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Raya in Türkiye: My First Aidilfitri Abroad as A UMPSA Student in Istanbul A Snowy Start to a New Chapter

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My name is Siti Maizurah Zulkafli, and this is my Raya story. This year, I celebrated my very first Hari Raya Aidilfitri away from home, and it was an experience I will never forget. I arrived in Istanbul last February, greeted by heavy snow. That was how my journey here began. As a third-year Semester 2 student of the Bachelor of Manufacturing Engineering Technology (Pharmaceutical) with Honours at Universiti Malaysia Pahang Al-Sultan Abdullah (UMPSA), currently on a mobility programme at Istanbul Technical University (ITU), I also had the unique opportunity to welcome Syawal in this historical city.

A Personal and Peaceful Eid Morning

Türkiye celebrated Eid on Saturday, 29th March 2025. Although I was far from my family in Malaysia, I was surrounded by warmth, kindness, and a strong sense of community. I began the morning with a visit to Veysel Karani Mosque for the Eid prayer. However, in Türkiye, only men perform the Eid prayers, similar to Friday prayers. So, after they finished, I found a quiet space in the mosque and performed my own Eid prayer with my housemates.

Raya Without Rendang, but Still Full of Flavour

Since I could not find the ingredients to make Rendang, I decided to cook Nasi Tomato and Ayam Masak Merah instead. One of my housemates made Bakso, and together we enjoyed a lovely meal. It was simple but full of joy and appreciation. I share the house with an Indonesian friend, and beyond exchanging food, we have shared stories and culture, which helped me feel at home.

On the second day of Raya, I was invited to celebrate with other Malaysian students in Istanbul. The moment I stepped into their home, it felt like Malaysia. The food, the laughter, the language, it was comforting. I did not feel homesick at all. There is such a strong Malaysian community here, and I try

to accept every invitation I receive as it helps me stay connected.

A Family Portrait from Afar

One of the most touching moments was when my father woke up at 3 a.m. Türkiye time just so I could be part of our family’s annual Raya photo. They placed my FaceTime call on the TV screen, and I was there, smiling virtually in our 2025 family portrait. It was both hilarious and heart-warming.

Kindness and Sisterhood in Beyo?lu

On the seventh day of Raya, I joined a gathering with a group of Malaysian girls in Beyo?lu. Although we had only recently met, they treated me like an old friend. They have always been there when I needed help or had questions. That sense of sisterhood and support meant the world to me.

Tulips in Bloom and Eid in Spring

Because Eid coincided with spring, I made sure to visit Emirgan Park in Maslak. The tulips were in

full bloom, making the perfect backdrop for our Raya photos. It felt like the season itself was celebrating with us.

A Ramadan Filled with Community and Reflection

Ramadan was just as memorable. I received many invitations to iftar gatherings with MASAT (the Malaysian Students Association in Türkiye), friends at ITU and the Faculty of Mines, local NGOs, and even informal ones with friends near Aya Sofya. I also joined *itikaf* sessions at Eyüpsultan Mosque, where I spent quiet, spiritual nights with the MASAT community. Those moments of reflection were both grounding and inspiring.

Finding Home Away from Home

One of the most special highlights was attending a dinner with YB Dato' Seri Diraja Dr. Zambry Abdul Kadir the Minister of Higher Education Malaysia last week. It was an honour to be part of such a moment as a Malaysian student abroad. It made me feel proud to represent UMPSA here in Türkiye. Living in another country certainly comes with its own set of challenges. However, through this experience, I have learnt to be independent. I have learnt to think critically, manage things on my own, and adapt to a new environment. These lessons are shaping how I think, how I speak, and how I carry myself.

Thanks to Istanbul’s excellent public transport, I have also had the chance to explore beautiful places in the city, from parks and palaces to mosques and markets. Every day here feels like a new adventure. This Syawal taught me that joy does not only come from being home, it comes from

appreciating where you are, the people around you, and the journey you are on. And for that, I am truly grateful.

Eid Mubarak from Istanbul! May this Syawal bring peace and blessings to us all.

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