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# HOME HALFWAY

## ACROSS THE WORLD

By Sachina Dominic ▶ [sachina@mmail.com.my](mailto:sachina@mmail.com.my)

TEN years since making the move to Malaysia, Mexican Roberto Calleja said it was a simple decision: "It's a love story".

It all started with his wife, Patricia Vazquez Marin, who while pursuing her Masters degree in Japan, decided to visit a few nearby countries. The moment she stepped into Malaysia in 2007, she fell in love with the country.

There was no turning back from there.

"She graduated and got a scholarship to continue her PhD in UKM. She told me she have to move to Malaysia, and asked if I wanted to come along," Calleja added that the decision was a no-brainer.

It is not often you come across a Mexican who speaks fluent Malay, albeit with a Spanish accent.

Being in the teaching line, even if he is no longer a foreign language professor, his job in Malaysia then, Calleja saw the need to learn the national language of the country of his residence.

Also taking up the role of special

correspondent for Mexico in Malaysia, the 43-year-old has an important duty.

"Whenever something is happening to the Mexican community here, or something that is related to Malaysia in terms of earthquakes or any other natural disasters, and even on how Malaysians celebrate Christmas or Chinese New Year, I'm responsible for sending that news to Mexico.

"My main job now is lecturing in one of the private universities in Malaysia. And I'm a writer for a Spanish magazine that I have with my friends in Mexico," said Calleja.

His favourite part about living in Malaysia is the weather, as he was not too fond of the four seasons in Mexico City, which can be extreme come winter.

"Both my wife and I, like you say it, *tak boleh tahan* (cannot stand) the cold."

However, it took him about six months to get accustomed to the weather here.

On the similarities between both

countries, Calleja finds that punctuality tops the list. He has realised after his fairly long stint here that Malaysian events, especially weddings and parties rarely start on time.

"Similar to the phrase '*sekejap lagi*', Mexicans always say '*ahorita*', meaning that they will be there or do it in a bit, but it usually gets put off to a much later time."

Calleja loves his Malaysian food, binging on *roti bom* and *nasi lemak* in his first few years, only to realise he needed to cut down on that when his weight steadily increased over time.

Although his wife is a big durian fan, Calleja simply cannot get himself to like it, declaring it a lost cause.

He is proud to say that he has made the most out of his stay, having travelled quite a bit around the country. As a history buff, he especially loves Malacca.

"Every time I have a visitor, I'll take them to Malacca. It always makes me feel like I'm going back to that era when I'm there. I love the museum there too, I think I can describe

the museum to you from memory."

The one thing that makes him sad about Malaysians is how we don't seem to appreciate the wonders of nature around us.

Calleja said he has visited the **Forest Research Institute Malaysia** multiple times just to take in the nature with his family, and not one of his Malaysian friends seemed to even know the place existed.

On raising his six-year-old daughter in Malaysia, he does not feel she will be deprived of Mexican values, as they speak Spanish at home.

"We can still watch Mexican movies and listen to Mexican music online.

"We attend our National Day organised by the embassy. We can ask my in-laws to send her some Mexican blouses too," he said.

Having recently gained his permanent resident status, Calleja is looking forward to explore more of Malaysia in time and make the best out of his life here with his family.



Calleja with his wife and daughter on the first day of school.



The lecturer now speaks fluent Malay.