

**Why celebrate Malaysia Day?**  
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**BY EDWARD SOO**

This is our third year celebrating Malaysia Day at Bangkung Row, and I am often asked the question: why celebrate Malaysia Day?

Our restaurant group (Opus, Cava, Leonardo's) at Bangkung Row organised a street party fundraiser for the Sichuan earthquake and Typhoon Nargis victims in 2008. It was a very successful event and we raised over RM80,000 for both causes.

In 2009, we followed up with an even bigger World March for Peace and Non-Violence street festival working with five NGOs, which was also very successful. So in 2010 – I asked myself, what should we celebrate this year?

About this time, I became aware of the "Malaysia Day" issue.

Most of us celebrate the independence of the country on August 31, with parades, etc. Malaysia Day is merely a footnote in our history books.

It is often forgotten that Malaysia was only formed on September 16, 1963, when Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore joined together with the existing States of the Federation of Malaya, to establish the new federation of Malaysia. They did not join Malaysia, as is commonly thought. In other words, Malaysia Day is the birthday of Malaysia.

Sarawak proclaimed her independence on July 22, 1963, and Sabah proclaimed her independence on August 31, 1963. It is odd to require the peoples of Sabah and Sarawak to celebrate the independence of the Federation of Malaya. In my humble opinion, Merdeka Day should only be celebrated in Peninsular Malaysia, and the respective independence days of Sabah (also on August 31) and Sarawak (on July 22) celebrated in Sabah and Sarawak, respectively. All Malaysians should then jointly celebrate Malaysia Day as the birthday of Malaysia.

Some friends have asked why I have taken up this "East Malaysian" issue – well to me, it is an issue of fairness and inclusiveness and respect for the histories of the peoples of Sabah and Sarawak. And we do not have to be Sabahan or Sarawakian to support the cause.

I also celebrate Malaysia Day because I feel there is way too much negativity about the country. Yes, there are many things to be unhappy about - especially the political, racial, religious and social undercurrents – but we should also be thankful for our many blessings: a country that is rich in resources, free from major natural disasters; our diverse and beautiful cultures; warm friendly people (think about our open house concept, our respect for elders and how we call strangers "uncle", "makcik", "macha", etc.); and our glorious selection of foods available at all hours, etc.

That is why I believe we should celebrate all the wonderful things about this country (its food, culture, peoples), in order to strengthen our resolve to work towards an even better Malaysia.

One aspect of Malaysia Day which I am proud of is our inclusiveness. In curating the event, I take effort to include every possible group of people and their causes – we are partnering

with over 25 NGOs this Malaysia Day - I truly believe that there is a place under the Malaysian sun for all of us.

In celebrating Malaysia Day, we are also acknowledging the "Malaysia Day issue" concerns of our fellow Malaysians in Sabah and Sarawak, and having a celebration which they too can joyfully join in. This year in particular, we are having a wonderful Magical Borneo Evening, featuring over two hours of Sabahan and Sarawakian cultural performances on September 15.

I know this country is far from perfect (and some of you think I am too much of an optimist), but let us celebrate all that is good about this country. Let us work together to make this country better and fairer for all. Let us treat each other with respect, sincerity, and compassion. It is said that: "Men did not love Rome because she was great. She was great because they had loved her." Let us love our country.

Join us in celebrating Malaysia's 50th birthday on September 15-16 at Bangkung Row, Bangsar, from 5pm to 10pm for the Great Malaysian Food Festival and the Getaran Jiwa Two Evenings of Cultural Performances.

There will also be various talks, forums and art exhibitions from 3pm on those days. Check our Facebook page "Malaysiaku Celebrating 50 Years of Malaysia" for details.

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