One of the main issues immigrants face when moving to a new country is the struggle with the language barrier and culture shock.

My friend, Amir Hisham, is 21 years old and came to the US from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the capital of the tropical Southeast Asian nation. He flew to the United States nearly 4 years ago and after 22.5 hours, he arrived at San Francisco International Airport hoping to continue his studies at a prestigious university. At first, he went to community college, then after two years, he transferred to UC Berkeley.

One of the things Amir enjoys about California is the weather. In Malaysia, the weather is tropical and humid, so you sweat a lot. In California, you do not sweat very much, so taking a shower every time you return home is not necessary. Amir cares a lot about the environment, so conserving water is something he enjoys. Amir also likes the transportation systems in the Bay Area because compared to Kuala Lumpur, the BART and CalTrain are very efficient modes of transport.

For Amir, the first frustration he felt was with American culture. Americans are very individualistic while Malaysian culture is more familial and community-oriented. He doesn’t think that it is a bad aspect of American culture necessarily, rather it is something he has noticed and isn’t particularly fond of.

Immigrants often experience culture shock when coming to the US. Amir felt this, but it didn’t hit him as hard as it does for others. He was able to overcome this by spending more time here and getting used to how people interact.

When Amir moved to California, he also struggled with the language barrier and homesickness. He remembers taking a class at his community college and not being able to understand the American accent. As a result, he had to withdraw from the class because American English was too difficult to understand. In order to overcome this, he made friends, and together they practiced their English. They would work on grammar exercises and correct each other’s work. After a year, he retook the class, with the same professor, and got an A.

Another issue Amir faces is his homesickness. He has a large family with 6 siblings. He also has a lot of cousins and they would always hang out together. In addition, there is nearly no Malaysian food in California because the Malaysian population is significantly lower than most other Southeast Asian minority groups. He says that American food is dry while Malaysian food is flavorful. Amir still struggles with these issues but having friends at UC Berkeley and focusing on school helps with his adjustment. He also makes effort to seek out and try new foods because while there is little Malaysian
food, California does have a variety of other foods from around the world to try. Amir has overcome a lot since coming to America. He wishes the immigration process was easier, but ultimately, he recognizes that this has been a positive, life-changing experience. The next step in his life is seeing his family when he graduates.