy's coverage.

### Finland

- [Finland's centenary year has begun](#)
- [Statistics Finland explains why Finland is a good country](#)
- [Lonely Planet selected Finland as the third best destination in 2017](#)
- [Finland as the new hotspot of wellbeing](#)

### Estonia

- [The Government of Prime Minister Jüri Ratas assumed office](#)
- [PISA 2015: Estonia's basic education best in Europe](#)
- [Chedi Asian restaurant](#) in Tallinn has a Malaysian chef from Penang

### Latvia

- [Priorities of Latvia's foreign policy for 2017](#)
- [Latvia's report on the Baltic-Nordic cooperation year](#)
- [Visit Latvia](#)

## Malaysia in the Finnish media

- [Malaysian Harith Iskander is the Funniest Person in the World – the contest finale was in Levi](#) (article in Finnish)
- [Malaysia encourages tourists to cycle](#) (article in Finnish)
- [From the verge of bankruptcy to becoming the most valuable entrepreneur – “Failure was not an option”](#) (article in Finnish)

The next issue of the Embassy of Malaysia newsletter (issue 2/2017) will appear in April 2017.

If you have any questions concerning the Embassy newsletter, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Satu Spratley at: [interpreter\(at\)malaysianembassy.fi](mailto:interpreter(at)malaysianembassy.fi)

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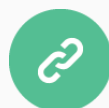
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