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In 2008, Asia:NZ's media programme began collaborating with the Australian Consortium for 'In-Country' Indonesian Studies (ACICIS), to include New Zealand graduates on the Jakarta-based Journalism Professional Practicum (JPP).

In 2009, we sent five young New Zealand journalists to take part in the annual intake.

Here is what Rhiannon Horrell, Charles Anderson and Sarah Urlich had to share.

## **Rhiannon Horrell**

“Hello mister, hello mister, where you from mister? Where you going? You from America mister?”

This was my first taste of Jakarta, Indonesia – being a novelty to the locals. It is a strange feeling to have every person in the street stare at you. Perhaps on a par with this was the traffic. I panicked the first time we entered the crazy ring routes and toll roads that make up the vast city. Cars, trucks, vans and motorbikes were weaving amongst each other, none of them staying in their lanes, driving within centimetres of each other.

“Welcome to Jakarta” were the first words Phillip King, the Resident Director of the ACICIS programme, said to us as we sat jet-lagged in a hotel room. We were certainly in for an adventure. The first few days we got the chance to visit Kota and Batavia, the ‘old Jakarta’ that was originally settled by Dutch colonialists. Climbing aboard an old fishing boat along a precariously balanced plank was daunting and the old fisherman advised us the only luggage we would need for a voyage would be cigarettes and a good attitude.

It was exciting to be in Jakarta, a city that never sleeps, with over 30 other young journalists who shared my passion to work in a foreign environment. I was here on the Journalism Professional Practicum, organised by ACICIS - The Australian Consortium for In-Country Studies. My trip was funded by the Asia New Zealand Foundation and to them I am very grateful.

We spent two weeks at Atma Jaya University learning the Indonesian language with some wonderfully patient teachers. It was awesome to be able to start communicating with the locals. They thought it was great that a silly white ‘bule’ could say a few words in Indonesian. I stumbled my way through conversations with taxi drivers – “Pagi! Bahasa Indonesia saya tidak bagus. Nama saya Rhiannon! Apa kabar?”

Spending a month at the Jakarta Post was not what I expected. The culture of the workplace was so different from anything I had previously known in New Zealand – my supervisors wandered into the office mid-afternoon and worked through till the late deadlines. It was wonderfully autonomous and I received great feedback to my story ideas. The first day I was given an Italian restaurant to review, it was wonderfully ironic having to try all these foods for the first time and write about them as if I was a seasoned culinary expert.

My time in Jakarta was continually surprising and what I will miss most about the city is catching ojek (motorbikes) everywhere. Despite the courage it took me to stop and get on one, to bargain the price with the driver and then put on my helmet that didn't fasten at all, it

was exhilarating to weave through traffic and feel alive. I also saw plenty of ojek accidents during my trip so treat with caution.

I never thought I would be at an Indonesian school in a remote village with a translator discussing how they cannot afford books. The Headmaster told me she was proud to have a Westerner visit their school. I never thought I would be dining for free at some of Jakarta's top restaurants. I never thought I would witness such inequality that was so normalised to Jakartan people. I never thought I would be thrown in at the deep end to such a bustling and crazy city but it has equipped me with so much knowledge which I can use in my future career.

## **Charles Anderson**

Jakarta teems. It bulges at the edges but does not burst. However, its overflow can be seen everywhere, any which way and in every direction and is often hard to tell.

Of all the large metropolises I had been to (and Jakarta is large), I believe this one to be the most disorganised. There is no central plaza, no existent nucleus around which the city functions. And yet it does.

So my place within it, as a graduate journalist, was to be on an interesting learning curve. I had no real idea of how to do my job in New Zealand, let alone in a city three times the size of that little South Pacific nation. My time at the country's largest English language daily was an amusing prospect...before I left.

The idea of working overseas had occurred to me before I graduated but I wasn't sure what avenue that might take. So when the opportunity arose through the Asia New Zealand Foundation to participate in a lovely double-barrelled acronym called the ACICIS-JPP, I jumped. It stands for the Australian Consortium for 'In-Country' Indonesian Studies – Journalism Professional Practicum. Breathe. Yes, it was a mouthful but it made the Jakartan experience a lot easier to digest.

The programme was essentially organised for Australians but the New Zealanders on the trip were made more than welcome. It was a great way to test the water and have support there if things went awry. We had 40 hours of language classes, field trips and an introduction through various lecturers into the political, economic and media environment in which we now found ourselves. All this before all trekking off to our respective four-week placements in various media organisations dotted around the city.

If anything came out of the trip (and a lot did) it was the realisation that to become accustomed and ply your trade in a very foreign environment is not actually that intimidating or difficult. It requires some help, which I received financially (thanks to the Asia New Zealand Foundation) but also in mentorship, from the vast amount of knowledge available at the paper I was working at.

The Jakarta Globe is one of the newest large-scale papers to have started up throughout the world. The presses started rolling last November after many months of many people working all hours out of a hotel room across the road.

It certainly was an interesting time to be an 'intern' and I use that word in its full American glory. Most of the editors at the Globe were from the US and from a vast range of

backgrounds. There was a surprising amount of New Zealanders working there as well.

Two Australian students and I were also working there, under the mentorship of the deputy editor, who not only was a great guy but hugely knowledgeable in his trade. As a foreign correspondent for Newsweek for 15 years you get that. He said something about a week in to the month-long internship: “You can be serious when you are in your thirties; while you are in your twenties go and have an adventure.” He was referring to a journalistic career, but because a) I have never been particularly serious and b) last time I checked, I was still in my twenties, the comment sat with me. It can be quite easy to change your career plans.

As far as actual work, I helped out on a large editorial project about the Old Dutch colonial town which was an insight into some of the failings of the government at all its levels and in all its forms. Bureaucracy is one of Jakarta and indeed Indonesia’s killers. But it has plenty of those and too many to talk about.

I mainly wrote business features about things I had no real idea about to start with - automotive industry, Islamic banking. But they were my ideas and they liked them.

Zippering around on scooters and interviewing some pretty big names in the Jakartan financial industry was a little surreal but I never encountered any problems.

The time of course is always over too soon. I felt I only really hit my stride half way in and could have easily spent another month/year/decade there. Many others on the program did stay on.

You won't get many favours in Jakarta. Zebra crossings, though honourable in concept, are meaningless. Pedestrians are not a valued sector of society here.

Nine hundred extra motorcycles and 260 new cars are added to the roads every day, so the only thing that will stop a rampaging motorist overtaking on the wrong side of the road is a firm palm extended outwards, an awkwardly brisk pace and the grace of Allah.

Luckily, Jakarta has that grace in swathes. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, a fact you will be reminded of no matter where you sleep and how well you do it. At 4.45am, on the brink of daybreak, the thousands of mosques around the area erupt into a cacophony of calls to prayer. As I look outside to the darkness that still lingers and rub my eyes, I'm sure they are still a little early.

One block over, this scene is replaced with a juxtaposing sterility – a shopping mall, 10 storeys high. Air-conditioned to uncomfortable extremes, smells of Christian Dior perfume, women dressed in Versace jackets, university students with over-styled hair playing on their newest purchase, a spanking Apple iPhone.

From here I went to spend a week in East Timor, a place I had always wanted to visit since reading about it when I was 14. To actually be there, standing in those places, was quite incredible. Also incredible were the opportunities I had: hanging out with the New Zealand defence force, going on patrols in big green trucks with troops with bigish green guns. It is safe to say also very surreal.

Working within these “structures” was a fantastic way to realise the opportunities available for young journalists, if you don't want to be that serious.

## **Sarah Urlich**

Sipping on strong Indonesian cocktails and listening to a live band. That's how I saw in the New Year. Admittedly I was asleep when the clock struck midnight, after 24 hours of travelling from Auckland to Jakarta.

Not knowing what to expect on my arrival I stepped off the plane and into chaos. From the money exchange people (who ripped me off) to the taxi drivers who tried to rip me off – I was being called at left, right and centre by Indonesians trying to take advantage of first-time bule (foreigner).

The roads were a whole other level of chaos; many without lanes and only a handful of traffic lights within an hour of speeding to the hotel.

After some cocktails and music some friends and I decided to venture out onto the streets. Ten steps later, with the smell of the drains in the hot sweaty night and locals squatting on the footpath calling out all sorts to these fresh-faced bule, I was suddenly ready for bed.

And this was the start of my adventure on the ACICIS programme.

I entered into the programme with no idea what to expect of the place. I was just ready for adventure, fun and to learn as much as I could about everything I could. And I wouldn't have been able to do it if it wasn't for the scholarship I received from the Asia New Zealand Foundation.

Five laid-back Kiwis and 30 loud, boisterous Aussies made the trip to Jakarta to participate on the ACICIS programme. We stayed the first two weeks in a hotel; getting used to the city, bonding as a group and studying at Atma Jaya University. The days were quite intense as we tried to cram as much of the language and history we could before we were left to venture out by ourselves in the big city.

The language classes were a great help and the teachers were full of energy and motivation, we made some contacts in the history classes, and were on our way.

The field trips were the best part of the University learning. We visited Jakarta's rubbish dump which is home to a village of people. I heard the children worked on the tip, but I was shocked to find they actually live on and in the rubbish; with bags of garbage surrounding them they find bits of rubbish to enhance their shacks they live in.

Even walking on the streets of Jakarta is difficult at times, with poor children the size of sticks begging for money, blind men just sitting on the bus way; the only way they can make a living is with their hand out in front of them, and monkeys dancing on the footpath with their hands tied behind their back. This was all so sad, but a part of Indonesia we were there to see.

Next stop was the four-week internship. I worked at Globe Asia and, again, had no idea what to expect. I was overwhelmed by the office when I saw it was male-dominated with writers who had an enormous knowledge on all things business. I did not. Coming from such a small place as New Zealand, I was nervous when I learnt this business magazine was published in Jakarta, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia and USA, to name a few.

Walking in not so positive, I walked out so happy with what I learnt and what I achieved. I sat in on an editorial meeting and pitched my own ideas. One thing that struck me as odd was the pace at which the Indonesian people work at. They're such laid-back people, who never show a sign of stress – something quite odd for any journalist.

I had a little trouble getting interviews for the first week as my lack of the Indonesian

language was often met with hang-ups, being put on hold for half an hour or being passed around a group of people till I was finally put on to another English speaker.

Eventually I got three features published and was incredibly happy with my journalistic experience.

But an even greater experience was getting to know the Indonesian people and their culture. Walking out on the street of Benhill where I boarded in a kos, I was constantly met by curious faces wondering who I was and what I was doing. Every now and then someone would finally gain the courage to blurt out any English they knew. So after a few weeks it was “Hello mister, you are beautiful,” and “hello misses I love you” all the way to work and home again.

Towards the end of my trip I hopped on the back of an ojek, after bargaining the price, and I was addicted. Weaving through the crazy city on the back of this motorbike was amazing. I even rode in the rain trying to keep my umbrella from flying inside out.

The end of my trip came around fast and I was sad to leave. I made some amazing friends and had a fantastic experience. It has opened up a lot of opportunities as a journalist as South East Asia is a booming place.

Jakarta, although it has many sad aspects to it, was such awesome. The smell of the streets was overcome by the lovely people and delicious warung food, and the chaotic traffic was best enjoyed on the back of an ojek. Needless to say I am desperate to return.