

Headline	Where kids rule		
MediaTitle	New Sunday Times		
Date	08 Dec 2013	Language	English
Circulation	156,910	Readership	295,000
Section	Life & Times	Page No	4,5
ArticleSize	552 cm ²	Journalist	N/A
PR Value	RM 54,027		



Where kids rule

At KidZania, kids are inspired to pursue their dreams by exploring what it's like to live and work in a functioning kid-centric city, writes

Aneeta Sundararaj

OUR tour guide for KidZania Kuala Lumpur at Curve NX in Mutiara Damansara is none other than its mayor, Susanah Abdul Rani. "This is an actual city," says the vivacious mother of two boys.

Starting at Governor's Office, the 46-year-old adds: "KidZania was founded in Mexico City by Xavier Lopez Ancona. He dreamt of creating a place where kids could have fun while enjoying real-life experiences. KidZania expanded globally and ours is the ninth city among 15 other KidZanias in the world.

At KidZania, kids are inspired to pursue their life's dreams by exploring what it's like to live and work in a real kid-centric city. They're in charge of choosing over 100 role-playing activities from over 60 establishments. But what does this mean?

Think of it this way: Most young adults leave school and venture into the world to pursue their dreams. They are likely to have some money in their pockets. Whether they choose to use up all the money, save and invest it or work towards getting more qualifications is up to them. Similarly, when a kid

first enters KidZania, he's given a cheque for kidZos (the currency in KidZania).

He opens an account with CIMB bank, gets his own ATM card and cashes the cheque.

Thereafter, he's free to choose what to do with his time and money.

What are the popular choices among the children? Being a pilot with AirAsia, model or fireman.

Susanah adds: "Many also choose to be a TNB technician, a courier or a police officer. My 8-year-old son, Adam, loves making sushi. It was his first time and he enjoyed learning something his mother didn't know how to do."

We stop suddenly as a siren from an ambulance is blaring. The driver — an 8-year-old girl — is weaving in and out of traffic ferrying the injured to the KPJ Specialist Centre. When the tour continues, we visit a new facility in the city: A dental clinic.

Inside, a group of dentists are cleaning a patient's teeth and treating cavities. And precisely how old are these dentists? Their average age is 7.

"Can you see their faces?" asks Susanah. "You can see that they know they're the ones in charge, now. They know they have to be gentle and they are no longer scared."

Next is a visit to the income tax office. Indeed, a group of sombre tax officers from Lembaga Hasil Dalam Negeri will calculate the revenue the State is owed and charge the citizens of KidZania accordingly.

"My elder son, Lokman, 9, was a tax collector and he learnt that collecting tax is a way of giving back to the people," says Susanah. "He chose to give the money collected to the police. When I asked him why the police, he said that if we don't have the police, then who's going to protect us. When I asked him why he didn't allocate the money to something like schools, he thought about it and nodded. 'Maybe next time around'."

As for the right way to deal with children, Susanah recounts a story from her childhood. "When I was in Standard 1, I had a wonderful teacher. Her name was Cikgu Rokiah. My father was a strict man and

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he taught us that when we heard the call to prayer at Asar, we must start to get ready for dinner. But at 4.30pm or so, I was still in school. So, every day, at 4.30pm, I will start crying. Cikgu Rokiah didn't scold me for this. Instead, she talked to my parents. When my father explained what it was, she was kind and told me that I didn't need to worry. This taught me that you have to understand children. Don't ignore them and make an assumption about a child. If you see a grumpy child, go ahead and approach the child. Don't be scared. Reach out to them."

Like the mayor of any large city, Susanah has her own set of challenges. "Yes, we have potholes in our roads and we have to patch them up fast. I have staff who are tardy and I have to motivate them to work. And we have an environmental team — not janitors — to maintain the cleanliness of our public toilets."

Most amusing is the story of a disgruntled parent who rang management and asked, "What have you done to my child?" Apparently, the kid was very excited that he had conducted surgery on a patient and removed cancerous tumours. Now, the child demanded that his parent stop smoking because smoking

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causes lung cancer.

The tour ends with a question from one in our group: Does Kid-Zania Kuala Lumpur have a scientist with a time travel machine that allows us adults to go back in time and start again?



Life as a newspaper journalist.



Kids get to explore various vocations here.