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UNV-HK Universities Volunteer Internship Program

IN *TIMOR-LESTE*



“What do you want to do after graduation?” That was the mostly asked question in my entire 4th year in university. As a business student, I had no idea I would be working for United Nations in a country that I have never heard of---Timor-Leste.

I consider myself as an adventurous person. I love exploring new things and places; so when I came across this program, I was fascinated. A chance to not only travel, but working and volunteering in some weird and new places across the world? That is a dream come true!

A love hate relationship with Timor-Leste



Unlike a lot of people, I did not do any research before choosing my duty station (work destination). "Timor-Leste? Never heard of it, but it sounds cool", went on google images, overwhelmed by its amazing coastlines and beaches, Timor-Leste became my first choice.



" So after 6 months, do you like Timor-Leste?" Honestly, I don't know. I remember when I first landed in Timor-Leste after 2 days of flight, the first thing that came into my sight was locals clinging on the bars of the airports,

staring each and every one coming out from the plane, it did remind me of The Walking Dead, but I kind of like it.

Timor-Leste is one of the world's newest countries. As a country just gained its independence from Indonesia, it is recovering from all the destructions and traumas. In Dili, capital of Timor-Leste, the infrastructures are old but decent, I would describe Dili as some rural towns in China; living in Dili reminds me of going back to my hometown in China, cozy, comfy and simple.





Simplicity

Life in Timor is simple; morning exercise with colleagues, walking to work, greeting gentlemen who sell *pulsa* (*phone credits*) on the road, avoid stepping onto mud, smiling at stray dogs/ chickens walking on your way, saying *Bomdia* (*good morning in local language, Tetum*) to everyone I met in the UN Compound. Simple, simple happiness.

Work beats you down? Time for a coffee break! Enjoy the coffee instead of stressing out, talk instead of gossiping, laugh instead of blaming. As cliché as it may sound, colleagues in Timor-Leste feel more like friends/ families than co-workers.



Obstacles

Before you think you can handle life in Timor, wait, I have to tell you 3 things: one, Timor-Leste's internet connection is not quite working; two, you may come across 1 or 2 sexual harassment everyday, and three, there is no public transportation after 6 pm.

I am not a phone/ Internet addict, but I would watch youtube and dramas during my spare time. In Timor, since it is impossible for you to load any videos, I struggled a bit on how should I idle my spare time away.

My suggestion for you in such circumstance would be, go back to simple! Put on sports shoes, grab a racket and get ready for an intense UN inter-agency badminton match! We

played badminton everyday after work! Trust me, you would be able to smash the shuttlecock real hard after 6 months of training!



Feeling exhausted after badminton? Gather some friends and enjoy a nice dinner with exceptional ocean view! Food in Timor-Leste is way better than what I expected(but I have to admit my expectation was pretty low and I am not a picky person in terms of food). When you have to live alone abroad, friends= families. I met so many

amazing people with the loveliest smiles. They inspired me with their perspectives and mindsets, they turned me into a better person,they took care of me when I was sick, they comforted me when I was undergoing mood swings, they saved me from dangerous situations, they made my life in Timor-Leste so much more interesting. Cheers to all of my friends!



Sexual harassment is widespread in Timor-Leste. Women walking on the street would get catcalled, sometimes,they may even experienced physical attack from men. “ *It is hard to survive as a female in Timor-Leste*” said by one of my local friends. In order to be able to protect myself, I joined the Judo class, practised some handy tackling skills and trained up my physical fitness. I no longer feel weak but strong, as a proud woman!



Besides judo, I also participated in diving courses and got my first diver license! Diving in Timor is amazing! The water is so clean that you can spot a fish 20m underwater; the corals are the most beautiful thing I have ever seen in my life, they are so unreal!

During the day, *mikrolet* is the main transportation. *Mikrolet* is actually a mini van which goes around the city in standardized routes. It is never fully-occupied; when all the seats are filled, new passengers will start sitting on each other's lap! *Mikrolet* stops operating after 6 p.m., then Taxi comes in handy. But be aware, there are 2 types of taxi, yellow and blue. Yellow taxi are generally considered as dangerous, woman should never get on one unless you knew the driver!



Blue taxi is safer as drivers are trained, but there are only few of them. But not to worry, there must be one/two cool and nice friends who can always give you a ride!

Working as Communication Officer in UNFPA



I was employed as the communication officer in the United Nations Population fund (UNFPA); 5 days a week, from 0800-1730, you may need to work over time. It is pretty much like any job. The former communication officer left the organization a month after I started working. It was quite a challenge to take over her role in just a month time. I was so frustrated at the beginning since I did not only have to deal with ad-hoc work, but also some spontaneous job requests from local newspaper. I was completely clueless until my supervisor sent me to the APRO communication workshop in Bangkok. As a newcomer, it was such an honor to be given such a chance to go overseas and learn. I truly feel like an individual whose skills are treasured and trusted. I gained so many inspirations from communication experts from all around the world. So when I got back to Timor, I initiated several communication projects on my own. It was difficult as I do not have any previous references or templates, but I enjoyed seeing how my creativity and ambitions turned into feasible plans and achievement. The more I initiate, the more opportunities I discover.



UNFPA works hard to *deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled*. For UNFPA in Timor-Leste, we focus on promoting safe sexual and reproductive health (SRH), maternal health and comprehensive sex education (CSE). During the assignment, I participated in every project of UNFPA. I generated human interest stories on SRH and maternal health, I promoted CSE during the UN Day, I also assisted in the Census team in doing data analysis!

"I am going to send you to as much places as possible", said by my supervisor in my first week of work. And he did! Besides Bangkok, I was sent on several field trips across the countries.

Municipalities (districts) outside Dili reveal the real Timor-Leste. The infrastructures are far lacking behind. People's life is difficult. I always had to work and live in new environments, it was quite a mental challenge for me at first. Listening to real stories of how mother died from pregnancy due to a lack of maternal knowledge/ medical support is always heart breaking. These mothers and infants would not die if they are born in developed places.



I love my work and my team. I like the feeling I got when I know I am doing something good for the world, making the country a better place, making a better life for every girl in the country.

Some of you may think communication does not play a main role in humanitarian actions, but it is essential. Seeing my human interest stories got published and receiving all the comments, I knew I am spreading the messages out, and by spreading the message out, I am helping to attract more donations and volunteers. Sometimes, there might be too much work and work would stressed me out, but when I thought of the impacts of my work, I am proud and energize.



Journey comes to an end

My life in Timor-Leste is not easy, but it is also some best parts of my life. I miss the country a lot. I grew a lot as an adult, a professional, a woman and a global citizen. Thank you for the opportunity and support offers by the Agency of Volunteer Services.



"Timor-Leste never leave you, it stays with you", Obrigada barak.