

<http://www.asianz.org.nz/our-work/media/field-notes/livingstone-acicis09>

*Andrew Livingstone is a University of Canterbury journalism graduate and was one of five New Zealanders who attended the ACICIS programme in Indonesia in early 2009 with support from the Asia:NZ Foundation.*

As a journalist, there are two important things I always try to remember: take every opportunity that comes your way, and be aware of others' agendas. So when I was presented with the opportunity to travel to Indonesia and work for a major media organisation, I thought it would be a great experience, but I was also wary of why I was being offered the opportunity: to return to New Zealand with an increased interest in reporting on Asia.

And from the time I arrived in humid Jakarta on a Sunday night in January – into the masses of humanity offering to take my bags or give me a taxi ride, sleep-deprived and with no idea what awaited me – until the time I again entered that same airport on a Friday afternoon less than two months later (but how short a time it seemed), everything passed in a rush.

Indonesia is like life with the volume turned up. Java is the world's most populous island, and it's smaller than New Zealand's South Island. Leaving sleepy Christchurch for Jakarta, with its 12 million people, floods, smog, noise and incredible traffic, is like leaving a movie theatre to find yourself back in the real world. All I really needed that first night was a good sleep to get over the jet-lag and farewell the night before, but what I didn't realise was that I was in for the most intense six weeks possible.

For the six weeks of the ACICIS programme I hardly slept: waking early for language classes, staying up late to explore restaurants in different suburbs, working double shifts at Metro TV, and taking every opportunity to see and do something new that came my way. I experienced a lot of stress, overtiredness and there were times that I wondered if it was all worth it, but those were only brief moments. In reflection, it was the perfect experience, and a great preparation for a career in journalism.

The structure of the ACICIS programme meant the first two weeks consisted of classes in Bahasa Indonesia and lectures from prominent business, political and educational leaders in the country. This was a good opportunity to learn about the country we would soon be reporting on, and a great chance to make friends with the 32 other young Australasian journalists as well as some local students.

The end of classes meant moving to a *kos* (boarding house) out near my workplace, Metro TV. It was cheaper than staying on in a hotel, but not the nicest place, and more than an hour's taxi ride away from my friends. However, I didn't care about my accommodation, I spent almost every waking hour at the station, and those few nights and weekends I wasn't there, I was sightseeing.

Metro TV is an amazing complex. Its seven-foot tall Chinese-style vases, Greek columns and Rodin-replica statues dotting the corridors almost make you forget you're in the media – until you enter the bustling newsroom. This is where the magic happens, and it didn't take long for me to get involved.

My second night at work was the Obama inauguration, which Metro TV covered live through

the night. I was busy in the control room running notices to the anchors, liaising with the producers, and basically doing whatever I could when the executive producer told me the English language news show I was working on was two staff short (that's two out of five) and I would have to produce half the show. I worked 10 hours without a break until the show went to air live, when I could sit back and watch it come together in the studio before me. The sense of achievement and teamwork is immense. It's amazing to see your world news hitting the screens, and to hear your voice over for the sports stories you wrote, beaming live to a potential audience of 230 million for the first time. No time to rest though, as soon as it was over, work on the next show began.

So passed the next four weeks: researching and writing questions for live interviews, producing daily world and sports news packages, accompanying reporters to street stalls, embassies and offices to interview and film stories, and most importantly, the chance to pitch news feature ideas, organise their filming, write them, edit and finally see pieces of work that were completely my own, broadcast to an audience that included all of Indonesia, as well as Singapore, Hong Kong and potentially Tokyo.

Between working 12-15-hour days I was fortunate enough to learn from the wealth of experience contained in Metro TV's international division and see some beautiful parts of an amazingly diverse country. I hope I was able to reflect some of my experiences of the Indonesian nation and its people in my work there.

The six weeks were over in a haze of new faces, new foods, bright lights and slow traffic. Now I'm back in that movie theatre world and life's volume has returned to New Zealand levels. I feel anxious and impatient for my next travels to a place where the people are so friendly, the air filled with different sounds and smells, and where I do not know what awaits me around every corner.

Six weeks after setting foot in Asia for the first time, I remembered my first sceptical thoughts of going to Indonesia – that country so large and so close, yet so unknown to New Zealanders and myself – and realised I was no longer cynical of the motives for being sent there. I was now a definite convert. Yes, I believe countries like Indonesia are under-reported and misunderstood in the media here, yes I think an exchange programme for young journalists like myself can help redress the balance, and most importantly, yes I absolutely do want a career that involves reporting on issues in Southeast Asia. Indonesia has not seen the last of me.