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LOCAL News

Diary of a Fulbrighter

By Vivi Jafiana Dato Paduka Hj Ja'afar, Indiana, USA



Celebrating Hari Raya with the Brunei community in McLean, Virginia.



On the Hollywood Walk of Fame.



At Capitol Hill.



A visit to Niagara Falls.

Hello again folks!

It has been a while since my last article. Time has really gone by quickly. We're almost approaching halfway through 2007 and what a semester it has been for me. This time round I am going to share my experiences during the first semester and

what is left of the second semester.

After what seemed to be a busy and long first semester from August to November, we eventually had a brief break for Thanksgiving. It was at this time I took the opportunity to visit San Francisco to meet up with my Fulbright friends on the West Coast. In addition to taking in the sights and sounds of San Francisco, I also visited Stanford University in Palo Alto and the University of California at Berkeley.

There, my friends brought me along for a Thanksgiving luncheon hosted by a professor at Stanford University. It was a wonderful experience to meet with Stanford's law students coming from all over the world. The professor even had an A - Z book of the countries of the world and had everyone sign it, and yes, Brunei was in there, although the book could have used a much updated picture of Kg Ayer.

The one-week break was a refreshing one because two weeks after that it was full on crunch time with late night studying for the finals. Coffee became everyone's best friend during that period.

With the finals over in December, winter break took effect, and with no more worries of exams and assignments, it was a perfect time for a long vacation. During that period, I visited four cities - Washington DC, Niagara Falls (in Ontario, Canada), Detroit and Los Angeles.

First stop was Washington DC, the capital of the United States of America. It was easy to get around DC with the metro (subway if you're in New York, the T if you're in Boston or the tube if you're in London). Main attractions like the White House, Capitol Hill, Lincoln and Jefferson Memorial, Georgetown, Spy Museum and the likes are easily accessible from downtown DC. Despite being in the winter month, the weather at that time was fairly pleasant. The highlight of my visit to DC was celebrating Hari Raya Aidiladha with the Bruneian community and their families in McLean, Virginia. It felt nice to be able to celebrate together when you're far away from home and the best part of it all? The food that was served.

My second stop was Niagara Falls in Ontario, Canada. There are actually two Niagara Falls, the American side (which is in Buffalo, New York) and the Canadian side (in Ontario). Once I arrived in Buffalo, I took the Niagara Airbus across the bridge that connects the state of New York with Ontario. Being one of the seven natural wonders of the world, it was truly a magnificent sight to behold. It was here that the realisation that it was winter began to hit me - it was extremely cold. So cold that it was impossible to walk around without a pair of gloves, a scarf and a winter hat.

In the daytime, the sight of the Falls was exactly like what you see on television or postcards - thick mist rising up like smoke and the constant sound of the gushing water. At night, you can see flashes of colourful changing lights all over the Falls.

Next, I was off to Detroit for the 2007 International Auto Show and a quick visit to the GM Headquarters. Being a car buff, this was something that I was looking forward to. It showcased new models from every carmaker that you can think of. At first, it was my soft spot for BMWs that had me going over to the showcase, but then it was the large number of concept cars all spread out in the auditorium that caught

my attention. Some looked good, some just plain weird and there were some that looked like cars coming out of the Jetsons cartoon.

My final destination was the City of Angels - Los Angeles, California. It was certainly nice to head over to a place where it was a little bit warmer than the three places that I had visited earlier, although it was still considered cold by California standards. My focal point in LA was to visit Universal Studios in Universal City, the Hollywood Walk of Fame and the Kodak Theatre where the Oscars are held. I also had the chance to tag along for a group tour of Movie Stars Homes in which I was shown the mansions where Hollywood's A-listers reside, from Tom Cruise to Madonna to Paris Hilton. During the tour, our bubbly driver kept telling us to keep a look out for any famous people because, she says, you never know who you might bump into when you're in LA.

Unfortunately, we didn't get to see any stars that day.

After the long vacation, it was time to get back into study mode for the second semester. By that time the winter weather was worsening. Daily temperatures in January were between -27C to -7C with snowfall every now and then.

In fact, we experienced a heavy snowstorm in February with 13 inches of snow. Classes had to be cancelled for the day since it was almost impossible to get around with such an amount of snow and ice on the roads. An abundance of cars got buried in the snow. Shovelling snow is fun, but shovelling 13 inches of snow in the freezing weather just to get your car moving - that is what I call hard labour.

As Spring arrived in Indiana, thankfully, the temperatures have rise above the 0C mark. However, we were warned of the unpredictable weather here, and low and behold, we had plenty of rain and also light snow flurries just after the official announcement of Spring. Lately, we received lots of sunshine, cool breeze and blooming flowers. Gone are the dark winter colours and in are the bright spring colours.

I swear even the squirrels and rabbits on campus have gone a little bit scrawny compared to their chubby size over the cold winter. With the sun shining brightly and comfortable temperatures, the campus is now filled with a sea of people just hanging outside, basking in the sunshine. It is as if the buildings have all tilted and spewed everyone out onto the outside grounds.

I am now in the last half of my second semester. With project deadlines to meet, seminars and the finals it is going to be yet another hectic month. There is also summer to look forward to where I will be attending the 2007 Fulbright Science & Technology Seminar in San Jose, California.

This will be the feature for my next article, so until then....