

Irish writer: Some Malaysians are more equal than others

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Marc de Faoite is an Irishman who has lived in Malaysia for 10 years and calls Malaysia his home, but was quick to add that some Malaysians were more privileged than others.

In his article, in *The Irish Times*, Faoite listed as number one, “All Malaysians are equal, but some are more equal than others.” He listed this as the first item in his article, ‘10 things I’ve learned from 10 years living in Malaysia.’

“Malaysia is ethnically diverse and being a member of a given ethnic group confers advantages and disadvantages. For example - everyone has freedom of religion, except ethnic Malays who have to be Muslim.

“In many parts of the country, including most of rural Malaysia, property can only be owned by Malays. Other ethnicities have to either rent or else live in areas where they can legally own their own homes,” said the freelance writer, yoga and meditation teacher who lived in Langkawi with his Malaysian wife.

Second on his list on staying in Malaysia experience was that primary school education is split along linguistic lines. “Malaysians can attend Malay, Chinese, or Tamil language schools, representing the languages spoken by Malaysia’s dominant ethnic groups.

“In theory anyone can attend any school, but in practice it is extremely rare for anyone who is not ethnic Indian to attend Tamil school. It is becoming increasingly common for middle-class Malays to send their children to Chinese language schools, but the majority of Malaysians tend to be schooled in the language of their ethnicity.”

Third point on the list was that the government is made of a coalition of ethno-centric political parties.

“The dominant party represents ethnic Malays, with other parties representing ethnic Chinese and Indians, plus some other minor parties and independents. Though technically a democracy, Malaysia has never had a change of government since independence from the United Kingdom in 1957.”

Fourthly, he said, “Freedom of speech is a privilege, not a right. The government directly and indirectly controls almost all the media. Occasional voices of dissension are heard in online news outlets, but the internet is strictly monitored.

“Websites critical of the government are routinely blocked and it is not uncommon for people to be arrested for an indiscreet Tweet or Facebook post. Anything deemed critical of Islam is not tolerated and many Malaysian Muslims are increasingly moving away from a

moderate stance, calling for laws that will allow stricter penalties for crimes, including whipping and amputation of hands.”

‘Summer all year long’

The fifth point was, healthcare is almost free, sixth was summer all year long and seventh is Malaysians love food.

He confessed there were times, “I’ve thought of leaving. But the reasons to leave are always outweighed by the long list in the plus column. There are days where I find it hard to be optimistic about whether Malaysia and I will have a long future together. I certainly hope so. I feel like I’m doing my best.”

His eighth point was Malaysia has world-class infrastructure, ninth, Malaysia is a nature lover’s paradise, and tenth, Malaysia’s greatest asset is its people.

“Malaysians are very laid back, with most Malaysians, especially outside urban areas, taking life as it comes. In the past 10 years I have consistently found Malaysians to be extremely friendly, kind, and generous, and though I will always be Irish I consider myself very lucky to be able to call Malaysia my home,” said Faoite.

He explained that the Malaysian woman who led him to Malaysia, and who later became his wife, was the only reason he chose Malaysia.