UCSI Sarawak Open Day and green expo beckon visitors today

THE UCSI University, Sarawak Campus is inviting members of the public to its two-day open day from today.

The university will be open from 9am till 5pm at its campus near Jalan Lapangan Terbang in Kuching, throughout the open day with the main events. The campus is also providing more information on the Centre for pre-university studies (CPU) and its Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management (FHTM).

Students, potential students and parents will be given the opportunity to meet with the lecturers and course counsellors from the university for an in-depth briefing on the programmes and career opportunities.

UCSI CPU will also be holding an innovation exposition with the theme “Green Cycle”, aimed at raising awareness of the importance of recycling and preserving the environment.

Information on financial assistance such as scholarships and education loans can also be obtained during the open day. A special carving scheme will be introduced where outsiders from CPU will be given a chance to grab this special scholarship scheme with forecast results for 2014.

UCSI Sarawak houses the Faculty of Hospitality Management and Centre for Pre-U studies, providing niche programmes to students.

Registration for the January intakes is now in progress. Students interested in enrolling are reminded to bring along their academic transcripts and forecast results for enrolment.

For further information, call 082-455 255 or email cpu@uscis.edu.my.

Groomed for success

IT is something of a throw-away observation to note that academic news in Malaysia is largely persona-centric.

So when it turns out that there are high achievers from Sarawak and Sabah, the effect is rightfully magnified.

This is certainly the case for 16 students of UCSI University, Sarawak Campus, who recently secured their coveted internship at luxury hotels and resorts in Japan and Singapore.

Among them are Michele Kong and Rebecca Tan, who wrote history themselves and also for the university when they were selected for a five-month internship at the renowned Niseko ski resort in Japan — widely regarded as one of the world’s premier winter holiday destinations.

Now entering their fourth week of internship, the two clearly felt that the exposure they’d been given was truly invaluable.

“It’s a totally different environment compared to Malaysia, down to the people’s work culture and things that I learn on a daily basis,” enthused Tan.

“Everything happens so fast around here! I have to master the booking system, reply emails, act promptly on feedback, offer quality service to our guests and arrange for their pick-ups, in addition to the daily grind of managing check-ins and check-outs.

“The resort itself is vast — I’m still trying to figure out how many properties Hokkaido Tracks — the company behind Niseko — really has,” she said.

Kong explained the steep learning curve she had to navigate upon her arrival at the resort, shaking off the initial jitters as it was her first time overseas on her own.

“It’s quite a challenge to work with so many different people from different cultures; to learn from each other and to voice our opinions on various issues.

“The internship is going well for me and it is a nice change to be able to experience it in a foreign country — an extremely rare opportunity for a university student,” she said.

On a lighter note, the girls were united in their views of a challenge that could not be overcome easily — Mother Nature.

Kong said the weather had been the hardest thing for her to get used to as she had never experienced snowfall before and the uninteruppted temperature, which is below 0°C, average. Although she was slowly getting used to this, she said it would take more time to fully adapt to the changes caused by the different environment.

Similarly, Tan said she was still grappling with the vast expanse of snow that could adversely affect one’s sense of direction.

“I am still unfamiliar with the many landmarks. There were times when I lost my direction during inspection of rooms at different properties in the resort. I had to radio the headquarters to get directions from my supervisor,” she admitted.

Now wherever I go, I will ask the first person I see for directions, whether it is the location, or more importantly, whether I will get lost again... Funny as it is, it makes my internship here more interesting,” she laughed.

Marvelling at and learning the efficiency and reliability — the two traits that are quintessentially Japanese — of their senior colleagues, both students pointed out that Hokkaido Tracks was actually Australian-owned.

It is really impressive to see how they retain the uniqueness of Japanese culture, at the same time displaying the seemingly Australian laidback approach,” Tan said.

Taking the lead from their foreign colleagues who spoke Japanese fluently, the girls signed up for language classes, a move they believed would boost their career prospects.

This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, Kong and Tan credited their alma mater for grooming them for success.

“My time in the UCSI Student Council and also the various roles I played have really prepared me for this internship as I learn how to work and play together in a team comprising individuals from different backgrounds,” said Kong.

She said the learning system UCSI had also taught her how to prioritise tasks according to urgency, which had helped her at Niseko, where she was required to get things done in a timely manner.

“More importantly, UCSI played an integral role in setting up this internship. The university had put us in touch with Hokkaido Tracks and I would not have known about Niseko without their help,” said Kong.

The positive experiences of the two girls are shared by their 14 friends who are currently away on six-month internship at premium hotel chains in Singapore like Mandarin Orchard, Mandarin Oriental, and Resort Sentosa, as well as the Conrad Centennial Singapore Hotel.

UCSI Sarawak chief operating officer Liew Peng Yeow said such experience would boost students’ employability and raise the aspirations of their peers.

While some struggle to secure work placements at home, a group of varsity students are excelling overseas.

The university endeavours to give its students wholesome hospitality education through unique placements like those in Singapore and Japan.

“Exposure at such companies will equip our students with the business acumen of the global economy and they will learn to appreciate different business cultures and perspectives. This will serve them well in their future careers as they develop into global citizens who are cosmopolitan and capable,” she noted.

The achievements of UCSI’s students have added credence to the role that the university is playing towards reshaping domestic tourism and hospitality industry through education.

Despite being the fifth largest contributor to the Malaysian economy, only around 18% of workers in the industry possess the minimum qualification of a diploma or a degree.

To match the industry’s projected growth, the Government has highlighted the need to raise the statistics to 22% and as a result, the Malaysian Centre for Tourism and Hospitality Education (MyCETHE) was set up by UCSI MyCETHE — a coalition involving some of Malaysia’s foremost public and private higher education providers — is on track for a full national roll-out by 2020. Four clusters are currently operational in Sarawak, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Sabah.

As the first successful cluster of MyCETHE, it is somewhat fitting that UCSI Sarawak’s is putting its time in the spotlight.

It has attracted foreign students from developed countries like Germany, Denmark and Canada, among others, in recent years and the trend is set to continue through student and staff exchange programmes.

And with more student achievements on the cards, the university is showing that Malaysia’s appeal as a preferred education hub extends far beyond the Klang Valley.