

October 21, 2006
Saturday

Borneo Bulletin
WEEKEND



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Features

Another fulbright adventure

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The Navy Pier. Photos: Vivi Jafian
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View from Sears Tower Sky Deck

In this week's issue I'm going to share with you my wonderful day trip experience to Chicago during the recent October break. It isn't actually the first time I've been to Chicago - well, that is if you count airport stops while coming from Brunei and leaving Nebraska, heading towards Indiana. But, this is definitely the first time for me in downtown Chicago. This trip was organised by the International Center of West Lafayette.

Chicago is located in the state of Illinois along the southwestern shore of Lake Michigan. Also known as the 'Windy City', Metropolitan Chicago or Chicago land has a population of around 9.4 million making it the third largest city in the USA.

8.00am: Boarded the bus at the International Center and by 8.30am we took off from West Lafayette. The weather was a bit cloudy, but it wasn't too cold. We were all just hoping that it

wouldn't rain since we were going on a boat trip as well. Jim, our driver, made the trip effortless with his humour and interesting insight of the places as we progressed through the journey out of Indiana and into the state of Illinois.

10.45am: A few miles after entering Illinois, we soon caught a glimpse of the Chicago skyline. It was truly spectacular, like a perfect postcard picture. We stopped at the Chicago Art Institute on Columbus, drive right across Grant Park to let off a few passengers who were not joining the boat trip to start their adventure in the city. After the brief stop, off we went along Lake Shore Drive, heading towards South Michigan Avenue to board our boat for the architectural tour.

11.30am: While waiting to get on board the open top boat, the sun was starting to come out (which is always a good sign and a relief for us all), but it was still very cold. Chicago certainly lives up to its reputation of being called the Windy City with a temperature of around 10 degrees Celsius and the constant blow of icy cold wind. The architectural boat tour along the Chicago River is simply magnificent. Not only did we get to see the skyscrapers of the city on both sides of the river, we were also given a brief history of the city and how it became the Chicago of today. Speaking of which, did you know that the name Chicago comes from the Native American word "Checagou" (pronounced as "She-ka-gan") which translates to "wild onion" or "garlic". Interesting stuff!

For those of you who want to visit Chicago, I highly recommend this tour. It is the best way to get snapshots of the skyscrapers. As a matter of fact, I think everyone went home with a neck sprain after the full 90-minute tour of gazing up at the amazing structures.

1.00 pm: After taking what seemed like a gazillion snapshots of the skyscrapers, we got off the boat and made our own way to explore the city. We walked along the vast shopping area of downtown called The Magnificent Mile. This is somewhat similar to what Fifth Avenue is to New York. The long strip of shops, boutiques, malls and exclusive hotels on both sides of the street is definitely a shopper's paradise. From Macy's to Neiman Marcus to Tiffany & Co all the way to Nike Town, Banana Republic to Gap and etc. There's absolutely everything for everybody.

Shopping put aside, our first stop was the John Hancock Observatory. The elevator took us all the way up to the 94th floor in just under 40 seconds - now that is fast! The Hancock Observatory offers Chicago's best views spanning up to 80 miles, four states and 360 degrees. It also boasts the city's only open air viewing area called the Skywalk, which is about 1000 feet above The Magnificent Mile. Venturing onto the Skywalk, you can feel the wind in your hair and hear the dynamic buzz of the city from 1000 feet in the air. But be warned - this is definitely not for those with acrophobia. But if you still insist, just don't look down.

3.00pm: After the amazing feeling of being high up in the air with the spectacular view of the

city, we wanted more. So, our second stop was the infamous Sears Tower - one of North America's tallest buildings. After watching a brief movie on the history of the tower, we went up to the Sky Deck on the 104th floor where we were offered an amazing view of the city and beyond. It is estimated that approximately 1.5 million tourists visit the Sky Deck each year. For such a super tall building, one may ask how they clean the 16100 bronze tinted windows. The answer to that is six robotic window washing machines mounted on the rooftop.

5.00pm: By this time, we were all exhausted. But there was one more stop to do - Navy Pier. Located on Lake Michigan, Navy Pier houses attractions which include an IMAX theatre, a Ferris wheel, miniature golf, Chicago Shakespeare theatre, cruises and numerous restaurants. We went on the 3D time escape ride, which was fun. By 6.30pm it was already getting dark and the city skyscrapers were slowly lighting up. And as a lot of people say, the best view is at night - it was indeed beautiful.

8.00pm: It was time to board the bus and head back to Lafayette.

Despite being a big metropolitan city, Chicago still has that mid-western charm which makes it unique compared to other big cities that I've been to like New York or Los Angeles. There was a whole lot more things to see and do in Chicago but we'll save that for more trips to come.



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