

3rd Culture and Arts Competition
4th Progetto Vivas Project
8th Festival Internazionale dei Giovani

A. INTRODUCTION

How it started ??

In October 2006, Ms Sanoyah Yusof contacted me, Mr Abdul Samad Tahir, Secretary General CIOFF Malaysia seeking the possibility of taking part in CIOFF Festivals in Europe especially France.

Ms Sanoyah is a teacher at Sekolah Kebangsaan (National School) Teluk Pulai, Klang Selangor, Malaysia. She had in August 2006, took the Tunas Budaya Selangor Children Dance Group to take part in the Ilan International Children Folk Arts and Traditional Games Festival in Taiwan.

What is CIOFF ??

CIOFF is a French acronym for Conseil International Des Organizations De Festivals De Folklore Et D'Arts Traditionnels or in English : The International Council of Folklore Festivals And Folk Arts Organizations. For more information about CIOFF refer to www.cioff.org

Since 1970, CIOFF has worked for the safeguarding and dissemination of traditional culture. Through its activities, CIOFF aims for the following main objectives:

- Promote the intangible heritage, through forms of expression such as dance, music, games, rituals, customs and other arts.
- Serve the objectives of UNESCO
- Support the activities of its members and those non-governmental organizations working in the areas of folklore and cultural heritage
- Serve the cause of peace and non-violence through the implementation of the above objectives

CIOFF has about 71 National Sections, 3 Associate and 13 Corresponding Members and is represented in 90 countries on all continents. Its activities are:

- Coordination of over 300 International Festival for folk art
- International exchanges between folklore groups, reaching some 50,000 amateur artists
- Participation in UNESCO programs

- Transmission of cultural heritage to children and youth
- Conferences, symposia and exhibitions
- Publications: The CIOFF Festival calendar of events, CIOFF Newsletter and Reports
- Cooperation with various national and international organizations and non-governmental organizations
- Involvement over 60,000 volunteers in CIOFF events
- CIOFF World Folkriada every 4 years.

What is CIOFF Malaysia ??

CIOFF National Section of Malaysia was formed in 1985/86 under the then Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. The man at the helm then is Mr A Aziz Deraman. In 1987, CIOFF issued a Charter requiring all CIOFF National Section to set up and register their respective organization as a non profit and non governmental organization in line with it CIOFF's status as NGO when it was registered in Confelens, France in 1970.

In 1991, Mr A Aziz Deraman formed a pro-tem committee to register CIOFF Malaysia as a non-governmental organization through the Federal Territory (State) Registrar of Society. It was on 25 August 1992, with registration no. 1491/92 (Federal Territory) when CIOFF Malaysia was officially registered. Copies of CIOFF Malaysia's rules and regulations were sent to CIOFF Headquarters for filing and reference.

The objectives and activities of CIOFF Malaysia are similar if not exactly the same with emphasis of safeguarding and dissemination of Malaysia's traditional culture, arts and heritage.

What is Tunas Budaya ??

Tunas Budaya Program is a program developed by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage Malaysia. Under this program each State Culture, Arts and Heritage Department is to select some primary and secondary schools to form their respective culture and arts club. The department initially sent out their music and dance instructors to conduct lessons for the club members. Subsequently, the Ministry conducted workshops on traditional music, dance and games. The Ministry trained and certified the teachers as instructor. Malaysia is made up of a federation of 14 states. Thus all the 14 states have Tunas Budaya Program. This program is supported by the Ministry of Education.

The Role of Ministry of Education.

Every state in Malaysia has a unit that handles the schools co-curriculum program. There are co-curriculum activities that are carried during schooling hours and those carried out outside the schooling hours. The co-curriculum activities include sport, club, society, uniform unit etc.

The highlight of activities related to the culture club is the organization of inter-state annual dance competition for both primary and secondary schools. The representatives from each of the 14 states are selected from the winners of the inter-school state level competitions. At the school and state levels, the culture clubs are exposed to take part in various school, district and state level events endorsed by the respective state education authorities. The events are Prize Giving Day, Canteen Day, International Children Day, National Day Celebration, Festive Celebrations and many more. Some club took part in competitions organized by the Education Department, Shopping Complexes and corporate companies. Taking part in regular practice sessions, demonstration and competition is a good recipe for the children to advance into better performer on and off stage. It is good personal developments for the children and provide good platform to advance the studies and carried in arts, culture, heritage, tourism, education related career.

In Malaysia, there many national and private institute of higher learning that offers music, dance, theater, filming, script writing and other arts related subjects. However, the only government institutions that focus more of performing art subjects none other than ASWARA (Academy of National Culture, Arts and Heritage).

Inter-School Dance Competition

The primary and secondary schools that are selected under the Tunas Budaya Program took part in many activities including state level competition organized by the Education Ministry. The state level inter-school competition is in progress. In the primary school category each participating school is to present three showcases namely the traditional dances, ethnic dances and finally the creative dances. For the Selangor State the top five primary schools Yuk Hwa National Type Primary School of Kajang, Teluk Pulai National School of Klang and Puncak Alam National Primary School of Kuala Selangor. The merits award went to Puchong Perdana National Primary School of Puchong. The winner is to represent Selangor State at the national level competition which is to be held in every November i.e. during school holidays.

The secondary level was held in July every year. This year the winner is Maktab Sabah. Second placing is Seri Rahmat National Secondary School of Johor State, Third placing is National Technical Secondary School of Pasir Mas, Kelantan State. Tun Abang Haji Openg National Secondary School (the winner of 2006 competition) was awarded the Special Merits Award.

The Tunas Budaya Selangor Group is a combination of Teluk Pulai National Primary School, Puchong Perdana National Primary School, Sungai Kertas National Primary School and Sungai Kertas National Secondary School. The Sungai Kertas National Primary School is the winner of state level "Silat" and Kompang Ensemble" competition.

Silat is the traditional arts of self-defense originated and nurtured from Malay Archipelago. It is widely taught in the Archipelago countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, southern districts of Thailand and The Philippines.

Kompang is a one face drum made from hardwood and animal skin such as goat, cattle and buffalo. It is used as music accompaniment to welcome honored guest, wedding processions and silat and dance exposition.

Tunas Budaya Selangor in its quest to promote Malaysia culture, arts and heritage includes segments such as singing, music, dancing, painting, exhibition, craft making & sales, traditional cooking and wedding animations. With this varied segments, friends from other participating countries are able to know Malaysia better.

B. PERIODICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Pre Event and How the project progress ??

October 2006

I contacted the Organizer of Recontres Internationales Folkriques Infantites of Cedex, France (R.I.F.E) of the group's interest to perform in France and other neighboring countries. The contact address is available in CIOFF Festival calendar. The respond received is that the group has to send its application before the end of November 2006. This feedback was relayed to Ms Sanoyah Yusof. Unfortunately, she could send the application materials because there is no approval from the Education Director General office yet. According to procedures the Director General of Education Department approval must be obtained and must be supported by the State Education Department.

January 2007

A meeting was held at the Selangor Headmaster Council Office in Klang. Those present were Ms Sanoyah Yusof , Mr Mahindran Rajagopal, Haji Azman representing the headmaster's council and Mr Basirin Yamin representing Selangor State Education, Co-curriculum Section and I. At the meeting, CIOFF festival conditions were elaborated. Subsequently, the Selangor State Education Office has no objection if any school wishes to take part at international events. Request for approval can be sent direct to the Director General Department or from the school headmaster concerned. CIOFF Malaysia has the option to write the Director General and naming the group/school selected or let the state education department select the school. Another option is CIOFF Malaysia can write to the headmaster concerned by offering their school to represent Malaysia and the headmaster has to seek upward approvals from the Director General Department through the State Education Department.

January 2007

I contacted CIOFF Italy and R.I.F.E. (Rencontres Internationales Folkloriques Infantines) in Cedec, France regarding the application to take part in their festival. Unfortunately, the response from R.I.F.E is negative because our application did not meet the application closing date. The feedback was conveyed to Ms Sanoyah Yusof. Apparently CIOFF Italy/R.I.F.E. referred our application to Mr Carlo Devoti, Organizer of Festival Internazionale dei Giovani which, later constant communication is established.

3 February 2007

At 1030 hours, a meeting was held at Academy of National Culture, Arts and Heritage Malaysia (ASWARA) between Ms Sanoyah Yusof, Ms Siti Dewi Marsitah Ismail (Assistant Director, Co-curriculum) and I. Profile of Tunas Budaya, selected photos and CD were presented to CIOFF Malaysia. Within the same day, CIOFF Malaysia wrote to the Selangor State Director of Education offering the Selangor State Tunas Budaya Group to take part in the above event. The selected period is from 17 to 31 August 2007.

7 February 2007.

I sent all the necessary application letter and materials to Mr Carlo Devoti. Later, an official invitation was received through e-mail attachment and was redirected to Ms Siti Dewi Marsitah. The original copy was received a few weeks later.

With such invitation in hand, serious work plan was drawn involving all the coordinating teachers and Selangor State education officials. Names of participants are listed and budgeting plan was drawn. Mr Mahindran Rajagopal, a teacher at Puchong Perdana National Primary School was elected Project Secretary.

7 March 2007

CIOFF Malaysia wrote to Malaysia Airlines seeking special direct deal fares for 30 children and adults. Subsequently, Mr Mahidran Rajagopal communicated direct with Malaysia Airlines for the required seats and fares. An advance of RM25,000.00 is required by Malaysia Airlines as deposit.

The State Education Department sent official application for financial grant from the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage Malaysia (KeKKWa) was sent to the Ministry concerned. Letters for donation and sponsorship were also sent out to suppliers, companies and individuals by the project members. They are to collect as many funds as possible to cover all the project cost.

Each participating school conducted their own training session and the centralized training from was carried out the multi-purpose hall in Section 8, Shah Alam, Selangor.

June 2007

The request for fund from KeKKWa was turned down and the project team has to work harder to get the project going. Such rejection do frustrate the teachers so much so the children and their parents as they had to pay more for the air tickets.

The feedback received from Malaysia Airlines was that the seats on 16 August were fully booked and the option to travel on 11 August 2007. Mr Mahindran Rajagopal communicated with Mr Carlo Devoti seeking the latter approval to host the group from 12 August till 31 August 2007. The response through e-mail was positive.

13 July 2007

A dinner function was held at Bluewaves Hotel, Shah Alam, Selangor. It was a preview cum sales of table function meant to raise more funds for the project. The guest of honor is the Assistant Director of Selangor State Education Department. The net amount collected was RM10,000.00 (Euro 2220.00)

23 July 2007

Mr Carlo Devoti sent an official invitation to CIOFF Malaysia and Ms Siti Dewi confirming the hosting dates from 11 to 31 August 2007, together with a list of participants. All participants must carry a health certificate along to Italy.

The Selangor State Executive Council for Education was approached for financial funding, who in turn wrote the Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage Malaysia to assist.

27 July 2007

A meeting was held to go through and be prepared to complete the "List of Task" required by the Organizer. The meeting was attended by Ms Siti Dewi Marsitah, Mr Mahindran Rajagopal, Mr Nurool Hudda Husain and I. Ms Siti Dewi Marsitah started the meeting to say the Minister of KeKKWa has approved RM30,000.00 to support the project. It was agreed that the amount is equally divided amongst 30 participants and each participants is to top up the cost of air tickets. The adult fare is about RM3800.00 and children under 12 years is RM2967.00

28 July 2007

I sent a list of updates and feedbacks to Mr Carlo Devoti was the reply was received on 3 August 2007.

29 July 2007

I wrote to Malaysia Airlines for 300 kilos of excess baggage waiver and to KeKKWa for some literature about Malaysia cultural music, dances and games. An official reply from Malaysia Airlines only approved 150 kilos for both outgoing and inbound flights.

30 July 2007

I went shopping to buy all the necessary items for wedding animation and craft making activities. The cost is around RM500.00. The next day, he went for shopping survey for food ingredients. The other teachers also do their part in preparing for the list of tasks required by the Organizer.

01 August 2007

A meeting was held at Malaysia Airlines ticket office to finalize the purchase of air tickets. The meeting was attended by Ms Siti Dewi Marsitah, Sanoyah Yusoh, Mr Mahindran Rajagopal, Mr Nurool Hudda Husain, Mr Mohd Mazri Mamat (a teacher representing Sungai Kertas National Secondary School) and I. The big delegation is necessary as security for the large amount of cash money i.e. RM75,000.00 (Euro16,000.00) At the end of the day, only 29 tickets were purchased. A few children opted out because their parents could not support the cost of air tickets.

The team by now has included Mr Ismail Sulaiman and his spouse. He is the Assistant State Director of Selangor State Education Department. Next year he retires from service. His role now is as Chef De Mission.

04 August 2007

I went shopping for all the necessary ingredients need to prepare three Malaysian dishes in Italy. The budget is RM200.00 but only about RM80.00 was spent. It was decided all the fresh raw ingredients such as seafood, vegetables, beans and rice should be provided for by the Organizer's kitchen because the importation of such items are not allowed by the CIQ authorities at Rome Airport. The other team

members are requested to by a few more ingredients (herbal plants) such as lemon grass, pandanus, and curry leaves are certainly or may be not available in Italy.

05 August 2007

A list of menu and food ingredients was sent to Mr Carlo Devoti. Ingredients and items to be provided by the Organizer were also spelt out clearly. Further communication with Mr Carlo Devoti resulting with an issue of another official invitation that include Mr Ismail and his wife. The contact number of the bus driver, Ms Serafini was also given.

11 August 2007

By 2130 hours all team members are at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). I arranged for the group's check in. The 150 kilos excess baggage waive became handy because the excess baggage is just enough. At present rate excess baggage charges to Europe can cost up to RM180.00 per kilogram. We had with us 54 checked baggage with substantial weight of food. I became nervous when the check in staff told me that only 9 names appeared on the list. Quickly I asked Mr Mahindran to go to the ticket office at the airport to ensure the return flight on 2 September 2007 will have all our names. Apparently, Malaysia Airlines (MAS) had implemented a new reservation, ticketing, accounting, check in system and this is one of the teething problems. Luckily, the flight was not full and the flight commence at 2335 hours. The flight is about 11 hours. MAS cabin crew was requested to supply the surplus drink and food for the children who will endure a 10 hours journey to Ferreire.

Program Proper

Day 1, 12 August 2007, Sunday

Our flight arrives at about 0600 hours. Whilst embarking form the plane, it is already daylight. The official invitation proved handy when dealing with questions and the Immigration counter. Then, we had to hire baggage trolley at Euro 1.00 each. In Malaysia, usage of trolley is free of charge. All our 54 pieces of baggage arrives safely. The clearance at the Custom was smooth because they did not check anything despite many of the costumes, food, musical and craft items are packed in boxes.

At the exit, Sara spotted me. She also had a placard in hand. She was always smiling when talking and leading us to her bus. The bus is rather small as it did not have enough compartments for all our baggage. Some bags had to be put in the passenger cabin. We leave Rome Airport around 0715 hours. Sara speaks some English and it is nice to be able to talk to her during the journey. She is a very pleasant lady.

Around 1230 hours, we reached Pisa. Sara had some problems location the bus parking/shuttle station. We finally were able to visit the Pisa complex. Wow... there are some many peoples visiting this historical site. The children may not know about the leaning Tower of Pisa but the adults and teachers may know about it from the history book. We bought some souvenirs from Pisa for ourselves, relatives and friends back home. The teachers had to buy more souvenirs on behalf of the school children. No little shots of photographs were taken to tell the world that we are in Pisa. Our journey continues to Ferriere at 1430 hours. During the journey, my attention was focused on our Chef De Mission, Mr Ismail Sulaiman, as to what type of accommodation suitable to him. We arrived there at about 1900 hours but the sky is still bright.

Mr Carlo Devoti met us on arrival. The volunteers were very helpful to carry our bags. Mr Carlo conducted the housekeeping and program briefing and follow-up with dinner. It was a soup with pasta followed by some other food. Though the menu is not to our taste but we had to finish them. Then, we were allocated rooms at the 1st Floor of Casa Montagna Valnure. We are pleased that one room can be allocated to Mr Ismail Sulaiman and his wife. The bed had sufficient pillow cover and bed sheet. We thanked the Organizer for providing two bath towels for them.

Day 2, 13 August 2007, Monday

I woke up at 0500 hours. I had my prayer and later took a shower. Then I took a walk up the upper side of Casa Montagna. It is pleasant to see the row of houses and its structure. Seeing the local fruit trees of apple, apricot, pear and grapes really make the feels of Europe.

At 0900 hours all the participants assemble to take part in the sport and exercise programs organized by Mr Carlo and his team. It is nice to note that our member Sulaiman aged 14 was chosen as winner in his age category. It is interesting to that even the kids were able to win one segment of the tug-a-war game after I shown them the technique of tug-a-war. By noon the games was over.

At 2130 hours, it is show time. Casa Montagna Valnure was equipped with indoor multi-purpose room, covered tents and open stage. That night we had the participants from other countries and local about 150 of them as audience. We presented the "Welcome, Zapin and Joget" dance. The other groups from Russia, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland also presented their talents.

Day 3, 14 August 2007, Tuesday

After breakfast, the kids carried out the tasks given to them. Some sweep their rooms, some collect litters and some send their clothing for laundry. The kids were told not to change their dress/wear regularly every day to avoid large amount of dress/wear being laundered everyday.

At 1000 hours, it is swimming session. It is mandatory for the kids and adults to wear designated swim wear. The kids had to pay one Euro for the swimming cap. They enjoyed the stint at the pool. Ms Siti Dewi Marsitah and I later were interviewed by Marco and his editorial member, more about Malaysia, our feeling and experience in Italy. But not least we were asked about our opinion on Mr Carlo. We were also asked about the cartoon series “ Sandokan “ a heroic epic about a warrior lived around the Sulu Seas. This series is very popular in Italy but it was not shown in our local television. They asked whether the stories is true or not ??? My answer is that I do not know unless I see the series. The questions of my Islam in Turkey differs to Islamic practices in Malaysia are also raised. My answer is very simple that is in Turkey the Islam practices are not allowed in the Government. They are to be separated. In Malaysia the Government wanted the Islamic values are inculcated in our daily live may it at home or at work place.

At 2130 hours, it is show time a Piacenza. The venue is located at a public square located in front of the Italian National Bank Centre. The bus trip from Ferriere took us about 1 hour 30 minutes. A few of the kids and adult vomited whilst in the bus and immediately arriving at the venue. Malaysia was allocated 15 minutes program. It was later split into two segments of two dances each. The show ended by 2315 hours and we reached our hostel the next early morning. We really enjoyed the occasion but rather disappointed with the audience turn out. Next year we will look for festivals with very large number of audiences because promoting our traditional dances to large audience is one of our main objectives.

Today our Chef De Mission, Mr Ismail Sulaiman and his wife went to tour Milan. They traveled using bus and train. It cost about Euro 20.00 for a return journey.

Day 4, 15 August 2007, Wednesday

Breakfast consist of lemon tea, hot chocolate, biscuit, cheese, jams, honey and yogurt. Breakfast time starts around 0700 hours. Each day one country is assigned to prepare the table and plates for breakfast, lunch and dinner. This is part of the communal obligations required from every participating country.

We Malaysian are not used to such combinations but were able to consume them. We missed “nasi lemak, noodle, roti canai” very much.

At 1000 hours, I gathered all the children to teach them some traditional and folk games of Malaysia. The games are those selected by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage Malaysia. The games are “Rebut Negeri” a tug-a-war version, “Lompat Tali Untai Getah “ a skipping version and “Galah Panjang” . The session ends at midday.

At 1200 hours, we set up two tables to display all the literatures, craft and souvenir items. This is part of our obligation when agreeing to take part in this festival. This activity is aim to make children from other nations learn and understand more about Malaysia.

At 1800 hours, it is traditional games display. We managed to get the children from Poland to take part because they are about the same size and age with the Malaysia kids. We hope they are delighted to learn about our traditional games.

At 2100 hours, we had meetings amongst the adults and the children. The meeting was to recap the objectives of participation and assessment of our group's behavior and attitudes. The outcomse of the meeting are:

- Suleiman and Wuhaida were appointed as leader to lead the male and female kids respectively.
- Assignments were given to the kids to ensure that they communicate and engage in talking/speaking with children from other countries and locals.
- Community works were drawn to guide the kids to be self reliance and independent, not as when they are at home where their mother and housemaid spoon fed them everyday and hours.
- Assessments were carried out and those male and female kids were awarded for the exemplary display of dancing skill and discipline. This is to motivate the other to excel.
- The games introduced today are elements of knowledge and fulfilling the free time into doing useful things. In Malaysia the games are meant to make the kids pre-occupied with the games and have fun thus avoiding them from homesick, hooliganism, bullying menace, drugs and other social evils
- Suleiman and Wuhaida are to ensure that the juniors called them "Abang" means Big Brother and Kakak "Big Sister" and not by their names just like calling other peoples by names. This is Malay culture and values of respecting the elders. The leaders are to ensure the other kids to clean the bathroom, roll up their bed, blanket, pillows, sorting their clothes for laundry, sending clothes for laundry and drying up the clothes. Shoes and slippers must be arranged neatly outside the dormitory. The laundered clothes must be neatly folded and stuffed in the allocated cupboard. They are to take the breakfast, lunch and dinner as one group and not trickle one by one at different timings. Those who took the food first must sit at the first seat allocated for Malaysia and not seat as and where they like. All these are about a discipline communal living. The meeting is the moment of truth to test whether the learning objectives of the project are achieved or not. The children's parents and education officials at home wanted a list of what their kids have achieved. In this regards, the teachers are facilitators who will list out the results.

One of the teachers had asked me of my opinion about the group. I responded that I had never been with the group before and need more time to have an opinion on the group. But as at today, there has never been a major concerned. My only concerned is whether the group has enough money if there are

other side programs encountered later. In July 2006, I had a bad experience handling about 17 dance group members who are stranded in Paris and London for two nights.

Before 1900 hours, Mr Ismail and his wife arrives from Milan. They told us what to expect in Milan. Shopping is expensive. This is what they told us.

Day 5, 16 August 2007, Thursday

Today it is Malaysia's turn to do the communal duties. It started this morning to prepare for breakfast.

At 0900 hours, for the first time the kids were taken to tour Ferriere town. This town of 2000 inhabitants is considered small as they kids we used to stay in big city such as Shah Alam and Klang back in Malaysia. Each teacher is assigned to look after two kids. Pictures are taken around the town. On the way to the river, the group met with a local who offered apples and apricots from his orchard. The local and the kids took photographs of themselves.

At 1500 hours, groups from Malaysia, Romania, Russia, Bulgaria and Poland performed at Casa Montagna as a gesture to welcome groups arriving from Russia. It is learned that groups from Russia and other ex-USSR member countries pays minimal charges to stay and take part in this festival. Local or Italian is to pay the full board charges of about Euro 580 per session. Countries from the Far East are not charged anything. Casa Montagna Valnure is a project and by product of European Union support towards promoting Olympic sports. The choice of Ferriere is because it is meeting the concept of choosing a place high in the mountains that always has fresh air and clean environment. Secondly, it is willingness of the Ferriere Municipal to reserve the land for such project.

At 2130 hours, all the groups had to do a 15 minutes show at Casa Montagna. This program is a farewell session for the groups that had been here for the past 12/13 days. Our group initially should arrive on 17 August 2007, but with Mr Carlo's approval, we can come one week early. This is because the flight on 16 August 2007 from Kuala Lumpur to Rome could not offer the 30 seats we required. During this session, Malaysia put up the display of traditional Malay wedding and dances usually performed during wedding ceremonies. The group leaders from each group and Mr Carlo were invited to conduct the blessing ceremony. In return, they were given " Bunga Telur" and symbolic gesture of thank you to our honored guests.

Day 6, 17 August 2007, Friday

At 0900 hours, a Russian group departs for Samara. They had to travel 3 days bus and 2 days by train to reach their home. The Bulgarian group too had to depart today. But their van broke down. What a pity

situation. They had to spend another night here. The Malaysian group did the send off ceremonies for the Russian. "Bunga Telur" as a gift are given to each of them.

Back at the room, we were told to up do our bed sheet. They are to be laundered. It is during this period the hostel staffs had to do the spring cleaning to prepare for the next groups arriving tomorrow and a day after. In the meantime, the kids were requested to enjoy themselves at the pool.

Some teachers had planned to go to Milan. They wanted to take the opportunity to visit and see other cities.

Day 7, 18 August 2007, Saturday

At 1030 hours, Mr Razak, Mr Hafiz, Mr Mohd Mazri and I met at the local café to enjoy cappacino and black coffee whilst waiting for the 1335 hours bus to Piacenza. We missed the early morning bus. We arrived at Piacenza Bus Terminal at about 1515 hours and then walked to the Railway Station. At about 1628 hours we took a train to Milan. The train interior décor is just like in an airplane. It is a double deck train that stops at all main stations leading to Milan. The scenery along the railway tract is mostly trail of cornfield. Surprising not a single corn is served during our daily meal. We arrives Milan at about 1615 hours and wonders for some time near the train terminal.

After buying a map from the local vendor, we went to a Bangladeshi restaurant for dinner. During dinner we talked to a female service staff, and she told where to go and visit. We took a subway train to Duomo and reach there at about 1745 hours. True enough Duomo is a popular tourist spot. The church here is majestic and was professional crafted and constructed.

The ugly sight of Bangladeshi/immigration using fishy tactic to lure me to pay 2 Euro for the small handful of corn really made me annoyed. He requested me for another 2 Euro, I am really made me mad and I had to raise my voice and raise my fist. This guy then move away from me. The Milan City Council must regulate and issue license to locals to sell the corn or any other bird feed.

We then took a walk towards the old castle grounds and back to the main shopping centre at Duoma. This 7 floor shopping complex is really the heaven for those with deep pocket. For us from Malaysia, everything that we want to buy we must convert to Malaysia Ringgit in order to know the exact value. Now it cost Ringg4.70 to 1 Euro.

By 2230 hours, we are back at the Milan Central Station. We visited all the hotels that we come across looking for cheap accommodation. At about 2320 hours, our search end at a 2 star hotel costing 100 Euro for 4 persons with breakfast. After taking a bath, I went to bed but for the youthful teachers and lecturer, they went out to see is there any night life along the street.

Day 7, 19 August 2007, Sunday

The next morning, I was told that my friends had another meal at the Bangladeshi restaurant. This time the food is free because the owner said the complimentary is on him. He had once worked with the Malaysia Embassy in Rome for a few years before going into this food business.

By 0830 hours, we had our breakfast and checked out of the hotel. We walked down the road and at the next block there is a Sunday market. The vendors are mostly from Morocco. There are many illegal Bangladeshi vendors too. After making one round trip around the market to compare the prices, it is time to zoom to the stall that offer the cheapest products we can afford to buy. We end up buying t shirts at 2 Euro each, hand bags at 1 Euro each, children dress at 3 Euro each, boxer at 5 Euro for 3. By 1230 hours, all of us had a big bundle to take back to Piacenza.

At 1320 hours, we took a train back to Piacenza. This train is stinking with urine. By 1500 hours, we were at Piacenza at took the 1640 hours bus to Ferriere. We had to look for a bus with "Selva" written on it. Selva is located further up of Ferriere.

By the time we arrived at Casa Montagna, we were told that Mr Ismail and his wife had gone to Venice for a night and then to Rome by train.

After dinner, the other teachers were excited to see what we have bought. They are really worth the value for money. That late evening, we did the welcome reception for a Russian group coming from Central Asia.

Day 8, 20 August 2007, Monday

Today the whole day is dull except for the 1130 hours program where we did the welcome reception for two mayors and a government official on official visit to Piacenza. The venue of the program is within the vicinity of the town church. After the official speeches in the church the Malaysian group did the welcome dance for the guests of honor in front of the church.

At 2100 hours, we were invited to the town park to witness some local and foreigners performing some music, singing and dance numbers. There is a ballroom dancing too. The kids were allowed to join the party but they were sent home early because the night is getting colder. The teachers took the opportunity to open up a table to sell souvenirs.

Day 9, 21 August 2007. Tuesday

After breakfast, we conducted the aerobic session. The session were attended by groups from Romania and Taiwan. This session is part of the obligation required from all the participating groups.

After lunch, the kids had to be dressed and make up for the evening program in Betola. But the heavy down pour of rain for about 45 minutes caused the trip to Betola being cancelled. Instead the 2130 hours program was held indoor at Casa Montagna. Apart Malaysia, Russia, Taiwan and Romania presented their program.

Day 10, 22 August 2007, Wednesday

Today Mr Ismail and his wife traveled back to Malaysia from Rome. They had a meaningful trip visiting Milan, Venice and France. Their early departure is because they need to do some preparation for their son's wedding on 9 September 2007. The kids were invited by Mr Ismail to perform during the wedding ceremony.

At 0600 hours, 35 of us including 8 from Taiwan rented a bus to go to Venice. We arrived at the ferry pier at about 1030 hours. Coaches entering the visitor's zone are required to pay some fee. Venice is a city without any motor vehicle. It is a floating city with thousands of visitors daily. The coach cost us Euro 840.00 and the ferry ride cost another 6.00 Euro. Venice, apart from the grandeur buildings it is pleasing to see vendor selling corn to feed the pigeons. Here, I see a lot of Africans selling belts, handbags and other ladies wear. At time, they were chased away by the local policing authority.

By 1530 hours, we had enough of walking in Venice. Some teachers bought souvenirs on behalf of the students and also for their parents. This is a rare opportunity for the kids to visit Venice. Event their parent did not have the opportunity.

By 1700 hours, we are back on board our bus to travel back to Perriere. We arrived at 2120 hours. We were told that they is not activity at the hostel because it was raining almost the whole day.

The visit is very worthwhile for all the group members. Venice is a destination known worldwide. Though famous with its condola ride, we rather become the paddle man than having to pay 150 Euro for just one ride. It is worth a clerk monthly pay for just an hour ride.

Day 11, 23 August 2007, Thursday

The morning session is free time with not program.

At 2100 hours, the musician and singer are required to performed with other group in the town church. In Ferriere there is no community hall for such activity. The only suitable indoor venue is in the church. That night it was raining and cold outside. Other groups are from Romania, Russia and Taiwan.

For the past days, Mr Carlo is seen running all the shows. He is the festival director, emcee, floor manager, stage manager, logistic organizer, photographer, catering chief and many more hats. He is like a superman.

Day 12, 24 August 2007, Friday

There is no program in the morning.

At 1800 hours, there is a slide show of the past activities performed by all the groups. Copies of the visuals are presented to the Russian group that is leaving Casa Montagna the same night.

At 2100 hours, Malaysia had to perform for 5 minutes and followed by a 20 minutes program by a Romanian group.

Day 13, 25 August, Saturday

Ms Siti Dewi, Ms Norzamani, Ms Normalina, Ms Sanoyah, Mr Mohd Mazri, Mr Nuroi and Mr Mahindran took the 0620 hour bus from Ferriere for Paicenza and then to Milan.

After lunch, the children did their own facial make up and hair do. A day before, they were taught by their teachers.

At 1500 hours, the remaining 19 member were taken to a private health care centre at Farini to perform for 10 minutes. Our dance program includes a song by Mr Hafitz. I do the photography and video coverage. At the end of the program the children were serve coca cola, cookies, biscuits and ice cream. This is the most appreciable meal we had ever had. The remaining food was packed as takeaway food.

At 2100 hours, the children were treated with a cartoon show titled " Streak II"

Day 14, 26 August 2007, Sunday

Today it is Malaysia's turn to prepare the table and plates for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

At 1000 hours, the kids had to do some rehearsal for tonight's show. Mr Hafitz supervises the rehearsals. Mr Hafitz and I were then interviewed by the local newspaper publications. Most questions are related to Islamic culture, practices, dressing, way of life in Malaysia, cost of living, misuse of drugs, type of dwelling, how we got to know about the festival in Casa Montagna, about Mr Carlo, how the group fund their travel to Rome etc.

At 1500 hours, Mr Claudio took us for a picnic at one of the local resident Mr Felipe. He is a very pleasant person and affection towards the Malaysian kids.. First, we were taken to the river located behind his house so that the kids can enjoy the swim there. Then, refreshment is served at his house compound. There were coca-cola, local non alcohol beer, apricots, melon and cakes.

Before dinner, the kids had to do their own dress up and make up. By then the teachers had arrived from Milan. After dinner, the teachers did their part to do the make up and dress up. At 2100 hours, the Malaysian group performed at Casa Montagna. Other groups are from Taiwan, Romania and Russia.

Day 15, 27 August 2007, Monday

Today is Malaysia Day. We had to do some preparations and program. Initially we wanted to have it on 31 August 2007, but were told that by that day other groups had gone back.

After breakfast, the day started with an aerobic session. However, by 0800 hours, there is hardly any other kid from other countries. At 0900 hours, we conducted the aerobic session. By then the Taiwanese, some locals and Romanian joined us.

At 0930 hours, we introduced some traditional games to the kids and youth from Italy, Taiwan and Romania.

At 1030 hours, we opened up the craft making program. It was well attended by the adults and children from Taiwan, Romania and Georgia. The participants are allowed to take home the craft the made. The craft is about making a flower potpourri. They can be used to decorate office and act as car fragrance.

At 1000 hours, Ms Sanoyah and Mr Razak are in the kitchen to identify what is provided to prepare a Malaysian dish "Nasi Lemak". We have to test the local rice.

During lunch, since so many days, this is the first time the kids were served with nasi lemak. The other dishes are scramble eggs and fries cooked with black sauce.

At 2115 hours, Malaysia was given a 60 minutes program. The program includes wedding ceremony, singing by a Romanian kid, dancers from Taiwan and performers from Georgia. Group leaders from other countries are invited to do the blessing ceremony. The session ended with a disco promoting Malaysian music. The program ended at 2230 hours.

Day 17, 28 August 2007, Tuesday

Today is Romania Day

At 0930 hours, the kids and I waited in front of our hostel. According to program, they are to conduct an aerobic exercise. But they did not turn up. We later were told that the session was postponed to the evening. In order to keep the kids occupied, I took them for a walk for 3 kilometers up the northern side of the hills that surround Ferierre. The walk up hill and later down hill took us about 2.5 hours. Some photos were taken to records our presence and enjoy the scenic view.

At 2100 hours, Malaysia put up a 15 minutes show together with groups from Romania, Taiwan and Georgia.

Day 18, 29 August 2007, Wednesday

Today is Taiwan Day.

At 0930 hours, members of Taiwan's group took the stage to conduct aerobic session. This time many kids from other countries took part. After aerobic, the Taiwanese put up demonstration how to dance and move with the "lion head". This is the main set to perform the Lion Dance.

At 1000 hours, the Taiwanese put up a video show about major festival in Malaysia. Unfortunately, not much we can learn because the narration was in Mandarin.

At 1400 hours, Ms Sanoyah taught the children movement and "Chan Mali Chan" dance. "Chan Mali Chan" is a traditional children folk dance. The dance is about a boy looking for his missing goat, that he named it as Chan. The other dance movement that was taught was "Endang". This is the popular folk dance song on Negeri Sembilan state of Malaysia. Most descendents of Negeri Sembilan migrated from Central Sumatra. Thus the Endang dance share same identity with those in Indonesia.

At 2100 hours, Malaysia put up a show that includes both the dance above. This night is part of the Taiwan Day program where we compliment the program on the request of our friend from Taiwan. Apart from Malaysia, Romania and Georgia also took part.

Day 19, 30 August 2007, Thursday

Taiwan group had departed for Rome. They had gone without saying goodbye to us.

After breakfast, a Romanian teacher conducts some sport exercise for the Malaysian kids. Some Romanian youth sportswomen assisted the teacher. The Malaysian kids did learn some important

learning points in the exercise. At the end of the exercise, we were hit with heavy down pour. There were rain crystals dropping every where. The kids were excited to experience to hold the rain crystal and took some photographs.

After lunch, it is time for the Romanian group to return home. They travel by a tour van. It took three days for them to reach home. We noted that Ms Muresan Alma Crina traveled with the group. From the first day she is at the kitchen we thought she is an Italian, part of the kitchen staff. Anyway we took photographs with her. We missed her a lot. We gave her group lot of souvenir, sang a goodbye song and hope they remember us and can come to Malaysia.

After dinner, the Malaysia group traveled down to Betola. The Russian and Georgian groups traveled on other coaches. Unfortunately, it was raining and we cannot put up a good show. Mr Carlo told us that Betola is his grand parent's village. At one time Christopher Columbus invaded and burn down the village. The site we were supposed to perform is located next to the statute of Christopher Columbus.

Day 20, 31 August, Friday

Today only Malaysia and Italy left at the hostel. The other groups were staying at the hostel located near the town church. The whole day look deserted. The kids make up for the time to play some games.

After breakfast and lunch, all of us do the necessary packing. Now about 47 pieces of baggage left compared to 54 pieces when we arrived on 12 August 2007.

After dinner, all of us including kids from Italy assemble at the multi-purpose hall. A slide show was carried out to display visuals of our group and other group's daily activity for the past on week. Later two copies of the CDs were presented to Ms Siti Dewi and I. That night Mr Carlos presented diplomas to every member of the Malaysia's contingent. I took the opportunity to deliver a short speech. My speech focused on thanking Mr Carlo for inviting this group, how much we enjoyed the stay and the trip to Milan and Venice, how much the children can and have learn cultures in Europe. I also took the opportunity to explain to the Italian that Malaysia has a place having same temperature with Ferriere that is Cameron Highland and they are invited to come and visit Malaysia. I also informed Mr Carlo that whether he likes it or not, we Malaysia had to cook our food in the bedroom because our body really cannot consume pasta everyday. Later I read some text / message written by the teachers and children on the postcards given to us a few days ago. Mr Carlo was excited to receive the postcards and he wanted it to be displayed at the lobby of the hostel. Mr Carlo also told us that he knew that we cook in the room but he chooses not to see that. **At one point, when Mr Carlo was shaking hands with me, he told me that I had made a good and correct choice of selecting Tunas Budaya Selangor to represent Malaysia. He said Malaysia has met all the objectives of the festival.**

After this session, it is back to the room. It is time to do the final packing, spoon fed the kids with rice and "sambal" a hot chilly dish. Each kid got about 5-6 teaspoon of rice but it is enough for them. They it is clean up time. The room and passage way must be as clean as the first time we set our foot at the hostel on 12 August 2007.

At 2400 hours, it is time to leave for Rome. Mr Carlo, Mr Claudio and Ms Alise are there to bid us farewell and goodbye. We hugged each other and bid goodbye. Some of the kids dropped their tears. We really missed all your hospitality and friendship. We will not know when we can meet again perhaps meeting in the e-mail only.

Day 21, 01 September 2007, Saturday

We arrives Rome at 0630 hours. It took some time to look for the hostel that the Malaysian Embassy staff had booked for us. It cost Euro 26.00 per person for the room and food to be purchased. The coach fee is about Euro 1400.00 including the one day tour of Rome.

After locating the hostel, we washed up and change on other clothing. Then the coach driver took us to a park for picnic and take our breakfast. Then we went to visit various tourist spot such as the Castel Sant' Angelo, Basilica of St. Peter, The Colosseum, The Fountain of Trevi. The tour ended at 1700 hours and the children are complaining that they are tired.

We decided to go back to the hostel. We started cooking porridge for all. By 2100 hours we had a good dinner. The hostel has a pantry that allows us to do cooking. The teachers and lecturers later went out to see around. The only adult left behind is me with the duty to look after all the kids. The children safety is our utmost concerned.

Day 22, 02 September 2007, Sunday

At 0630 hours I was up from bed and took my shower. I then went to wake up the children and the teachers. The teachers had to prepare tea, biscuits and noodles for everybody. The rice cooker I took along is the life safer for all of us. We use it to boil hot water, cook rice and curry.

By 1000 hours, we are on our way to the airport. This airport is second or third placing when compare to the magnificent and modern technology of Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Mr Hafitz did not join us because he is going to London the next day. By 1320 hours, we were airborne. Goodbye Italy, Mr Carlo, his team and the residents of Ferriere.

Day 24, 04 September 2007, Tuesday

At 0630 hours, we arrived at Kuala Lumpur International Airport. We gathered all the children and all the teachers and lecturers speak to all the kids. When it come to my turn, I told everybody that though this is my first trip with them, thank gods everything turn out well planned and executed. I also told them what Mr Carlo had told me of making a good and correct choice to select Tunas Budaya Selangor. They should now be proud of themselves.

By 0730 hours, we are out of the airport and the kid's parents are there to receive them. All the kids are in the save hands.

This is the ever longest festival I had attended and for the first time meeting a SUPERMAN like Mr Carlo Devoti. Could I become like him one day ????

Report By: Abdul Samad Tahir
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