



National Youth Council

## Youth Expedition Project '09 TEAM SKYBREAKER!

COLLABORATION BETWEEN:

- NATIONAL UNIVERSITY SINGAPORE MUSLIM SOCIETY (NUSMS)
- NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY MUSLIM SOCIETY (NTUMS)

**Y**outh Expedition Project (YEP) has been a key programme to encourage volunteerism among our youth since its inception in 2000. YEP supports youth to embark on community Service-Learning projects with the objectives of building up self-confident youth volunteers who can identify needs and contribute to the community both at home and abroad.

This expedition encourages NUSMS, NTUMS and various inter-religious groups to foster deeper relationship among them. This serves as an excellent learning platform to promote inter-religious understanding and mutual respect. Kindness, respect, love are just few of the universal attributes that goes beyond race and religion, that speak beyond borders.

### YEP to China!

A collaboration between a charity organization, ZJC Charity Service Centre and a strong team of 19 members comprising of students from NUS and NTU with various disciplines embark on an experiential learning journey to touch the lives of children in one of the poorest regions in China. ZJC Charity Service Centre, the first Muslim NGO in Zhang Jia Chuan Muslim Autonomous County, Gansu, manages education and social welfare projects.

Our area of interest, Lan Jia Chun Village, is a remote village in Shangri-la located at the foot of Haba Mountain. Lijiang airport, about 5-hours drive away, is the nearest domestic airport whereas Kunming Airport is the nearest international airport. Lan Jia Chun has a population of 200 with farmers making up the majority whose modest efforts aim at meeting the basic necessities of the villagers there.

### Description of overseas service-learning project:

- Share practices of good personal hygiene habits
- Impart basic English language knowledge
- Classroom makeover
- Assist locals in the re-designing their garden which includes landscaping and concreting

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



## Reflections

---

Day 1: 15th June 09

Name: Nur Hamizah Bte Rosidin

Title: The Journey Up - Answering the First Call To Prayer



The journey up to Lan Jia Chun Village was one which we never imagined it to be. It was really the start to the wonderful journey for Team Skybreaker! Bumpy as expected but the beautiful, magnificent view that surrounds us left us in awe of God's creation. Photographs in our Geography textbook pale in comparison to the mountains (some covered in snow), hills, ridges, plateaus, valleys, rivers, you name it all, which rolled past the windows of our 18-seater van at every mile of the drive up. Cameras and video cam recorders were constantly being stuck out of the windows, to capture the stunning scenery which was simply not to be missed. Add a Start button at the bottom of every snapshot of puffy cotton clouds in an azure sky and rolling hills and voila! – default wallpaper for your Windows XP.

As we drove on, the roads began to get rougher. At some point, it narrows severely with the right side that plummets precipitously at sharp angles. You would not want to move even an inch in your seat. We held our breath each time the van rocked from side to side on the narrow mountain road as it drove over scattered rocks and some potholes. All that was pushed right to the back of our minds when the van suddenly stopped before an unbelievably narrow portion of the road. A-shu, our guide, told us to shift ourselves to the left side of the bus. It was an attempt on our part to shift the already high centre of gravity of the bus (due to our luggage piled on top of the van) away from the steep cliff on the right side. Soft chatters slowly began to be heard again as the van crawled past that short but heart-stopping portion of the road.

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



The drive turned out to be longer than expected as we continued the journey in the dark.

“Hang in there, guys. We’ll be reaching in half and hours time...”, Hajjar said that repeatedly despite having said that more than an hour ago.

We pinned our hopes at every distant light we saw as Lan Jia Chun Village. It was only after a bumpy ride for about an hour or two in the dark that we finally safely reached the place we were to call home for the next 11 days. Only praises to God Almighty ran through my mind as I thanked Him incessantly for granting us a safe journey albeit the long hours on the wheels.

The true sense of relief and peace was deeply felt at the eloquent call to prayer for Isya’ by another guide of ours, Brother Ali. For it is only with His grace that we were chosen to be part of Team Skybreaker, to safely reach Lan Jia Chun Village as a strong 19-man team and finally, to be able to prostrate humbly with our foreheads on the prayer mats in the Snow-capped Haba Mountain Mosque. With this, I have chosen a photograph of the Imam and several villagers performing the sunnah (optional) prayer after the Adzan which we joined in soon after for my photo essay. Despite being miles away from home, the heart can still find peace at the remembrance of Allah God Almighty.

**A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:**



**OUR SPONSORS:**



## Reflections

Day 2: 16th June 09

Name: Hanan Hazirah Bte Muhamad Aziz



I took the picture of the Imam's daughter, Aisyah, eating her meal using a pair of chopsticks. This picture was taken after the team had our first lunch. The villagers served their local dishes. Although some of us may not have adapted to the local taste yet, I felt grateful to at least have food to consume which gave us the energy we needed for the day. After a strenuous day clearing the land outside the mosque, I was actually looking forward for dinner which was served on time. Looking at the faces of the villagers, I could see that they were happy to have our presence and maybe a little wary that we would not be able to adapt to the way of living in the village. I believe that we should try to be a part of the local community and make the villagers comfortable with our presence. Simple gestures like smiling and saying thank you after every meal can mean a lot to them and it is a way for us to show our appreciation to the villagers' great hospitality.

Another reason why I took a picture of Aisyah is that she represents the local kids in the village. I observed that there were some differences comparing village kids to urban kids, for instance Singaporean kids. Village kids have better endurance level and greater physical strength. There were certain areas in the village that seemed dangerous but the kids were able to walk around without getting injured easily. There were moments I expected Aisyah to stumble and fall but she did not. At times if Aisyah happened to fall, she was able to quickly get her feet up and continue walking, without crying. Her strong endurance amazes me because putting Singaporean kids in Aisyah's position, I predict that most Singaporean kids would have stumbled easily and would have cried out for their parents if they fall. There were, however, the rare moments where Aisyah would slightly injure herself and started crying. Her mother or father would then come to console her. This represents the universal nature of kids who rely on their parents for support, encouragement and love.

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



At the background of the picture is a scenic view of the mountains. The beautiful scenery of the village was breathtaking. It has always been my dream as a child to be able to travel and see the beautiful creations of God. I count myself lucky and blessed to be able to enjoy the beautiful mountains and at the same time, doing community work and adding colour to the villagers' lives. The peaceful, quiet and simple life of the village is something we can never find in Singapore. It feels good to be away from Singapore's rat-race, busy and hectic lifestyle for a while. What I had is a once-in-a-lifetime experience which many may not have the opportunity to. Most importantly, my stay in the village has brought me closer to God.

**A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:**



**OUR SPONSORS:**



## Reflections

Day 3: 17th June 09

Name: Yio Lee Chien Janice



While waiting for lunch, buddy Soefie, Salman and I went to visit a villager's house which was a stone throw away from the mosque we were living in. It was constructed using logs and old newspapers- probably one of the oldest and most run down huts in the modest village. Upon nearing the hut, I was excited. Yet, at the same time, I was scared of what I was to behold. Judging from the exterior, I was bound to expect that the interior would be really dusty and possibly even reek of sweat stench. I was admittedly hesitant about entering the hut. However, I could not refuse the warm gestures and persistent welcomes of the villagers themselves. Standing at the door of what seemed to be a disgustingly dirty hut, they were all smiles, ready to receive us into their house with open arms. We entered the hut, only to be greeted with a comforting sense of warmth. The place was undoubtedly run down and slightly dusty, but it looked cozy and homely. As with most other houses in the village, there was neither television nor radio. But the place appeared to be sufficient. Looking at what was present in the hut inevitably made me draw a quick comparison between what I saw and what I had in Singapore. With the newest technology, with an endless stream of entertainment and megamalls, our lives should appear more comfortable, and more complete. We ought to be happier with how things are. But, why is it that we never seem to be satisfied? Why is it that we are always whining and demanding more things instead of appreciating and making do with what we have? Why is it that everything we own never seem to suffice? Maybe, we should learn from these humble villagers. They may not be cash-rich, they may even have to live under supposedly substandard conditions, in wooden huts and being void of electricity. But, they are happy and contented. Instead of complaining and whining, they are satisfied with whoever they are and whatever they have. If life is a stage and all men merely actors, the more we should act out our roles in a happier manner. So, let us celebrate the strengths of these villagers. Let us embrace whatever we have more happily and be more contented with life.

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



## Reflections

---

Day 4: 18th June 09

Name: Nur Azhar Bin Amin

Title: The Moon of the Sunrise



The sunrise. What a sight. The dreary dark of the night is lifting. Brilliant colours of pink, gold, and red crammed in one long streak across the horizon. The background was ornamented with shadows of clouds, creeping. The young crescent moon perched across the overwhelming brightness of the sunrise, as if unwillingly to give in to the powerful emerging sunrays. The beauty of creations, the alternation of night and day, without fail, obey their master.

It was 5.30 am. I could taste the fresh morning air in my mouth and after taking a deep breath, the chilly-air smoldered my nose, a pleasant feeling. Although it was the early morning, I needed a drink. I took a gulp. As the water went past my lips, my parched throat invited it to flow down my throat hole. The thoughts of my life began to shroud my mind.

To wake up each morning to the city sunrise, to listen to all the activities and the hustle and bustle of city life, knowing and to feel that everyday, like any other day, will become a challenge that is unexplainable. I have taken each sunrise for granted. It was living a life with an obtainable means, often making ends meet, working and playing together, and a casual demeanor that would entice even the

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



average person, some of these things so many people have long forgotten. Often than not, complaining over minute issues.

In contrast, it left me to ponder upon the simple yet self-suffice life of the villagers. Smile crafted upon their faces regardless of any shortcomings left me in a state of awe.

In what seems a brief moment of thought, it ocured to me that adults and children alike cannot even begin to grasp the peaceful tranquility surrounding the structure of the villagers' life. I also realised how very thankful I am to be this fortunate, to have abundance in some aspect of my life. Having the ability to learn this way of life, makes all of my childhood struggles worthwhile.

Then the sun bursts above the mountain's peaks, and slowly above the horizon. I turned away. For, sunrise will surely come, regardless of the dark night before. Indeed, within darkness lies beauty, whose sky was adorned by its constellations.

"Verily, in the creations of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternations of the night and the day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding." –Quran 3:190

**A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:**



**OUR SPONSORS:**





## Reflections

---

Day 5: 19th June 09

Name: Farah Hidayati Sanwari

Title: Sight and Vision



*“O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another...” – Al-Hujarat 49:13*

If there is one thing that I learnt on this very day of the expedition, it is communication. Before embarking on this expedition, I had already forecasted that I would have to depend on body language and what little Mandarin I was able to master from watching Chinese dramas to communicate with the Chinese locals due to the language barrier. I was eager to learn about their ways of life and for a while, it did not come across to me that the same thing was happening on their part.

I had been drawing out the kindergarten landscape plan to show to the villagers when Mr Daud, the person in this picture, reached out for my book and started drawing. I was surprised and looked forward to his sketches. Unfortunately, I was called out to help in something else. By the time I came back, my book had been returned and there was a drawing of the mosque. Until now, I am still unsure of what his intentions were, but I do appreciate that he was trying to communicate to me. This incident taught me that communication is not a one-man show. The seniors have told us once that what we give, we will get so much more in return and Mr Daud drawing on my book, to me, was one of the greater returns. I am deeply touched by his initiative to communicate with us. It did not matter that he could not speak English. He just knew that to get his point through, language should be no barrier. What I never expected was that his way of communicating to me was through visuals. As mentioned before, I was expecting body language or have a translator with me to understand a person there. Mr Daud's actions took me by surprise. It reminded me of my work as a design student. Communication through visuals is very important. I hope that in the future, I would be more thorough and clear in my representation of ideas through graphics.

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



## Reflections

---

Day 6: 20th June 09

Name: Siti Badarina Binte Hassan



The photo was of little Aishah 'helping' the cook and her mother out with the dishes. It was after lunch and Aishah was trying to wash some bowls of her own. Hence, her mother took out an empty basin and placed it in front of her so that she could wash her own dishes too. The two ladies were gracious enough to wash the dishes of some of our team members as well.

I was touched by Ms Zainab and Ms Salimah's hospitality and how they put in so much effort to ensure that all of the team members were well-fed. They offered us seconds and were always asking us whether the food was to our liking. Even the village chief and the Imam of the mosque offered us blankets for the cold nights during our stay in the mosque. These are some of the many kind gestures that the villagers have extended to us and I really feel gratified by the warmth and hospitality that they've shown. A learning point that I took from this is that we should give our best in whatever task we are given be it in school or at work. The villagers went all out to be the best host they can and I feel that they've accomplished just that.

I am also impressed by the resilience of the toddlers in the village, physically that is. They are used to walking on the rocky paths in the village, which is not properly concreted. This reminds me of the children back home. Parents in Singapore would shudder if they were to let their kids roam around unguided on such grounds. However, parents here take it as a learning process for the child. The child learns to pick himself up when he falls and I feel that we should emulate such attitudes in our daily lives. We should not beat ourselves up when we face failure but take it as a learning curve instead and strive to do better in the future.

I feel there are many things that I could learn from this expedition and feel truly humbled and blessed to be on this learning journey with such a wonderful team.

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



## Reflections

---

Day 7: 21<sup>st</sup> June 09  
Name: Koh Yan Qing  
Title: Warmth



This picture depicts the boiler which sends hot water to the Wudu area. One of the villagers is helping us to top up the water from the tap. Every evening, the villagers will take turn to stay around the area to do the same task knowing that we need hot water to bath due to the cold weather. As there are quite a number of us, we need to take turns to bath. I am touched by their actions as they will stay around that area for the 1 to 2-hours just to help us top up hot water. Their actions are like the kind of care and concern that a family would do for me.

I appreciate this warm water more as they had to go through the trouble of cutting the firewood, making the fire and so on to get this warm water whereas all we need to do is to turn on the boiler tap in Singapore. It is also a luxury to be able to receive this warm water in this cold mountain climate and after a day of work in the construction compared to using warm water despite the hot weather climate in Singapore.

Through this, the villagers there has taught me to cherish little things around us which we would accidentally take for granted in our daily life and they have show me that there is no boundaries for showing care and concern for anyone. In our busy life, we tend to forget that it is within our boundaries that we could do little things for others and in turn, we tend to forget to appreciate the little things others have done for us.

I am glad to be there to go through this YEP experience with everyone. What they have given to us was actually more than what we planned to give to them.

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



## Reflections

---

Day 8: 22<sup>nd</sup> June 09

Name: Mohammad Matin bin Mohdari

Title: Step-by-Step



**“Step by step, stone by stone”**

In essence, this picture was chosen due to its perfect depiction of the true spirit of humanity in action. An act of togetherness as well as cooperation, that extends beyond borders, race or religion, in the face of harsh weather conditions and adversities. The photograph captured a humble task of us laying a pathway, step by step with stones and gravels in an attempt to create a miniature “garden of joy” for the village kids. Certainly a menial task, but was nevertheless an experience worth treasuring.

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



My immediate sentiments as this image was taken revolved around a sense of dedication and enthusiasm that my fellow team mates had displayed in them while performing such simple and mundane tasks. It was indeed, the sheer determination as well as the tenacity of purpose that drove their motivations. That was also the moment when I felt a great sense of gratitude to the Almighty who had blessed me with such an extraordinary opportunity to be part of this enriching expedition, placed among dedicated and passionate individuals who are fully committed, without any question of doubt, to the cause of “breaking habits and changing lives”.

At the end of it all, I still do strongly believe that, it was inherently that particular pursuit of perfection in the name of passion that drove our spirits in instances where we needed it most, such as waking up early, carrying an extra load of gravel as well as going the extra mile to get water for thirsty team mates. Laying concrete, expanding pathways, planting grass, teaching basic hygiene habits and creating a garden might sound like a big accomplishment for a team of 19 individuals in 12 days, but believe it or not, nothing of that could match the sight of joyous and grateful villagers. All that effort - stone by stone, gravel by gravel, one by one, step by step...was all worth every sweat.

*Touching the lives of many while being a positive agent of change*

As we bided farewell on the 26th of June 2009, we were pleasantly surprised to realize the extent to which we have actually gained, received, benefited and not to mention, grown in maturity. These villagers had touched our hearts and in more ways than one, had helped us rediscover ourselves while reshaping our views of life in general.

We can only *gain* through *giving*.

This was a leap of faith that I never regretted. Thank you Team SkyBreaker.

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



# Reflections

---

Day 9: 23<sup>rd</sup> June 09

Name: Siti Radiah binte Safie



In one of our breaks from construction, two of our teammates create a simple see-saw. The toddlers watched curiously as a plank of wood was placed on top of a rock. The two TSBians then demonstrated how to play and made the kids interested to join in. The kids were thrilled just by standing on the see-saw as it bobbed up and down.

Engaging with kids is rarely this simple. Especially the boys who often got into fights or refused to do as told. Not every child can be disciplined the same way. The oldest of the toddlers was a boy aged four. Sometimes when we scolded him, he felt threatened and would throw sand and rocks at anyone near him. The kids might even spit at you. You have to remain cool, patient and firm when dealing with such kids.

Teaching very young kids is best done through playing. It was challenging to teach, even for our Chinese friends as some kids spoke dialect at home. We tried one-on-one English tutoring but only two could follow the lesson. We did away with the lesson plan. In the classroom, we let the kids to draw or colour. The kids spent most of their time playing outside. I felt it was a great achievement for the Hygiene team to be able to teach the kids how to brush teeth. Nonetheless brushing teeth still depends on their mood.

As we get to know the kids better, we found out about each kid's capabilities and talents. Hakka is energetic and strong. Syed can recite short Chinese poems. Asiah has gorgeous eyes and is very photogenic. Samsul is patient and not easily agitated. Kamal is willing to stand up for his friend. Sidiq is a fast learner and shares drinks with his friends.

Creating our own see-saw is one example of improvisation that we did in the village. Initially we planned to construct a proper playground for the kids, but due to lack of time and resources, we just make do with what we have. Hopefully the next expedition team can build a playground for the village.

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



## Reflections

---

Day 10: 24<sup>th</sup> June 09

Name: Farah Hasinah binte Abdul Wahab

Title: The Undying TSB Spirit



Ten things that our team gets excited about:

10. When we finally board onto the delayed flight from Singapore to China
9. The GORGEOUS scenery on the way up to the village; the clouds, the mountains, the cliff!
8. When we eventually reach Lan Jia Chun Village after many hours of van ride despite Hajjar repeatedly saying, "30 minutes more."
7. When we start clearing the land for concreting in our clean jumpsuits!
6. When we did the skit for the children!
5. Seeing the primary school children coming for Sport's Day
4. When we had fried fish with delicious sambal for dinner!
3. The arrival of grass for our landscaping!
- 2. After we took our candid 'graduation photo' and we all ran to the photographer!**
1. When ALL the girls are up and ready for breakfast but Hajjar is still wrapped in her sleeping bag!

This picture is one of the many reminders of how vibrant our team is. The excitement that everyone in our team has for everything and anything has kept us going strong for the 15 days we spent together. No matter the time, no matter the weather, no matter the terrain- someone would always be upbeat and cheerful! Not everyone was at their best everyday but yet, the littlest effort from the most tired member, to keep the team on the roll could be felt. A simple comment that made everyone laugh helped keep our mind off the fact that we had a lot to do and nothing seemed impossible when everyone stood by one another. Even the biggest rock could be moved all the way to the other side! The determination that everything can be done no matter what, was a key factor in helping us complete what we did in the village. The strongest member did not do it all. Neither did the weakest sit by, watching. Everyone shared the load - no matter how big or small it was.

At the end of the 15 days, we were no longer 19 people, but 19 friends who spent the best two weeks of their lives together up in the mountains. (:

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



## Reflections

---

Day 11: 25<sup>th</sup> June 09

Name: Nur Imran Soonan

Title: HABA: It's All In The Script.



Many things happened on the day that I was assigned to do the photo essay. I was pleasantly surprised as the team managed to complete our planned construction work within the stipulated time period and hence had at least a day off for some recreational activities in the village. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, I woke up feeling grateful to God for assisting us in our endeavour and I was truly looking forward to the day's activities.

After close to 10 days being cooped up in Lan Jia Chun Village, I got ecstatic at the thought of venturing out of the place and visiting the sights that the town of Shang Ri La had to offer. The team visited Baishuita, the "other" village and also Haba town. It was an enjoyable experience and I snapped a couple of pictures but I was still undecided on which was to become the shot for my photo essay.

After some careful consideration I waited until the team got back to Lan Jia Chun Village and got their hands busy preparing dinner for the locals. I thought that would make an interesting scene to focus on as it was the first and only time the team could cook for the locals. We proved that we could do some manual labour but can our cooking skills suffice in pleasing the locals?

While my dear teammates were busy preparing their respective dishes, I decided not to disturb them, as I firmly believed that too many cooks spoil the broth. Hence I was equipped with my camera and kept myself occupied snapping shots of my team in action, testing their skills in the kitchen. I managed a couple of shots and a headache ensued as I had trouble picking one for my photo essay.

In the end, I chose a picture of Matin and Rina cooking in the kitchen. It came to that decision as I felt it best reflect the efforts of the team in the preparation of the dinner as it showed that both guys and girls were pitching in to help. The photo depicts our team's appreciation towards the hospitality of the local villagers. Throughout our stay in the village, they have been exceptionally warm and cordial, ensuring that our everyday needs are met, ranging from preparing hot water for our drinking and baths and also tasty home cooked meals for the team. Since some of the dishes prepared by them were new to our

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:





taste buds, the team agreed that it would be an interesting move to prepare Singaporean dishes for the local villagers. It would be a win-win situation, as the villagers would have a taste of famous local delights whereas we could get a little taste of home. We were somewhat relieved that the locals enjoyed what we had to offer and in the end the hard work of my team mates paid off as we all enjoyed a sumptuous dinner, albeit it being a simple fare but one that was prepared with much love.

The experience taught me that even with limited resources, if one is determined to have an end result that one wishes, coupled with hard work and enthusiasm, it all could be possible. The team showed that up in the mountains, without the necessary ingredients, they managed to whip something up via clever substitution of essential items. Dishes like “roti john” and “begedil” were possible as the chefs had their hearts and minds set on making it and thus it shows that when there’s a will, there certainly is a way.

In addition, it also highlighted that the YEP experience proved to be the time when many of us pampered city dwellers get a taste of the rural lifestyle. I myself have never used the pickaxe, spade or the cangkul ever in my life but here; I am presented the opportunity to do so. These tools may seem ancient and primitive to us all but they form an everyday necessity in the daily activities of the farming community. From the photo, we saw how Rina and Martin made use of the firewood stove to cook. This was certainly something different from the stove that we are used to back at home. I was amazed at how the team managed to adapt to the environment up in the mountains. Not only do we have to endure the physical elements but also other cultural and social norms have to be observed as well.

Apart from that, the cooking experience taught me that no matter how much we did for the villagers, be it the manual construction work, the education programme or the dinner we whipped up for them all, I truly felt that we as a team or individually for that matter might have gained a lot more than what we actually did to help the villagers. It seems to me that I can never repay the local villagers for their kind hospitality, the construction skills they taught us and also several religious lessons that they instilled in me. Not forgetting the lovable kids who never fail to put a smile on my face and brighten up my day with their cute antics.

In conclusion, whatever interaction I’ve encountered with these villagers, despite the language barrier, I will forever in my heart remember the wonderful times I had here in Lan Jia Chun Village. I am certain that I will not trade this experience of spending two weeks with individuals of noble and esteemed characters with any other thing in the world. It was truly a superb and sensational episode in my life, one that I’ll forever treasure.

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



## Reflections

Day 12: 26<sup>th</sup> June 09

Name: Siti Hanisah Binte Yahya



We have not seen the Haba Mountains for several days now, because it had thus far been shrouded by clouds and mist. The sight of the snow capped mountains always held a certain amount of solace for me, personally, because amidst the hard work and exhaustion you sometimes forgot your initial intentions of going on the trip. But one glance at the mountains resolves that glitch and you are reminded of the villagers, the kids and the imam; and all at once your fatigue and stress were instantly relieved. The sight of the Haba Mountains never failed to take my breath away, and on the days building up to the 26<sup>th</sup> of June, what was to be our last day at the village, I prayed hard that I would once again be given the opportunity to lay my eyes on the mountain before we departed from the village.

Unfortunately, this was not to be. On the morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> I awoke early to begin packing so that I would have ample time to soak in the village sights for the last time. However, the air was cold and mist hung over the mountains, obscuring it from view completely.

Upon reflection, this seems to be a very appropriate metaphor for the lessons that I had learnt throughout my stay at the village. Sometimes, things might not go as we had planned for it to. This is only natural, because as humans we are limited in our ability to determine things which are often beyond our control. However, I have learnt, from the people around me that the best way of tackling adversity is with patience, good humour, friendship, and prayer. Many times, the prospects of an entire day's manual labour one day after another can be daunting, but waking up with friends who tackle such problems with a smile or a laugh would undoubtedly bring a smile to my face as well. The villagers, who turned up to work alongside us, though hampered by a language barrier, never failed to offer us help with smiles on their faces. They continuously showered us with gratitude and hospitality, even though the hard manual work must wear them out too, or prevent them from going through their otherwise normal routine. Ultimately, we can only learn to accept the outcome of the things we cannot control, and I have come to discover that things always turn out for the better. If we fall, we learn to pick ourselves up stronger.

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



So, even though I did not get to see the Haba Mountains that morning, the view of the clouds is still as magnificent, praises be to God. And God willing, in the future, I would once again be gifted the chance of seeing those snow-capped mountains again, in the presence of good company.

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



## Reflections

---

Day 13: 27<sup>th</sup> June 09

Name: Farhana binte Mokhtar

Title: Open Hearts and Minds: Cultures, Beautifully Imperfect!



I recall a cliché saying, “A picture speaks a thousand words.” True enough, this photo of my team members in the traditional costumes of the locals at the National Geopark Stone Forest in Kunming City conveys to me more than what meets the eye. It tells more than mere fun, laughter and enjoyment. Here, I see an espousment of a foreign culture done so willingly and with open arms.

It is without a doubt that an exchange of culture occurs every time we meet people. They are mostly of different historical backgrounds and come from different walks of life albeit possibly having similarities. This inevitably holds true when we meet those of different nationalities and creed, living far beyond our island borders. Thus, assuredly, the adage of learning something new every day speaks for itself in this matter.

This photo speaks to me how there is a need for us to open up our minds and hearts in getting to know and understand things that might at first seem outlandish, or to an extreme point, ludicrous. I can only understand why. It is an innate human trait to be insensitive of elements that are alien to us because there is this perpetual search for things we find comforting, what more in a foreign land. Novelty, although exciting, might not always be comforting, an emotion I personally experienced during this expedition. For instance, when asked to pose in the local traditional costume as seen above, I refused, foreseeing that I would look comical in it.

However, I realised that complete ridicule and hesitancy to such uniqueness will interfere with our efforts to forge strong mutual bonds with others. More perturbing is the fact that it reflects our ailment of biasness, devoid of cultural relativism. It is consequential to note that we should not judge the culture

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



and customs of others based on our understanding of what is right and wrong, of what should and should not be and of what is true or false. This biased attitude, I learnt, will only shut opportunities for us to acquire the principle behind every custom of a foreign culture.

Knowing that every culture can contain irrelevance in this day and age, it is of course, not wrong to disagree with and shun particular practices of a foreign culture. Nevertheless, it does not rightfully mean absolute disregard and disrespect for the people and their culture. Respecting, learning and adapting ourselves as well as adopting the culture, I believe, are apparatus for survival in a foreign land for as long as we are there. For all we know, the values that lie behind every queer practice might be the missing element in our own culture that can potentially aid us to be successful individuals in life. Being open-minded about new things can indeed benefit us through attaining the best out of both worlds and hence, creating an amalgam of practices on our part, simultaneously enriching and rejuvenating our own culture. Indeed, there is wisdom behind celebrating the strengths of others and their culture. I quote the Holy Quran:

*“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).” [Surah Al-Hujraat 49:13]*

I am astounded, knowing how every culture is beautifully imperfect! ☺

A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:



## Reflections

Day 14: 28<sup>th</sup> June 09

Name: Tan Li San



Embarking on this youth expedition program to Yunan is definitely a once-in-a lifetime experience. When the team first reached the Kunming city, our first breakfast was at a mosque situated there. Then, we had our first breakfast in Yunnan and it was a rather simple but filling meal. By fate, the team had our last dinner at the same mosque too. I feel that this picture is of much significance as the dinner marked the end of our journey in Yunnan and it was fate that we had our last dinner at the very same mosque that we had our first breakfast. From the simple fare on the first day till the dinner feast on the last night, I feel that everyone has given their best in the course of this expedition and made the journey of this trip more fulfilling and meaningful for every one of us. The feast was definitely a reward to every member of team Sky breaker and I am sure everyone had appreciated it. This last dinner also meant that each and every one of us had persevered till the end despite feeling mentally or physically exhausted at times.

On a deeper note, the simple fare (bread and eggs) that we had on the first day also represented in the sense that we had gone into the expedition, without much knowledge of the place and the tasks that we were set to do at Shangri-La village, while the last dinner feast (with an increased variety of courses) as depicted in the photo chosen seems to represent that we, as a team and as individuals have all matured and grown in terms of our life experiences. What we have initially were little and we as individuals who were not as bonded, did not know what we can offer in this youth expedition program. However, I feel that nearing the end of the trip, what we gained and experienced from this trip is bountiful and that we have all matured and became more independent after such a long period of being away from our comfort zone.

Furthermore, I think this picture holds much meaning for me as having the first breakfast and the last dinner at the mosque signifies that team Skybreaker has gone through this expedition, without serious casualties and that we are all well if not even better, both physically and spiritually, compared to when we first reached Kunming.





This Youth Expedition Project would not have been possible without the following sponsors and help from various parties. We would like to express our utmost gratitude to the following parties involved in making this project a success.

**Sponsors:**

- Singapore Totalisator Board –Tote Board
- Hong Leong Finance
- Jamiyah
- Blackgold Resources
- Yayasan Mendaki
- Lembaga Biasiswa Kenangan Maulud (LBKM) -PMBM Scholarship Fund Board

**Institutions:**

- National Youth Council
- Youth Expedition Project
- National University of Singapore (NUS) Muslim Society
- Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Muslim Society
- ZJC Charity Service Centre

Special thanks to the following individuals for their advice and contribution towards TeamSkybreaker!

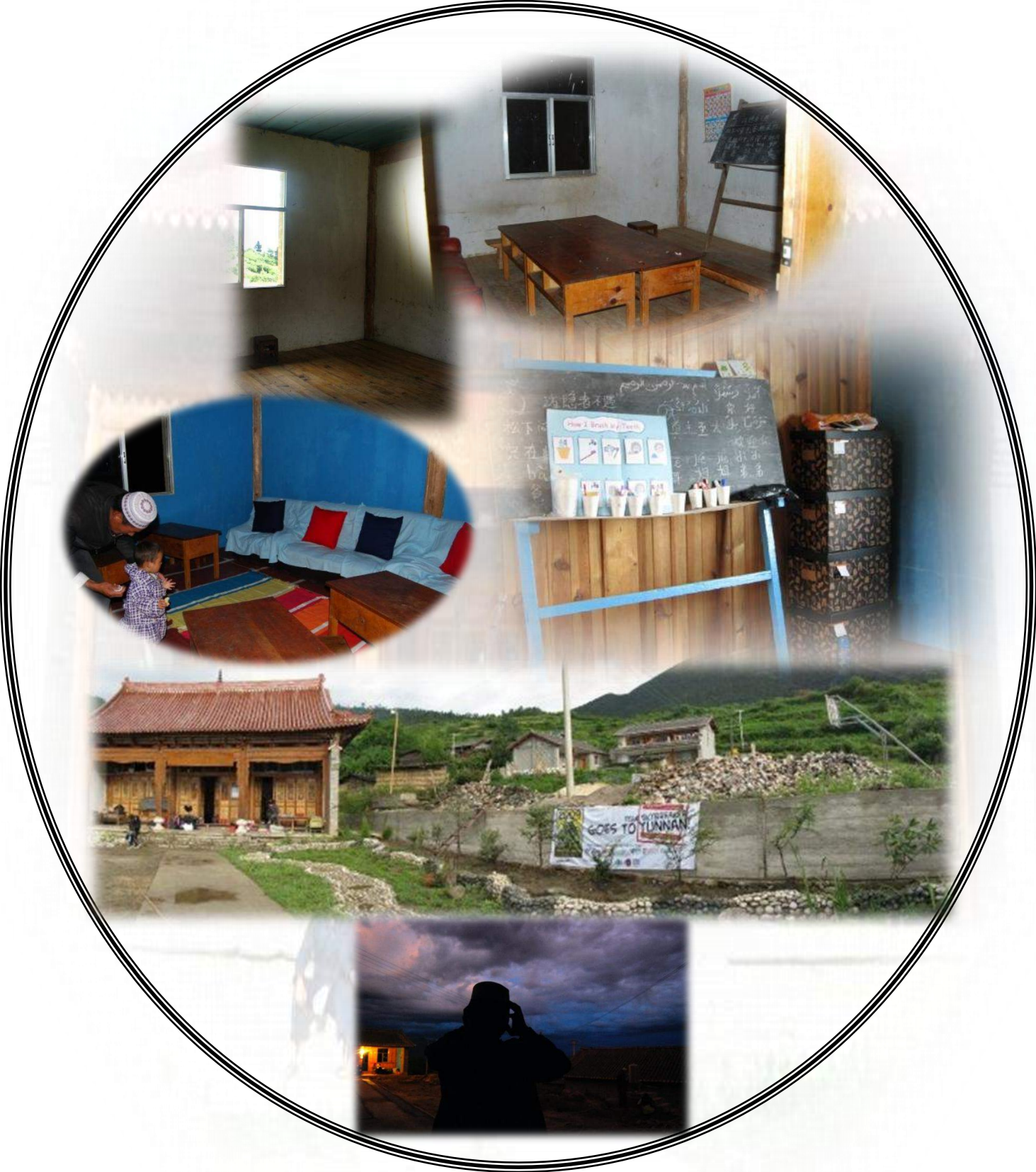
- Ms Mariah Mah – ZJC Charity Service Centre
- Brother Ali – ZJC Charity Service Centre
- Brother Hamzah; Yang Zhi Ling – Lan Jia Chun's Chief village
- Mr Tam Wai Meng – NUS Student Affairs Officer
- Mrs Lam Poh Ling – NTU Student Affairs Officer

**A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:**



**OUR SPONSORS:**





A JOINT HUMANITARIAN EFFORT BY THE FOLLOWING:



OUR SPONSORS:

