

My Amazing First YEAFEO Experience

YOUNG ENGINEERS SECTION



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I had always wanted to take part in IEM's activities, especially those organised by the Young Engineers Section (YES). But because of work commitments and other reasons, I could only join in the activities from last year. Work could be so hectic and I felt grateful to be able to take a break finally.

In December 2012, I attended the 19th Young Engineers of the ASEAN Federation of Engineering Organisation (YEAFEO) Conference in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The trip was organised by YES KL.

We searched for affordable hotels, places to go and things to do. I was extremely excited about the trip. Cambodia was one of the countries on my bucket list of places to visit and now I was getting a chance to actually cross it off that list. Besides, the many wonderful and unforgettable experiences as told by members of the YES committee who had attended the previous YEAFEO, only added to my excitement and eagerness for the trip.

A month before our departure, I surfed the internet to get as much information as I could about Cambodia, including places of interest, culture and of course, the local delicacies. Our itinerary was planned by the YES Committee members, but that didn't stop me from doing my own little research to satisfy my curiosity.

I was told that the Malaysian YEAFEO delegation this time would be much bigger as it would include participants from YES KL, YES Penang, YES Sarawak, YES Miri and the UTHM IEM Student Section. I didn't think it was possible to get more excited than I already was, as I'd never met

any of the members from other YES branches. Making new friends was one of the many things I looked forward to on trips like this.

The official event would only start on Monday, but most of us decided we'd travel earlier and arrive on Saturday, just for a chance to take in the sights and sounds of Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. We visited many attractions, such as the Independence Monument, a silk weaving factory, Choeung Ek Memorial (The Killing Fields), night markets (shopping was inevitable), Russian Market and Central Market. We managed to do all these in one day, Sunday, so you could imagine what a hectic day it was.

Absorbing the history and culture of the Cambodians was an amazing experience. The one place that touched us all deeply was The Killing Fields. Some of us couldn't help but shed a tear to learn about the hardships the Cambodians suffered during the Pol Pot era. Words could not express how grateful I was to be living in Malaysia during those rough times and I felt great empathy for the Cambodian people's sufferings. I was also a little awestruck by how strong they were as they had managed to overcome all obstacles that life had thrown their way. Not only that but they also came out stronger than ever.

When the Conference started on Monday, everyone came dressed in formal attire to greet friends from all over ASEAN and other neighbouring countries. I was one of the early birds to go down for breakfast! After I registered at Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeetra hotel and while waiting for the meeting to start, I met so many people from many



YES delegates at the Phnom Penh Independence Monument



YEAFEO delegates on a river cruise on the Mekong River



YES committee in front of Angkor Wat

different countries and backgrounds. I was so overwhelmed by everything that it left me speechless at times. It was an indescribable feeling to see no social, communication or other barriers between the participants of different nations and engineering backgrounds – whether they were from Myanmar, Hong Kong, Japan, Cambodia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand or Vietnam.

Everyone was enjoying themselves. It was like a breath of fresh air for me to feel the carefree aura that filled up the room. So I relaxed, opened my mind, and socialised with the other participants. I wouldn't be surprised if, at the end of the day, they all thought I was extremely talkative! I tend to talk a lot when I'm having a wonderful time.

After the networking session, the conference started and participants were separated into different working groups, regardless of their background. It was a smart move and definitely helped everyone to get to know each other better. I participated in the YEAFEO meeting where Young Engineers leaders from ASEAN and neighbouring countries came together to share their organisations' activities. We discussed issues related to young engineers, exchanged ideas and shared them with participants of different countries. It was very enlightening to see how passionate and concerned all these leaders were about current issues facing young engineers in the field.

In between the meetings, technical presentations and technical visits, our Cambodian friends managed to arrange a river cruise along the Mekong River for some of the Japanese, Myanmar, Hong Kong and Cambodian delegates. We brought along some packed *roti canai* and curry from the Malaysian restaurant in Phnom Penh. Our new friends loved it and ate it all up in record time.

After that, everyone started to loosen up and we introduced them to some childhood games from Malaysia, such as *Chap Kali Chap*. It got everyone excited and brightened up the mood in the boat. To add to that, we had beautiful, clear weather that night. It was the perfect ending to a perfect day.

On the final night, we attended the closing ceremony of CAFEO 30. The chairman had provided 2 songs for us to in advance so we could practise before the ceremony. The chosen songs were "Satu Malaysia" and "Go YES", an adaptation of the popular song by A-HA, Go West. For our performance, our group, including the seniors of IEM, went on stage with a small Malaysian flag in hand, and sang.



A group photo after the closing ceremony

At first, I was a bit apprehensive about going on stage to sing in public. However, I could feel that this was very different from wedding karaoke sessions and soon, my shyness melted away to be replaced by a carefree side of me that hardly ever surfaced. It was truly an unforgettable experience, from the performances of each and every country to the fun "train-ride" around the ballroom, as everyone within the ASEAN region and its neighbouring countries were united, regardless of language, race and religion.

After the official YEAFEO event, some of us had arranged to travel to Siem Reap together with the Hong Kong delegates. If you don't know where that is, it's the site of UNESCO's World Heritage Site, the famous Angkor Wat. We went to Tonle Sap (a lake), ate local Cambodian food and of course, visited Angkor Wat. The sunrise and sunset over at Angkor Wat was unlike any beautiful scenery I had ever seen, and it took my breath away.

Overall, the trip was, for me, a dream come true. This opportunity that YES had given me allowed me to make so many friends whom I would never forget. Already I am looking forward to attending the next YEAFEO, which will be in Indonesia. Yes, I have bought my ticket to Jakarta! Have you? Well, what are you waiting for? Go grab a ticket NOW! I'll be looking forward to seeing you there! ■



YEAFEO friends at the main entrance to Angkor Wat