

LIFE&TIMES **FAMILY**

# 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**



PICTURES BY KAMARULZAMAN ARIFFIN

**O**UR 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



*"You have to understand children. Don't ignore them and make an assumption about a child."*

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

## GET TO KNOW THE KIDZANIA RIGHTZKEEPERS!

KidZania Kuala Lumpur is home to five RightZKeepers who are "guardians" of five rights that make up the Right to Be.



**Urbano** RightZKeeper for the Right to Know, is 9 and sees the positive side of things. He loves science, inventions, experiments and action-packed adventures and games. He can be found skateboarding or riding his bike, encouraging kids to stay energetic and original.



**Beebop** Urbano's best friend, is the creative one. With a love of all genres of music, writing his own poetry and drawing comic books. Beebop guards the Right to Create.



**Chika** KidZania's 10-year-old fashionista guards the Right to Share. She willingly shares her passion for fashion, manga and the movies. She believes that music and dance are great tools of communication.



**Vita** Urbano's younger sister, guards the Right to Care. A nature-lover, Vita likes to take care of the environment, plants and animals. She hopes that one day the world will be free of pollution. She inspires children to be happy and thoughtful always.



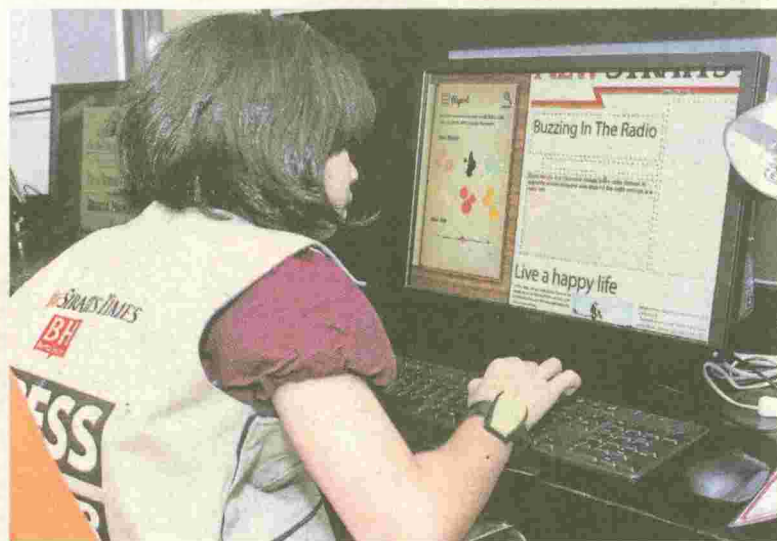
None of this matters if one doesn't play. So it is that in KidZania Kuala Lumpur, you'll find **Bache**, Vita and Urbano's pet dog. A fan of the movie, 101 Dalmatians, he guards the Right to Play.

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



Kids get to explore various vocations here.



Life as a newspaper journalist.

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 causes lung cancer.

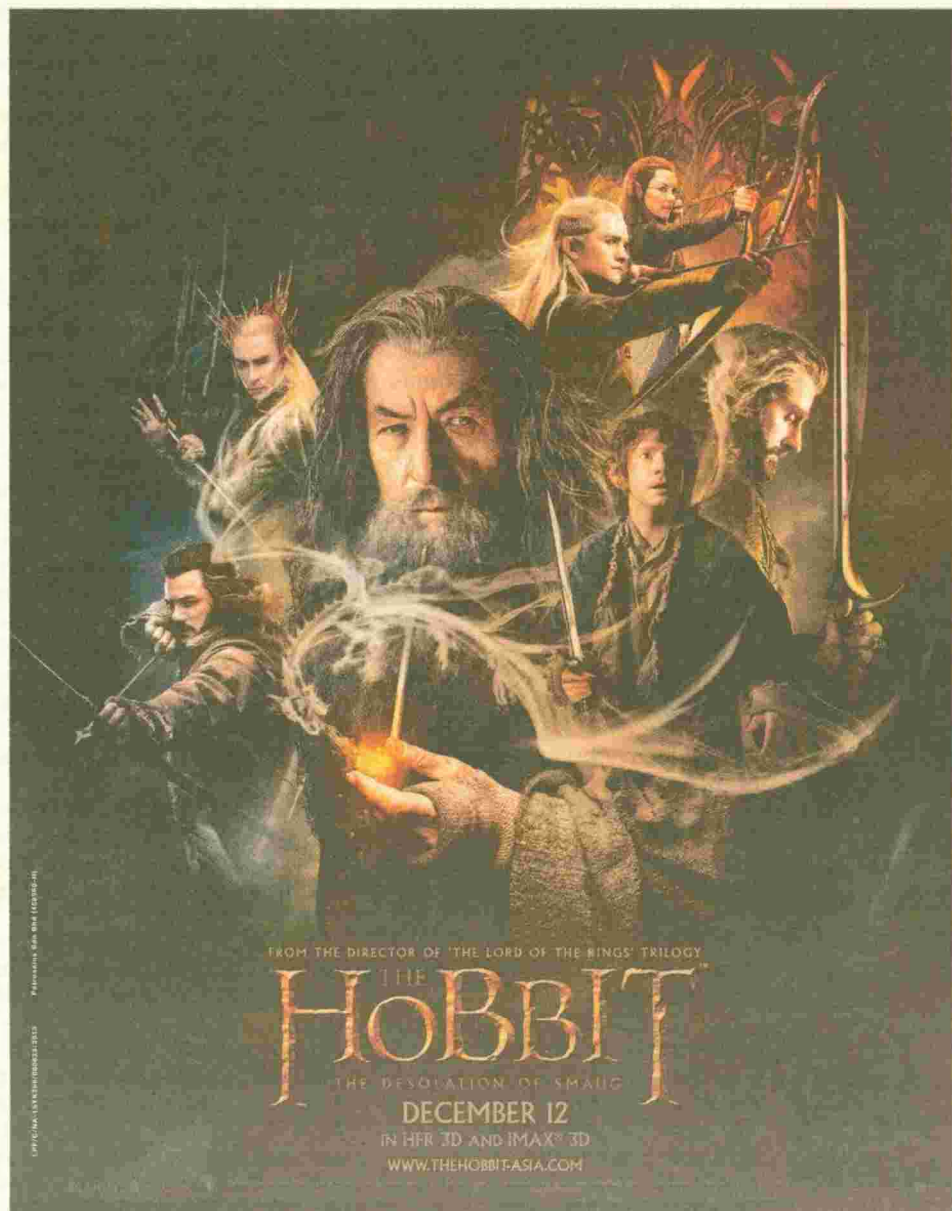
The tour ends with a question from one in our group: Does KidZania Kuala Lumpur have a scientist with a time travel machine that allows us adults to go back in time and start again?

## THE BEST EVER HOLIDAY PROJECT

WE have 150 KidZania tickets to give away! Give your children their very own holiday project. Starting tomorrow, you will find the KidZania RightZkeepers characters in Life & Times. Get your kids to collect them all and exchange them for tickets to KidZania.

Here's what you have to do:

- Over the next five days (Dec 9 to 13), look out for the KidZania RightZkeepers characters right here in Life & Times.
- Collect two of each character. Remember, that's two of each character.
- Check that you have the total, which should be 10.
- On Jan 6, from 10am to 4pm, come over to the Lobby at New Straits Times, 31 Jalan Riong, 59100 Kuala Lumpur.
- Redeem your cut-outs (originals only, no photocopies) for child tickets worth RM75.
- Use your tickets from Jan 7 to Feb 28 (excluding public holidays).



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