TIMOR LESTE IMMERSION PROGRAM

TIMOR LESTE IMMERSION EXPERIENCE

A month ago yesterday sixteen Year Ten students were at the airport at five in the morning, too excited to be tired. We were ready to leave for a ten day trip of a lifetime. After our first night in Darwin, we flew out the next morning and reached the island of Timor Leste as the sun was rising.

We spent the first day exploring Dili, the capital city, and learning some of tumultuous and inspiring history of Timor. We then began the eight hour car ride along the coast and through the mountains, to the isolated community of Marobo. As we drove past children would run towards us, waving and calling enthusiastically, ‘malai, malai!’ which means ‘foreigner’ in Tetum, one of the many languages used in Timor.

Over the next seven days the small community was to become like a second home for us; it was a place where we were welcomed by everyone, whom we built strong friendships with. Our days were filled with walks to places in the community, teaching English and Australian history at the local school and talking with the students from an all English speaking school, called SOLs.

Although we mostly didn’t speak the same language, we communicated through smiling, laughing and games. We got to know the SOLs students, who were around the same age as us, and they told us their stories, which helped us learn about the Timorese culture. One student said, ‘I asked my parents if they could pay for me to go to SOLs and they just cried. They didn’t have enough money to send me.’ He went on to say that his brother had paid for him. This was just one story that highlighted how the Timorese work together. There was a strong desire to learn emanating from the Timorese, as knowledge and education is the key to accessing wider opportunities in Timor. One of the students at SOLs commented when talking to one of our students, ‘we have different skin colour, come from different places, but we have the same potential.’ This passion for learning is one that we all wish to continue with in our studies now we are home. Although we aim to build a library for the community, which would be the only one in the whole district, the trip wasn’t solely focused on raising funds. We concentrated on building a friendship between our Hobart community and the Marobo community, and finding where the village needed support. Hours were spent crowding around a guitar, learning and singing both Timorese and English songs and dances. Games from Eddie Rice Camps were played with the local children.

Now that we are home, we are still committed to continuing our connection with Marobo and raising funds for the Library. The Timor Leste Immersion group would like to thank everyone for the items, whether it was stationery or money, that you have contributed to the project and convey how grateful the people of Marobo are. They already look forward to next year’s students coming to the village.

The situation of the people of Timor has opened our eyes to the realities of life in developing countries and the rich opportunities for service, mutual learning and growth in starting a school partnership with the Marobo community. Although they may not have the same opportunity for education or material wealth as we do, we found that the people were incredibly happy and united in doing good for their community. We taught them some English, but really, we were the ones who learned so much ourselves on the trip. We’ve seen a new way of living life, one that we hope to practise now we are home, so the lessons from Timor live on.

Rachel Hay on behalf of the Timor Leste 2013 Immersion Program Students