

Reflections:

1.



This expedition made me realize how fortunate we are to be living in a developed country. Water is clean and abundant here in Singapore, food absolutely diverse; in fact we are often spoilt for choice, education almost accessible to all and the list goes on. In Yunnan village where we were at, water even after boiling had plenty of sedimentation in it yet children drank their fill straight from the tap. At times, the village receives no water at all so water rationing is a usual practice. Also, the villages ate mainly vegetables, which they harvest themselves (particularly potatoes) day in and day out because meat is such a luxury (\$90SGD for a chicken!) and schooling is certainly not accessible to all. It was in such circumstances where I realized the things I have taken for granted in Singapore for example using up way too much water (!), wasting food, and not cherishing the opportunity to learn as much as the children there do. It was also heartwarming to see that despite the lack of provision (probably just in our eyes), the villagers always seemed happy and grateful towards their simple way of living. 😊

Another main take-away from this expedition is the importance of working together as a team. For example during the refurbishment phase, what initially seemed like a tedious job (painting the entire exterior of the pre-school) became relatively easy because everyone played his or her part (and more!) to their best abilities. During this process I also learnt a lot about caring for others because I honestly felt cared for throughout the whole expedition i.e. “drink up guys!” / “everything okay there?” such assuring phrases and caring acts that kept the team motivated and united. China OE; an experience & a team that I will certainly cherish. 😊

Yours truly,

Nur Amalina 😊

2.

Our team, Muestra De Camellia went to Yunnan, China for our overseas expedition. We were tasked with continuing refurbishment of the preschool and conducting several lessons for the kids in the school.

Every time I think of the thousands of photos we took during our stay there, there is one photo that I will always picture in my mind first. Needless to say the photo is what I feel epitomizes the whole journey we went through.



The pure joy and innocence of the kids in the photo transcends any language. It was a really beautiful moment. It reminds me of the whole process we went through, from the initial planning stage to the Pre-Expedition activities to the actual expedition itself. Like how the kids in the photo are different in terms of their enthusiasm to be in the photo but still pose the same way for the photo, all of us in the team are different but yet we are all on the same page and did our best for the cause.

It also shows that good company is essential and it erases your worries. The kids enjoy each other's company during school hours. Rarely do I see a sad face around the school no matter what happens to them. Similarly, I am truly thankful to be part of this really awesome team. Everyone knows how to have fun without losing focus on the ultimate goal. The team is adaptable to shortcomings and we always pull through being stronger.

Another key takeaway is how contented the locals are. While we may feel that they can do with a lot more to have a better life, they certainly prove us wrong. Yes, there are hardships such as shortage of water but they never let it affect their happiness. They are always there for each other and they showed that happiness could be achieved in life if we do not expect so much. We can definitely learn a thing or two so as to be able to better appreciate how blessed we already are. That alone should be reason enough for us to be happy yet we Singaporeans are always complaining.

It is also humbling to see how excited and happy the kids are over the little things we took for granted. For instance, the villagers were all excited to be given a chance to dress up in our traditional costumes for their photo to be taken with the Polaroid camera. One lady was so amazed by how it works that she went around showing her photo to everyone she sees. It was really touching to see that we were able to make them smile with things that we overlooked in our everyday lives.

Our hosts deserve a mention for they truly go that extra mile to make us feel at home. At times, I feel as if we are feeling more comfortable than them even though we are just guests for 10 days. Our food, drinks and sleeping area are all taken care of. They make countless trips to the town that is far away just to ensure that we have enough resources. They may have little but they will give their all for their guests. Their selfless attitude should be the envy of many for even Singaporeans who are blessed in many ways might not do the same for our guests.

I know 10 days in the school is not long and there is only so much we could have done but looking at the photo, it comforts me to know that we did touch their lives one way or another. The kids may be too young to ever remember whatever we did or even our faces but we will definitely remember the experience, the lessons and their smile for the rest of our lives.

Abdul Fattah

3.



Overseas Humanitarian Expedition 2014: China

It was quite astonishing when I first realized what a critical role interpersonal interaction plays in the development of an individual. As a team who aimed to develop virtuous members through helping community, it has been an eye opening experience for us, to know how much we have gained and learned from this trip, in comparison to how much or little, we could ever hope to give in return.

From the first day we arrived at the village, we could truly feel the serenity and calmness away from the bustling city. Despite the absence of sophisticated technologies or complicated networking, the happiness and contentment of the children and villagers can sincerely be felt. They seemed to have much more satisfaction and gratitude with life. Being brought up in Singapore, it was quite obvious how pampered we are. With our abundant resources like water and food, the unmatched internet and over-hyped social media, it was initially quite hard for me personally to adapt to the changing environment. But through it all, I realized how this unavailability helped us to bond more with each other as a team, talking to real people rather than virtual ones, leading us to appreciate the living conditions in Singapore. It made me think how these kids can feel blessed, with just going to school.

While we were there, we had activities like refurbishment and education planned for the school. However, it was during the sport's day event that we truly had the chance to interact and enjoy ourselves with the kids. Although we faced some challenges due to the language barrier, but it was that very same day that we understood the fact that sharing happiness is not about language, or race, or culture. It is truly about the sincerity of the heart, and your willingness to go out of your comfort zone and try out different things, to ensure that we are able to help others and contribute to the community no matter how different we are. It was then that we could see the smiles on the children's faces and one, as wide if not more, on ours.

Marinah Mohamed

4.

At the start of our journey, when we were busy checking in our bags at the airport, a thought crossed my mind. To what extent can we impact the lives of the people whose home we are visiting? Reflecting back, as that thought crossed my mind again, I think I found my answer. It did not matter how we impacted the villager's lives, as personally, I felt that they impacted me to a larger degree than we did them. Their simple lifestyle of farming and living off their land, having to drive an hour to get to the nearest market or convenience shop really impacted me. The elders in the villager had to hike steep terrains to get to the mosque for prayers, but they did so at almost all five prayer times. Chores that are so convenient in Singapore require such a huge effort on their part. For example, to buy bottled water for us, they had to drive quite a distance. Amidst all that, I do believe that the villagers are one of the happiest and content groups of people I have ever had the opportunity to meet. It made me reflect on my life in Singapore, how material things don't seem that important and how I should be content with all I have and live simply. The villager's kindness and generosity also reminded me of how I should be kind to anyone that I have the privilege to meet.



Atikah

5.



The picture above was taken on one of the final days in Zhaotong. After days of hot sunny weather, I was thankful that the rain finally provided a refuge from the heat.

One of the things that I took for granted back in Singapore was the always ready water supply. Since Zhaotong is near a mountainous area, water is pretty scarce. One day the water supply was cut short and it was a hot day, so many of us were feeling the effects of the heat. But we could not boil any water for drinking, so a few of us went to collect half-full water bottles that had been left around after drinking. That made me realise my lack of appreciation for the water that we have. Another thing was hygiene and sanitation. It may seem small, but it definitely left an impact on me.

The act of gratitude is something I feel have been lacking in myself and I hope to build on. I have constantly been chasing for more, complaining about all my dissatisfactions, without looking back to count my blessings. I am very grateful to have been given the opportunity to experience this unforgettable expedition, alongside the company that I am very thankful for.

Amirah

6.

The Overseas Humanitarian Expedition trip to Yunnan, China, had been a beneficial experience for me to say the least. Firstly, it was my first time ever travelling overseas (KL, JB doesn't count!). Also, the trip has actually widened my perspective of what is the meaning of life. If there's one thing that can be concluded about life in Singapore, it is that we have been living in a secured bubble. All of our needs and necessities are provided for and within our reach. We are pretty much taken care of whether we realize it or not. However, looking at how the villagers lead their lives in China has definitely humbled me and made me realize how implicitly ungrateful we can be. Here in Singapore we have so much dissatisfaction about life that we may seem to be insensitive to what it is like living in other rural areas. That being said, the trip has definitely taught me a whole new meaning of the word 'appreciation'. After recovering from my illness, I may claim to be one that appreciates life. And when I thought I already am appreciating life to the fullest, the trip has definitely forced me to realign my appreciation for the life that I'm living right now.

Haiqal

7.

The journey to Yang Tzai Village has taught me a lot. I have experienced many new things over the course of the 2 weeks from learning a new language, culture, food. It has made me very grateful that I am able to experience a life that is very different from mine in Singapore where there is always a connection to the Internet and to other people electronically. In China, I had the opportunity to talk and interact with villagers and pre-schoolers. It was a nice change waking up every day to the nature. The view was spectacular. There were mountains and farms all around the village. And the fruits and vegetables that we ate came directly from the farms. Teaching at the preschool taught me about the importance of being passionate in what you are doing. The children there were enthusiastic about school and were always happy when we came in to teach them. They responded happily and took in what we taught them. Best of all through this journey, I have gained many new friends in my team and in China. This journey has definitely spurred me on to want to do more community projects be it locally or overseas. Before the trip, I had no idea what to expect but it was definitely a one-of-a-kind experience.



Nazira

8.

Assalamualaikum wr wb

I kinda don't know how and where to begin so let's see where this goes. Ok so when I got back I was bombarded with the expected 'How was OE?' 'How was China?' etc and I remember being stumped. A brief and unjustly put 'It was good' was all I could muster. Regardless of the length the 'goo...ood' was dragged it still didn't do justice to the blessing that was (and still is) my short trip there.

It still hasn't fully sunken in how grateful I ought to be for everything that I have and *can* have. May we all attain/surpass the level of gratitude, the ease with which contentment was felt by the lovely people we met in China.

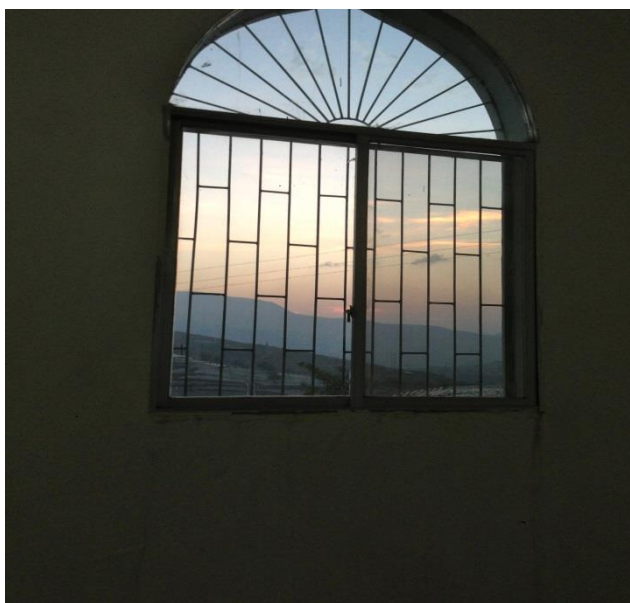
1) Water. It's amazing how they manage despite the scarcity of water. Our hosts were extremely hospitable and generous. It's humbling when I recall the lengths our hosts would go to to render the level of comfort that we received. Alhamdulillah and may Allah bless their lovely souls but they really did pamper us and at times I felt like we were a burden to them :(. Yet there was no trace of resentment or hesitation on their part to do what they did for us so sincerely and so selflessly. They really seemed so happy to do whatever they could to make us feel more than comfortable.

2) The children are *so* hardy. They fall down and get back up again (over and over) trademark grin still as wide as ever. The way they find so much happiness in the littlest and simplest things is really really really admirable. There was this group of children who were sifting through luggages of clothes that had been brought over for them and I still remember the look of absolute, unadulterated glee on their faces as they marveled over each and every item that was brought out. I mean I'm so fussy when it comes to clothes okay well everything and here they were being so genuinely happy regardless of the unsuitability of the clothes in terms of size or gender etc. Sigh :(There were these village girls who were giggling as they fashioned headscarves out of every piece of long fabric that they got their hands on. I miss them and the adorable and ever-so-smiley old folks. I miss all of them, really.

There's a peace that fills your heart when you're just sitting there in the courtyard awaiting dinner/evening prayers/whatever accompanied by a truly wonderful group of people (mustrada:)))), taking in the masterpiece that was the sky and the clouds and the mountains and the farming plains and the everything subhanallah I cannot even put this into words the serenity and contentment that enervates your very being. I miss China (and the team ofc). Sorely. May the ukhwah forged last till jannah.

Pictured is one (amongst manyyyyyyy) of the images I had the blessing of snapping as the sun was setting. :)

Aqilah



9.

Appreciate. This word that seems to be used all too often and becomes a cliché whenever one undergoes a humbling experience being in a foreign land. However, I would testify to the thousands of travellers who are 'enlightened' by their journey, and mine is no different from theirs. Truly, as mentioned by Imam Al-Shafi'i:

Leave your country in search of loftiness
And travel! For in travel there are 5 benefits,
Relief of adversity and earning of livelihood
And knowledge and etiquettes and noble companionship
If it is said that travelling brings humiliation and difficulty
And long journeys across deserts and toil and trouble,
Then death is better for a person than him remaining
In a humiliating land between traitors and enviers



The first thing that came to my mind about the China trip was the lack of water and appreciating the resources that we have. Being in Singapore, the issue of shortage of water seemed so far distant. However, during our stay at the village, we experienced bouts of water shortage and there was a time when our supply of drinking water was totally finished. Everyone seemed anxious and worried...or at least I was, and it really got me pondering on how blessed I am. Time and time again were we reminded about the importance of saving water, but no lesson could really plant this message into my head than the experience of not having any water at all. The second takeaway for me is to appreciate the company that I have. If there is one thing that I miss the most about throughout the expedition, is the time spent with all my wonderful and spirited team members. The joy, the sadness, the pain and most of all the laughter shared together is simply special. Having everyone to support and cover for each other, especially during those times when some of us are sick really bonded everyone together. This was observed through numerous instances whereby everyone was volunteering to cover each other's job, to

the point of pressing each other to rest out of their concern for the wellbeing of each member. Consequently, this picture best illustrated the strong camaraderie within the team despite all the challenges faced.

Arif Amir

10.

Being a member of a humanitarian group, my initial objective of this journey was to help the villagers and students in Yunnan and to leave an impact in their lives. However towards the end of our journey there, I realised that our roles were somewhat reversed. I believed that this expedition had left a deeper impact in my life instead. Through this journey, I have learned to understand both myself and my friends better. This experience allowed me to truly appreciate and treasure what God had provided me thus far. Being born in Singapore is already one of the greatest blessings that I treasure. During the 15 days we spent in China, we faced many challenges such as getting used to the climate there, the food there, the language barrier that we had and also the different living conditions. However, I believe that by overcoming these challenges, we emerged as stronger individuals. We learned to adapt in many situations and it is during these challenges that we can truly see the good in others. During the time that I spent in the village, I was very much impressed by the dedication of the teachers and principle to the school. I was informed that the principle had a Master's degree but yet is willing to be 'underpaid' as a preschool teacher because he was from the village. This had taught me that a job's pay is not always the most important factor when deciding a job and secondly we should never forget our roots, where we come from and the people who took care of us. This journey is definitely one of the most fruitful overseas trips for me thus far.

Haziq

11.

This China expedition trip has increased my ability to accept different views and trained me to be more dedicated to strive for success although faced with unseen difficulties. Thorough planning had been made before the actual expedition. A solid team consisting of 19 members were each given individual roles to complete the main objective. It was extremely important that each member did their job and did it well. During the expedition, we were supposed to do education and refurbishments. Almost for every task, there are different views and approach brought up by the team. We had to carefully select the best out of the few that has been brought up. It was good to argue the views given as it would help in choosing a better approach to handle the situation. Tension between team members may arise but we had to act professional and be able to control our feelings. However, sometimes even the best idea that we had chosen had flaws. From that, I had learnt that we must always have a back-up plan for anything that we do in case unforeseen circumstances happened. Moreover, with having alternatives to each act that we do, somehow we managed to overcome the problems faced. Last but not least, this whole trip had made me even stronger to pursue for true happiness and success in life.

Rahim

12.



What struck me most was however simple the lives of the children and villages were, they were contented with it. In Singapore, we are blessed with many modern facilities that we sometimes take for granted.

The picture portrays the daily occurrence of the children of Yang Tzai playing during their break. It is interesting to note that these children find contentment in playing amongst themselves. There was no ball, no mobile phones, no PSP to keep them occupied. Yet they seem genuinely happy.

This made me realised that contentment comes from within. It does not come from the excesses of life. It comes from how thankful and appreciative we are towards our lives however simple or complicated it may be. The trip to China has definitely been an eye opener. It has made me realised how blessed I am to have such a comfortable life in Singapore. It made me realised not to take things that are close to me for granted and to treasure them greatly. I do not believe that money can buy happiness. Happiness can only be bought by how grateful we are towards our life. This to me was the greatest takeaway from my two weeks in china.

Badruddin

13.

The two weeks in China has been an amazing experience for me, considering the fact that it is also my first time going overseas without my parents. One of the best memories I had in China was being able to make the young children there smile by playing various games with them. Even though the games that we prepared for them were very simple, they seemed to be genuinely enjoying themselves as shown in the picture above. The young children there taught me about the importance of being grateful for the things that we already have. Even though they have so little resources and means in the village, they still make do of what they have there and are still very grateful for it. Even though sometimes we have better resources, means and opportunities in Singapore, we tend to take things for granted and continue to ask for more. This puts us in a state of ingratitude and thus, unable to be happy with the things that we have now.



Diyanah

14.

As the saying goes, experience is the best teacher. This expedition to China has not only taught me lessons that can never be attained in a classroom, it has done much more than that. The entire journey and the team and I had gone through has opened our eyes to the big wide world beyond our safe tiny red dot. Even for those of us who have gone overseas for holidays, this experience carries more value than other trips. Out of the many, there are 2 main takeaways which I believed have impacted me most.

The first and most important one of them all is the true meaning of gratitude. It is hard for one to be thankful if one has never faced hardship. As a Singaporean, I have never had to face any circumstance where basic necessities are hard to come by. Simple needs such as portable water, food and proper sanitation are a given here in Singapore, but not in the village of Yang Tzai. There was a point in time where the school ran out of water, and the team ran out of portable water. At that time, everyone was feeling distressed. The thought of not having any water available to us never crossed our mind as we have taken it for granted ever since birth. Proper sanitation is even harder to find. Hygiene is not something that is known to the villagers of Yang Tzai and they are used to such a lifestyle. Unable to do

much about the lifestyle, many of us fell sick including me. Only then do we truly appreciate the clean environment in our home country. These lessons can never be truly learned and understood by one unless one is placed in the situation itself.

The second take-away is being content. Despite the little that they have, the villagers never put on a frown on their faces. Every single person that we have met were cheery and all smiles even when they were doing hard labour on the fields. Despite earning so little, living their lives day by day, earning only sufficient for the day itself, they were happy with their lives. Comparing them to us Singaporeans, we are miles away from what they have achieved. Despite having such a great life with all basic necessities met, we rarely smile to strangers and are rarely contented with what we have. We are always in pursuit of more and more while the Yang Tzai villagers are happy when given even the simplest of things. Despite all that we have, I believe that the Yang Tzai villagers are the ones who are richer than us simply by being content with whatever they have. That is a lesson which is hard but is necessary for us to learn.

The photo depicts the contagious smile that the villagers never fail to put on despite the harsh life which they have to live in. Those smiles have never failed to make my day and light up a spark within me, reminding myself that happiness comes from within us and not from others.



Hanif

15.

This picture pretty much depicts our journey. Firstly, the chilling water representing the relentless challenges we faced. Secondly, the team enjoying our time while standing firm together despite the challenges. It was an unparalleled journey of change and self-discovery for me. At first, I was a little apprehensive about this trip as it will be the first time I will be so far away from home and also for the longest duration. At the end of the trip I was feeling very blessed as I have grown into a better individual. The one thing that struck me hardest was the adage 'there's always a rainbow at the end of the storm'. There are many instances during the trip we were tested with challenges. One of the most testing challenges was having more than half the team falling ill. However, we stood firm together as a team and saw each challenge as an opportunity to grow.

Without these challenges that we face, we will not be able fully appreciate and taste the sweetness of joy. These challenges made me more appreciative of the little things in life and to be always thankful for what

I have. The experience I have acquired has definitely changed my perspective on work-life, my goals, aspirations, dreams and also success. It was certainly an invaluable experience that I will cherish forever.



Md Nur

16.

Having been to Yunnan and back to Singapore, I realised that the things we know about the world are only believable once we experience it ourselves. Things that happen at a particular place will happen and continue to happen with or without our knowledge. That is how small we are compared to the rest of the world. I have learnt that even though we are small, we are still able to bring about positive change through our efforts and contributions. At the place that we went, hygiene is not considered something important. By teaching the little children about hygiene, hopefully they will grow up seeing the importance of hygiene. Hopefully we were also able to brighten up the kindergarten with our murals. The climate there took time to be adjusted to. Many of us fell ill due to the difference in environment. This made me reflect that our health is something fragile and will not last forever and while we are still healthy, we should strive to contribute as much as we can to society. The breath taking scenery also calmed me to a certain extent. Being far away from technology as made me spiritually stronger with the desire to do even more good on this earth. It was a really fruitful and meaningful experience for me.



Ahmad Ghuzaili

Special Messages for Ms Mah:

- 1) Marinah - Thank you Ms Mah, for the wonderful opportunity you have given, for always guiding us and sharing with us the lessons of life. We have gained so much from this trip, spiritually, emotionally, and I pray that Allah blesses you and rewards you for all that you have done, for us and for the community, Insha'Allah. You have been a source of motivation and inspiration to us and we truly treasure this experience and your company. Thank you again Ms Mah :D
- 2) Atikah - Thank you for sharing your knowledge and I definitely have benefitted from the tazkirahs that were delivered by you. You are truly an inspirational woman and I am very thankful to have met and held conversations with you. Your passion and dedication to create a better environment for villagers in Yunnan has really inspired me. May we cross paths again, Insha'Allah.
- 3) Badruddin - Thank you for the help and guidance you gave us throughout the trip; from the recce to the actual expedition. I personally have learned a lot from your sharing. I am also at awe with the wealth of knowledge that you possesses. And you are neither afraid nor selfish to share. It was definitely beneficial. I pray that Allah grant you the wealth and health to continue this noble cause. May Allah reward you with the best of rewards.
- 4) Ahmad Ghuzaili - Thank you very much Ms Mah. This experience made me want to be a better Muslim. By observing my other members as well as the people I have interacted with, I realised that I am lacking in so many aspects. I returned to Singapore with the aim of deepening my knowledge of Islam and being able to contribute back to society.

5) Muhammad Arif – Thank you so much Ms Mah for all the help that you have provided us throughout the trip. This expedition truly has been an eye opener for all of us and it could not have been possible without your assistance and guidance. You are always willing to share as much knowledge with us through the Tazkirah, anytime and anywhere. I would also like to seek your forgiveness for any of our teams' shortcomings or wrongdoings that we may have done. We will always pray for your health and safety, and insya'Allah, may our paths cross again.