

A life changing experience

By: Mathieu Rouleau and Peter Tikasz

After hearing about this opportunity of globe-trotting around the world through the office of University Advancement, put together by Desautels Faculty of Management, we applied to take part in this trip. Once we found out that we were selected to be part of the 39 McGill students, staff and alumni, we were thrilled about the itinerary we were about to embark on. Being the agriculture representatives, we had the chance to teach the other students beforehand about the importance of agriculture in Indonesia.

On the 25th of February we departed for our grand adventure from Montreal on Qatar Airways. On our layover in Qatar we visited Doha's man-made island called the Pearl just before having supper with a McGill alumnus and Canada's ambassador in Qatar. We briefly discussed the trade progress with regards to the new beef export and the business styles in Qatar. This led to a more in-depth conversation about the impact of Canada on a global market and how Canadian agriculture influences various industries.



Following our eight hour layover, we took off to our next destination: Hong Kong. While landing on the man-made island airport in Hong Kong, we had quite a beautiful view from the plane of numerous cargo ships and sky-rise buildings. This destination was helpful to understand this city with its population that was expanding vertically with the numerous sky-rises and putting it into context when it comes to urban sprawl in Canada. This being a hot topic of conversation in agriculture as there is a limited amount of agricultural land. After our short stay, we embarked on a plane to Jakarta, Indonesia. We spent 5 days in Jakarta. We met lawyers, marketers, investors, journalists, the Canadian ambassador, CEOs of different companies and many other professionals.



During the trip, the Hot Cities group decided to raise \$5,000 for the XSProject. Every year, a non-profit organisation is selected and this year's goal was to bring awareness and improve the life quality of Jakarta's trash picker communities. XSProject buys plastic wastes from trash pickers and produce various bags that they then resell. They also provide education for the trash pickers' children.

Flying to the island of Bali was quite exciting as we were going to visit the greenest school (see picture) in the world according to the US Green Building Council. At the Green school, they have a similar approach to education as does McGill University's Macdonald Campus, which is to have hands on experience while focusing on a sustainable future for our food system and production. It was a very interesting tour as we saw their teaching approach to students from around the world. The teaching

infrastructure was very impressive, as most of the buildings are made completely of bamboo and the Green School has the biggest bamboo structure in the world.



John Hardy, the founder of Green School, took us on a walk around his Bambu Indah hotel, known for being a sustainable establishment. The hotel was built with bamboo instead of concrete and promotes natural mechanism and minimal water consumption over electricity use. John Hardy showed us rice plantations and explained its production. Rice production took over in Bali as the main crop because of its simple harvesting method and high yield. However, it requires lot of water and smaller dams were built on rivers to irrigate lands. On average, rice can be harvested between 3 to 4 times in a year. After our short stay in Bali, we took the plane back to Montreal on March 8th.

The many hours of plane rides gave me (Mathieu) a lot of time to think as I was traveling outside of North America for the first time to places that I would have never thought of going to. But, going to Indonesia with SEEF, more specifically to the trash picking community really marked me as the community members were super happy and but lived in very poor conditions among garbage. This experience really shook and made me realise that you had a great upbringing in comparison to their conditions. Being in Jakarta (the capital of Indonesia) really put a visual on the disparity of wealth and I will not think twice supporting the community around me as it doesn't hurt to help others. But, being in different countries I had the chance to experience the language barriers of someone from outside the culture and this made me want to learn a third language. As Mandarin and Spanish are some of the world's largest languages after English, my goal is to become fluent in Spanish and do an internship in a Spanish agricultural sector to have a third language and learn more about Latin America agriculture.

While traveling into different communities over the trip it helped me better understand the scale at which we need to reach to be able to feed the world in 2050 as our population will be over nine billion. A few years ago I participated in the Global Youth Agriculture Summit and this trip really brought the concept of "act locally, think globally". As a member of the next generation that will be facing these issues the Hot Cities tours gave me an international perspective as I got the chance to see the sands of Qatar, the sky rise dense community of Hong Kong and the disparity between the trash pickers and rich part of Indonesia. Macdonald Campus has taught me a lot about education outreach be it educational camps for kids or other outreach projects while the trip has given me the opportunity to make connections around the world. I believe SEEF is a real feature of what we learn at Macdonald Campus outside the classroom and how it bridges the gap between the theoretical part in the classroom and the practical side. The future is in the hands of the students of McGill and we need to reach out and build a sustainable future with the growing population and I(Mathieu) think this trip has helped me greatly.

This trip to Jakarta and Bali thought me about the environmental issues developing countries are facing. I (Peter) had the opportunity to meet two environmental consultants who were working in Bali and Hong Kong. The first one was from Jakarta and started his own firm after completing

his Masters. His work was more related to energy consumption and he was working with bigger industries in order to reduce their water and electricity usage. Because of the booming economy, and new constructions, most of the wastes were going directly into the ocean without being treated. Waste management is almost non-existent and wastes were transferred to different sites and were even left in the streets where trash-picking communities were collecting the valuable articles and left the remaining ones untreated. The second consultant was a friend of mine, and formal McGill Alumni, who was living in Hong Kong and was also working on waste management and toxic substance in different products.

This trip and meetings with these two professionals made me rethink my career path. I developed an interest on climate change and on the impact on poor communities who had limited access to clean water and where the soil was becoming infertile from the salty water. This brought me to urban agriculture. Urban agriculture could provide a solution to food production and availability of drinkable water while creating close to no waste at all. I was recently accepted to complete a six month internship with the United Nations Development Program in Dhaka, Bangladesh where I will be working with the climate change and natural disaster mitigation unit. I plan on continuing my education at a Ph.D. level, and this internship will allow me to investigate the feasibility of introducing urban farming in countries affected by climate change.

Overall, we travelled to 3 countries in 11 days, while taking 6 flights which totalled to 50 hours of flying. Without the Student Experience Enhancement Fund this trip would not have been possible for us and we would not have experienced this side of the world. This was an exhausting but very rewarding experience as we had the opportunity to see business and agriculture in a global context. This trip also allowed us to meet McGill alumni across the globe and make new friends from different academic backgrounds.