

**Where's the Malaysian we want to show the world?**  
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Ever since a child, I was under the impression that the Malays are a courteous lot.

Lemah lembut, berbudi bahasa, bersopan santun. I still remember those movies and pictures of the Malay ladies in baju kurung and kebaya smiling away.

Even interviews reported in the media had excerpts from foreigners stating how 'courteous' Malaysians are.

At the Narita Airport in Japan, the staff and officers handling my check-in, the baggage handlers and the shop staff were extremely polite.

Mistakes are almost instantaneously met with apologies and shop visitors are greeted with a polite Irrasshaimase! and Sumimasen - the same as 'Welcome' and 'Excuse me'. It is heard almost everywhere in Japan.

But on my arrival at KLIA, I was greeted with sour faces and rude behaviour. From the immigration officers to the police up till the taxi operators, no hint of courtesy was even falshed before my eyes.

I was frustrated and extremely embarrassed in front of Japanese visitors who showed respect in the queue lines they formed themselves.

On Malaysian roads, signals by cars to change lanes is almost non-existent. Cars were slipstreaming behind other slower cars to pressure them to give way.

Lumbering road hogs were on the fast lanes. Fist-clenching and vulgar shouting matches between drivers were the order of the day.

In Japan, they have evolved far from being 'only' law-abiding citizens. The law has been decorated with utmost respect to courtesy.

For example, according to law when driving at night, the night lamps must be switched on but if a Japanese stops at a red light, they will dim their lights so the glare will not blind oncoming traffic.

That is not a legal requirement, that is courtesy. Hazard lights are switched to signify 'thanks' if a car gives way.

What has happened to our own self-imposed label as being courteous and kind? Has the economic distress made us insensitive and oblivious to kind greetings and a warm salaam?

Is the warmth only reserved by those hotel doorkeepers as they greet guests to their hotels?

Where is that Malaysian that we want to show the world?

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