

All ready to go Down Under

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STUDENTS who are about to set foot overseas on their own for the first time will likely experience some trepidation over what lies ahead.

This is why the Malaysian Students' Council of Australia (MASCA) decided to organise the third Down Under Camp (DUC) last weekend. The camp enabled 200 new students to meet and mingle with former and current students already studying in Australia. The camp also lets students know what to expect while living there.

MASCA national chairperson Nurul Azwa Rodzi explained that DUC helps students prepare for life in Australia as the camp caters to the needs of new students who will be studying there through briefings, discussions and activities.

In an interview at the pre-departure camp held in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), she explained that the camp is gaining popularity, with the number of participants increasing each year.

"We had 100 participants for our first DUC and 50 volunteers," said Nurul Azwa, adding that due to

limited resources, the organisers had to cap the recent DUC to 200 students.

"We hope we can accommodate more students next year," she said.

In a testament to its popularity, Nurul Azwa explained that many have returned to join MASCA, to help them organise the next DUC or be a part of its events in Australia.

Among the activities in the two-day session included a general pre-departure briefing and parents' question and answer session filled with important facts and information about life as a student in Australia; Project X, which saw participants divided based on states for a sharing session with their seniors; Exploring Australia, which was an explorace-like game in which the participants were tested on their practical knowledge and living skills; Fiqh Luar Negara, a session for Muslim participants to ask questions in regards to potential challenges they may face in Australia; an Open Day, where participants and volunteers engage informally while giving back to the society through a cooking competition, with the food distributed to the homeless around the Klang



One for the album: (front row, from left) Dr Macdonald, Prof Asma, Prof Aini and Nurul Azwa pose for a group photo with the 200 participants during the Down Under Camp held in UPM.

Valley.

"That's how DUC creates memories for our participants and make them want to come back," said Nurul Azwa.

Higher Education Department director-general Prof Datuk Dr Asma Ismail who launched the event, encouraged students to read up about Malaysia prior to their departure as they are representatives of the country.

Deputy Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia Dr Angela Macdonald reminded students to get their visas in order before leaving for their studies.

"Study hard but remember to have a good time and immerse

yourselves into the Australian culture," she added.

Also present were UPM vice-chancellor Prof Datin Paduka Dr Aini Ideris and deputy vice-chancellor (academic and international) Prof Datuk Dr Mad Nasir Shamsudin.

Nurul Azwa explained that the camp has received positive feedback for being well-structured while several students said that they were happy to have met new friends and network with other students who would be going to Australia to study.

Participant Nur Farhana Sulaiman, 21, who will be leaving for Queensland University of

Technology in July, said the camp was useful in helping students address their worries such as in relation to their studies and transport matters.

Her concerns included whether she would be able to make friends upon arriving in Australia. She said the camp was a good platform for her to meet new people who are also heading to Australia.

Echoing Nur Farhana was Mohd Firdaus Baharuddin, 21, who said that the camp is a useful platform for students to network. He said his knowledge of Perth where he will be studying at the University of Western Australia, has also improved thanks to the camp.