

Malaysians in Singapore host stranded students for New Year

By Annabelle Liang
The Associated Press

SINGAPORE — Chan Jit Yen loves Lunar New Year. It is as much about festivities as it is a homecoming for the 31-year-old Malaysian woman.

Chan, who lives in neighboring Singapore with her husband, usually takes a week off work to visit his family in Kuala Lumpur.

They then travel to her hometown in Ipoh, and usher in the year with more visits, meals, and celebratory firecrackers.

Now, with the pandemic upending lives on both sides of bridges that link Singapore and Malaysia, Chan cannot travel. Instead, she opened the door of her rented apartment to four Malaysian students.

“Especially (for) Malaysian students, Chinese New Year has been something that they’re really looking forward to,” Chan said. “I hope they ... feel like home and not feeling left out in Singapore.”

Like Chan, the students are spending their first Lunar New Year away from home. They also have a shared interest in engineering, the field she studied before launching a healthy snacks startup.

Chan heeded a call by the Malaysian Association in Singapore, which asked Malaysians to treat students to a meal over the festive period.

The association eventually matched 25 students to 10 hosts.

“This initiative is all about the food and the people. Food is what brings people together, especially for Malaysians,” said management



OX YEAR OUTREACH. Pedestrians cross a street with a lit giant ox display to welcome the Lunar New Year at Chinatown in Singapore. With Malaysian workers and students stranded in the city state over the Lunar New Year due to coronavirus travel restrictions, the Malaysian Association in Singapore asked Malaysians to treat students to a meal. (AP Photo/Annabelle Liang)

committee member Lee Ji En.

After mulling over several menus, Chan settled on a hot pot lunch. She visited a supermarket early on Saturday, and quickly got to slicing ingredients and preparing tomato and Sichuan peppercorn broths.

Conversation flowed once the students arrived. They discussed university life, work prospects, and their favorite Malaysian cities and dishes.

It was an otherwise quiet celebration for Ter Leong Kern, who visited Chan with three university friends.

Under strict pandemic rules, households in Singapore, which has a handful of coronavirus cases reported

daily, can welcome up to eight visitors a day.

At night, Ter, 21, dreamed that he was celebrating with his family at their home in the Malaysian town of Klang.

Ter’s father and mother have seven siblings each, and the family makes the rounds during the holiday season.

“Hope is hope, but reality is still a thing, you know, so we cannot go back,” Ter said. “I hope that the pandemic will go away as soon as possible because it has been very detrimental to all of our daily lives.”

“One Good Thing” is a series that highlights individuals whose actions provide glimmers of joy in hard times — stories of people who find a way to make a difference, no matter how small.

Lives Lost: Parents hoped baby Kobe would play basketball

By Kiko Rosario and
Joel Calupitan
The Associated Press

TANAUAN, The Philippines — He was heralded in the Philippines as the country’s youngest COVID-19 survivor last year, a baby who’d become infected with and conquered the coronavirus during his first 16 days of life.

To Ronnel Manjares and Trisha May Noche, he was Kobe Christ, their second child.

Noche wanted her son to grow up playing basketball, just like his father. The couple named him after American basketball legend Kobe Bryant, who died in a helicopter crash early in 2020.

“I added Christ after he was born on Easter Sunday,” Manjares said.

The young parents prepared for Kobe’s arrival during a challenging time.

Manjares, 26, lost his job as a daily wage construction worker in metropolitan Manila because of the nationwide coronavirus lockdown imposed in mid-March. They wanted Noche, 19, to give birth in their home province, but the lockdown prevented any travel.

The couple also was advised that it would be safer to have the baby at home instead of a hospital to prevent exposure to the virus. With the help of a traditional birth attendant, Kobe was born on April 12, 2020 in a shack near a construction area that his parents already shared with their baby daughter.

Manjares said the delivery went



FAMILY HEARTBREAK. Ronnel Manjares, right, receives his 16-day-old baby Kobe who recovered from COVID-19 as they discharge him from the National Children’s Hospital in Quezon city, Metro Manila, the Philippines, in this April 28, 2020 file photo. Kobe was heralded as the country’s youngest COVID-19 survivor. But the relief and joy did not last. Kobe died on June 4 from complications of Hirschsprung disease, a rare birth defect. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila, File)

smoothly and that his newborn son “looked healthy and fit.” Noche was happy 15-month-old Crystal now had a brother.

“I want to take care of him, make him grow old properly, so my other child will have a playmate,” Noche recalled thinking.

The family spent Kobe’s first few days together at home. Then, the parents noticed his swollen belly. Their son also was constipated and running a fever. His father took Kobe to the main children’s hospital, where a coronavirus test of the infant came back positive.

Neither Manjares nor the doctors could trace how or where the newborn contracted the coronavirus. Manjares, Noche, Crystal, and the

birth attendant all tested negative.

But Kobe got better; he was declared virus-free based on another test when he was just over two weeks old. His constipation and enlarged abdomen also cleared up.

The baby’s discharge from the National Children’s Hospital on April 28 made news. Video footage recorded that day shows Kobe in his father’s arms and surrounded by cheering health workers, some carrying signs reading “COVID-19 survivor” and “I Beat COVID-19.”

The two would need to spend 14 days in quarantine at another hospital, but a relieved Manjares already looked beyond the confinement period.

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Getting vaccinated: What you need to know before you go

COVID-19 vaccinations are opening to more Oregonians. Here's what you should know before scheduling an appointment at a vaccination site or event. **Please do not call your health care provider or local hospital to find out where to get a vaccine:**

- Make sure the event or site you plan to attend is accepting individuals in your eligibility group
- Check to see if you need an appointment
- Wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth
- The COVID-19 vaccine will be free and you do not need health insurance. If you have health insurance, please bring your insurance card
- You should receive a vaccination card that tells you when to get your second dose. You should get your second dose from the site where you received your first

For more information visit covidvaccine.oregon.gov or call 211.