

Last summer, students from over 45 different countries joined our summer programs. For many, it was the first time visiting the UK, an entirely new place with different food, different shops, different time zone, different architecture, a different climate... But for everyone, though it can all seem quite alien at first, by the end of the summer, Cambridge feels like home.

I had a great opportunity to understand this process recently. I went with Reach's Academic Coordinator, Luke, to South East Asia, to visit schools that attend our summer schools or join us on tailor-made courses each year, and to talk to teachers, parents and students who might be interested in our programs.

I had never been to Indonesia, Malaysia or Singapore before, but after staying in each country for only a few days, I began to really settle in and feel comfortable. We had the unique opportunity to meet many local people and find out about the different education systems through our school visits, and we also made sure to see some of the most important sights of cultural heritage during our trip.

Indonesia

Our first stop was Jakarta, an incredibly busy and vibrant city. It was hard to imagine that England was suffering bitterly cold weather, including snow, as we stepped off the plane into the warm air.

As well as visiting high schools to discuss our academic programs, we also visited a very special primary school. Barack Obama attended State Elementary School Menteng 01 when he lived in Jakarta, and there's a big statue of the 44th President of the United States as a child in the schoolyard.

We also visited some other famous sites, such as the National Monument, the Istiqlal Mosque, and the National Museum of Indonesia. A really interesting collection inside the museum was models of different architectural styles from across Indonesia's islands.

Another highlight was the *rijjstafel*, which translates as 'rice table'. Between seven and forty plates of food are laid out on the restaurant table, containing everything from pork belly to fried rice, spring rolls to squid. Customers pick and pay for what they want to eat, and there's always a waiter on hand if you want more of a certain dish. This is definitely an idea we would love to see in the UK!

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Malaysia

Next we flew to Kuala Lumpur. Though different to Jakarta, one thing remained the same – in both cities, everyone is incredibly friendly!

✘ One of the main modes of public transport in Kuala Lumpur is the monorail, so we used this to see as much of the city as we could. There are lots of amazing sights - the palaces, the Twin Towers, Merdeka Square, an array of museums. We also ventured to the Batu Caves, made from limestone which is said to be 400 million years old. The Temple Cave is among the most popular Hindu shrines outside India. As it is almost 100m above the ground, visitors have to climb 272 steps to reach it. Though particularly tricky in the heat, there are monkeys all along the route and stunning views of Kuala Lumpur at the top!

Singapore

Our final stop was Singapore. For me, one of the best things about this country is the beautiful trees and plants lining the streets, and visiting the Botanical Gardens was a particular highlight. We also visited Marina Bay one evening, taking a boat tour around the harbor and learning about its history. Strolling along the bay, we stumbled across a fantastic water and light show, involving film projections directly onto sheets of sprayed water.

We were so lucky to be visiting Singapore just before Chinese New Year. We had the opportunity to try 'bakkwa', a sweetened pork traditionally eaten by Singaporeans to celebrate New Year. We also walked around China Town, which was lit by hundreds of lanterns and glowing goats (it's the year of the goat!) ✘

Though we only stayed in each country for a few days, by the time we left it felt like we'd been there forever.

Written by Flossie, Program Coordinator

We are always keen to visit new countries to tell teachers and students about our programs – if you would like us to visit your school, please let us know! Just email info@reachcambridge.com

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