

Seven weeks far away

"This was the best school camp I'd ever been on"

Looking at people's profile pictures on Facebook I'd try to see if I could get an idea of the people I'd be living with in a foreign country on exchange.

Seven weeks living in Jakarta, Indonesia, including a four-week internship at a government radio station would give me credit for two subjects in my final semester of journalism.

Enticing? You bet, I was excited.

Nonetheless, I was also slightly apprehensive of living with people I had never met before – organised in our

ACICIS- Australia Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies exchange group on Facebook – and whose profile pictures gave me nothing for the imagination.

The New Year brought for me Jakarta – busy, bustling and sweaty heat. The instantaneous change in culture came as soon as I left the airport. As I sat in the standstill of *macet* (traffic) watching the sea of motorcycles pass me by, some with entire families of five crammed on, and some who occasionally spotted the *bule* (white person) in the backseat of the taxi, the elation of an undiscovered life for two months here settled itself around me.

Home was bunkering in triple rooms at the Hotel Century Atlet and my family was thirty-three intelligent, confident, loud



and occasionally conflicting personalities from Australia and New Zealand. The road for the first two weeks lead the group to daily four-hour Indonesian language crash course classes at *Universitas Atma Jaya*. The early morning starts were complemented by afternoon lectures conducted by an array of academics, businessmen

and past ACICIS students who succumbed to life in Indonesia and have returned to live and work. University in Jakarta is among some of the best times I've ever known "studying" to be. This was the best school camp I'd ever been on.

After passing our tests at university (no-one failed), we moved out of home

into a share-house of eight in the funky suburb of *Bendungan Hilir* (equivalent of the charismatic Fitzroy) and started working full-time. My identification card acknowledged me as Voice Of Indonesia's *guest reporter* at Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI).

This is where I was to learn the ins and outs of government radio, apparently 'the ABC of Indonesia'. My days at RRI were a roller coaster of highs and lows, involving much confusion in my purpose as an intern due to the communication barriers that were hit daily and the ambiguous directions I received for assignments.

It was with much frustration and testing of patience that I eventually came to understand the world of government

journalism in Indonesia. After many analytical moments with fellow journalists, I no longer resented the roundabout, non-confrontational journalistic practices that existed in my office; occasionally I appreciated them. If things here worked the same way they did back home, curiosity would not have brought me here.

My ritual archipelagic weekend escapes with my closest friends are among the highlights of the exchange, if I'm forced to choose between them. My travels to Lombok, the Gili Islands, *Krakatau* and Yogyakarta were paradise after challenging weeks.

They also hold some of the greatest moments of bonding and friendship with the other students.

Larisa Tait

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