

## **A Year in Malaysia**

After a year of tireless fundraising and a 4 day residential training course on the Isle of Coll, I was finally prepared for my departure to live in Malaysia for a whole year on the 20th August 2015.

I spent my year volunteering in a government secondary boarding school called MRSM Mersing in the South of Malaysia, around 6 hours away from the capital, Kuala Lumpur. At the school, there were 664 students aged 12-17, who all boarded. My role there was as a substitute English teacher, so I covered classes when teachers were absent or in meetings. This meant my number of classes varied each week and I had the chance to teach every class at some point during my year, making it much easier to get to know all of the students rather than just certain classes. At first, I found teaching quite difficult because I had to plan lessons without knowing the level of the students and having very little training and experience, but after a few weeks I was finding it much easier. As the weeks went by, I was finding it easier to come up with fun ideas for my lessons to keep the students interested and make my lessons enjoyable.



I lived in the warden apartment in the girls hostel with my two partners. Living in the girls hostel was a great opportunity for us to form strong relationships with the students and being there 24/7 meant that we were able to help them whenever they needed us. We became much more than just English teachers – we became more like friends, or even siblings, to the students.

Outside of the classroom, we were able to get involved with lots of extra-curricular activities. I really enjoyed joining in with the basketball team in their training sessions and helping with the English Debate club. I started my own Drama club, which had around 50 members. I ran drama workshops and games once a week and nearer the end of my time at MRSM Mersing we put together

our own production of 'Peter Pan'. We also went to some of the inter-MRSM competitions including Language Week where our school competed against 12 other MRSM schools in English and Malay competitions such as Public Speaking and Storytelling.



One of my favourite memories from my time at MRSM Mersing is activity week. All of the students were split up into four different teams of different colours and throughout the week the four teams competed in different competitions such as cheerleading, a marching parade and lots of different sports competitions. I was in the blue team and competed against the other teachers to earn points for the team and I also worked with the cheerleading teams on their chants and routines. Both of the blue cheerleading teams won the cheerleading competition and at the end of activity week we came second overall. I thought it was great spending the week with all of the teachers and students together having fun.



Volunteering overseas for a year was an incredible experience and I gained so much from it. I have made many friends for life and I have learned so much about a completely different culture and religion. By learning so much about another way of life, I have also learned how important it is to never judge someone by their religion or culture, especially with all of the bad media surrounding Islam at the moment. 96% of the students at MRSM Mersing were Muslim and they are the most caring, kindhearted people I have ever met. I also gained independence and matured so much from my experience. Not only did I become integrated into the school life but I was also fortunate enough to be able to spend time with some of the students and their families at home celebrating some of the festivals such as Eid Mubarak (the end of Ramadan, the fasting month). I also learned a new language and I have grown in confidence. I feel much better prepared for whatever the future holds for me because of the experience.

The hardest part of the whole experience was leaving everyone when my time at the school had come to an end, however it was not “selamat tinggal” (goodbye), it was simply “jumpa lagi” (see you soon) as I know it will not be long before I return to my new second home.

