UCSI University recently hosted the Global Taste of Korea Contest 2014 that saw the participation of 10 students and working professionals.

In line with Korean Cultural Week, the competition aimed to create greater awareness on Korean food, traditions, history and culture among Malaysians.

Necessitating the participants to cook japchae - a popular Korean dish made from stir fried noodles with vegetables - within one hour, the competition saw Munirah Mohd Yusuf, a finance executive from Johor Baru, bagging first place.

Notably, she has won the opportunity to represent Malaysia in the final round of the competition in South Korea - where the grand prize is USD10,000 - and compete against participants from other countries like Japan and the Republic of China.

She will also attend a one-week programme at a Korean traditional cuisine school.

"I was shocked when I was announced the champion! It was really unexpected," she enthuses.

Describing her dish, she says: "I prepared my dish using the traditional method of cooking japchae but its uniqueness is actually in its presentation. I decorated it based on cherry blossoms because I feel that it really represents Korea in spring."

Overall, the dishes - some of which used ingredients like chili peppers and tomyam - received glowing praise from the panel of judges comprising Madam Kim Soo Ji, spouse of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea’s ambassador; Mr Kim Yong Hyun, master chef at Daorae Korean BBQ Restaurant; Mr Park Chul Hyun, managing director of Korea Tourism Organisation (Kuala Lumpur); and Mr Loke Hoi Weng, lecturer at UCSI.

According to Mr Loke, “taste, presentation and cooking methodology” was crucial in a culinary competition.

To win, you must have proper working methodology and confidence, he says, and it is equally important to ensure your dish is not overwhelming (in taste).

The participants have shown much enthusiasm and creativity in their dishes, he adds, and I am proud of their efforts.

This sentiment is shared by the Embassy’s second secretary and consul Mr Chung Chi Won, who comments: “I’m pleased to see the participants genuinely interested in Korean culture - it’s very encouraging."

“I hope we have more opportunities to organise similar events so that more Malaysians will gain better understanding about our country.”

The event was supported by Le Quadri Hotel - a boutique hotel under the UCSI Group - which provided the participants with the necessary utensils, equipment and cooking stations.