

Malaysia: January- July 2009 - by Hannah Bush

'So don't be afraid to make mistakes, stumble & fall, because most of the time, the greatest rewards come from doing the things that scare you the most.'

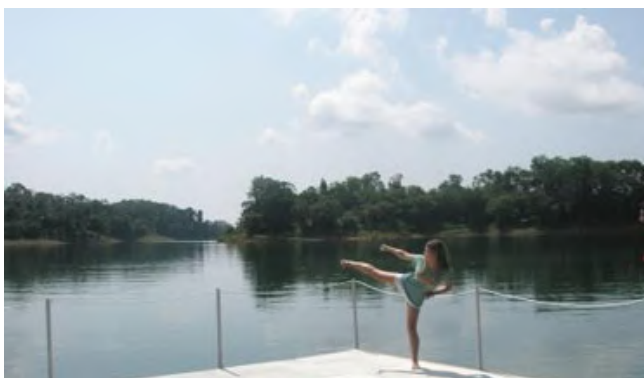


Going to Malaysia had been something I had wanted to do since I had first started Taekwondo 5 years ago. I'd read Mr Lear's article and Tim Skinnners and fell in love with the idea; travelling to a foreign country and doing something I love every single day, training harder than ever before and pushing myself to be as good as I could be. It sounded fantastic. After my A levels I started to make plans to go in my gap year, I spoke to Master Tan and with Mr Lear and in November when I booked my flights a large part of excitement turned into nerves. I felt very scared about going to the other side of the world without my friends or my family- it seemed such a long way away! In the weeks leading up to the 17th of January when I was set to leave I wasn't sure I even still wanted to go. Deep down I knew I did but I was so scared!! It turned out that pushing myself to do something that really scared me, took me way out of my comfort zone and away from everything I knew was the best thing I had ever done. The six months I was there were six of the happiest I've ever had, I made wonderful new friends, saw beautiful places, trained harder than I could ever imagined & best of all became part of an amazing family; the vision Malaysia family.



I had thought a lot about how great this trip would be, what I stood to gain from it and what it might do for me but I never thought I would get as much out of it as I did. It really has been a life changing experience.

The first few weeks when I arrived were tough, I was ill, missed home a lot and training was hard, despite knowing master was going easy on us! I found it hard to motivate myself at times and six months seemed like an awfully long time to last out. I had a great time though, enjoyed the new places and faces and even got to see in Chinese New Year with Masters Family. But then I had a call from my mum saying my nanna was ill and I decided to go home to see her. She died shortly after I got home but I was pleased I had got back in time to see her. A few days after the funeral I went back to Malaysia and somehow I felt a lot better this time. I knew where I was going and what was in store for me. I was so up for the tough training and ready to get stuck into it all. It was a difficult time but being able to focus solely on training as hard as I could was helpful. By the end of each day I was too tired and too content to think very much about anything else. For me it was a good time to be there. I felt motivated and determined and enjoyed the improvements I could see beginning to appear in my Taekwondo.



Whilst staying in Malaysia I lived with Charles. Many of the others who had been out before have also stayed there with him and I had heard a lot about him before I left... Charles is a funny man, he is the size of a sumo wrestler with shoulder length wispy grey hair which he often has tied in a plait, most of the time he wears a blue sarong tied around the waist and that is all. He is however a very hospitable man and as long as you can get past waking up to find Charles asleep on the living room couch wearing just his sarong, then getting on with him is very easy. I also lived with two boys, Callum and Armaan... And we all had to share one bathroom. Luckily Callum is a self confessed 'clean freak' so the bathroom, most of the time, was bearable. The heat however wasn't. Living at Charles' was like living in a sauna and no matter how many times we asked for a swimming pool to be installed in the garden or air-con in our rooms somehow they never materialised. I had a small room to myself and Callum and Armaan shared a larger room next door to mine. I was lucky to have the smallest room and the largest fan because although it sounded like the room was about to take off it was marginally cooler than theirs... even then however I never once needed my sheet at night and each morning I woke up soaked with sweat (nice). Sleeping in the heat was one thing- now try training in it.

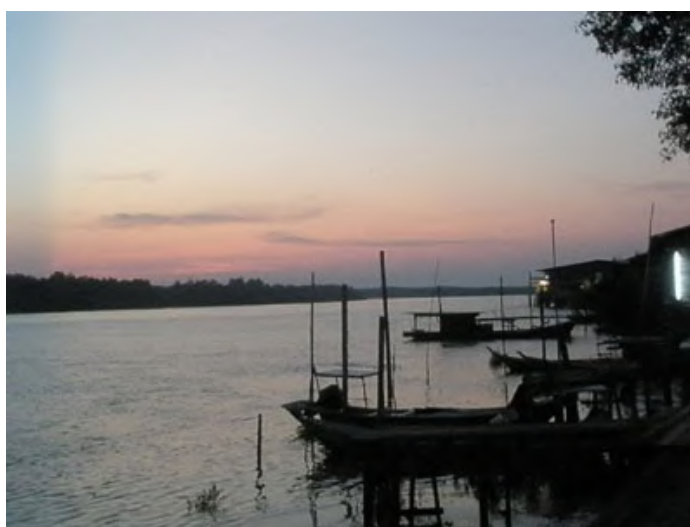
Training was awesome. I loved it. Even the bits when I felt like absolute rubbish and was getting beaten up by black belts or made to do another hundred front snap kicks because mine didn't 'snap' enough. Master's training was unlike training I had done before. After a few months, once I had got used to the training my day went something like this; I woke up early about 630 and went to the park to run before it got too hot (unless it was a Wednesday in which case we all ran in the evening) I'd run about 10laps each about 1km and then I'd go back home have a cold shower and go back to bed until about 12oclock.

Master would then pick us up and take us for lunch. We ate at all sorts of amazing places but I'll talk about the food later... after lunch most days we would go and help teach at the international schools where I was able to help teach 5year olds their yellow tag patterns. This was one of my favourite things to do. It took patience and enthusiasm and often it was frustrating but whenever one, who seemed completely and utterly hopeless at first, learnt a pattern it was a great and rewarding experience. I was so proud when one of the little boys I had been teaching graded to yellow belt! After teaching the young ones we'd go the secondary school where there was a gym, we trained a bit before the class started and joined in with the class after that. These classes were often filled with fundamental movements. We'd practise low blocks and middle punch, front kick, turning kick, side kick over and over again in front of the mirrored wall.

I don't know how many kicks I must have done in that gym but it must have been millions. In-between master would have us doing sets of sit-ups and push ups, sit ups in sets of a hundred and press ups in sets of forty. Some days we'd do close to eight hundred sit ups.



After practising fundamental movements we'd go through ALL our patterns and practise bits we weren't so good at. For me this was often the jumping techniques in Choong moo which I formed a love hate relationship with in time. We'd end the lesson with sparring, most times I was paired with a boy called Dylan, and I think he was only about twelve but he was good fun to spar and especially towards the end of my trip got increasingly good at hitting me. I think I have him to thank for teaching me to move around more when sparring. Before we left the gym master had us doing various kicking combos on the punch bag teaching us the importance of timing. Jump- back thrust and downward kick on a swinging bag is tough!! Monday was the killer as some days after this class we headed over to Lyonel's university class and trained for an hour there doing yet more press ups and more patterns. By the end of this class we'd be shattered and be dropped home for a quick bite to eat and if we were lucky a power nap before being picked up by Miss Cheang who took us each week to the arena classes.



The arena was a large hall used for badminton and social functions. On Monday and Thursday nights we came here to train. Despite having open sides it was so unhearably hot inside and training was twice as hard. A lot of the class were black belts of a very high standard they all trained hard

Since it was so unbearably hot most of the training was done in the shade. Most of the classes were black belts of a very high standard, they all trained hard and hit hard. I was usually just glad to survive it! Training with so many black belts really helped a lot, it raised the bar higher and higher all the time as you always had someone to watch and to see how it was done. Before class it was expected that we all warmed up a bit ourselves, not difficult in the heat and made sure we were stretched. Again we'd start with fundamental movements in-between press ups, crossing up and down, leg raising and '45 each side' - Master didn't have to explain that one we all got to know pretty fast what it meant... Then we would start at the beginning, saju magki, saju jurigi all the way up to your highest pattern. I found making it to Choong moo hard, think of the 5th degrees!! The last half an hour was always sparring practice; free sparring but only using downward kick or reverse turning kick, free sparring but only with your hands, one side attacks only whilst the other side moves... always moving around. Do not get hit.



Pairing up was always interesting. In the beginning Master let us choose our partners but soon he was putting us with more senior grades to see how we fared. Usually I was either paired with Elaine, nicknamed the crazy boxer who really wasn't scared to come charging in and punched as hard I'm sure as most of the boys. So sparring her was pretty terrifying!! If I wasn't with Elaine I was sometimes with Michelle. When we weren't sparring she was like a big sister, she looked after me and took me out shopping etc so when I first sparred her I thought she might go easy on me especially as I am a black tag and she is a fifth degree. I was thinking this thought as she winded me with a lightning fast turning kick, back kick combination. 'No mercy!' I learnt that pretty quickly too.



Classes would end at about 1030pm and we would all (most of the time) leave on a high. Training done with for the day meant one thing, dinner time :) Food in Malaysia is like no other place I've visited. You can eat anything. Chinese, Curry, Malay food, Thai Food, gorgeous fruits, huge crabs and the nicest duck ever, anything you like!! And it's not only the different types of food or the miniscule amount it costs to eat that is amazing it's the places you eat at. Be it breakfast, lunch or dinner, 12noon or 3am there's always somewhere good to eat especially if in the company of master. I could write forever about the food but you really have to see it to believe it; I've been home months now and I'm still having cravings for even just a teh tarik!

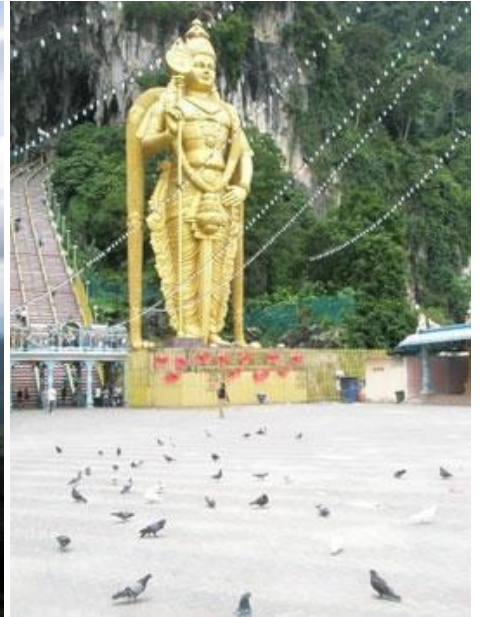
I timed my trip pretty well as I managed to fit in a million more things than I thought I could and master went out of his way to make sure we all saw as much of Malaysia as possible. I visited China in February, where I visited temples and gardens, night markets and old Chinese towns, shopped- A LOT and tried lots of new foods. It was really good fun and it surprised me how much I like the places I visited as china had never been somewhere I had ever thought of visiting.

In between training we did two trips to Thailand where on the first time we visited a cowboy town right on the border. We did a LOT of shopping!! (A reoccurring theme!) Ate lots of great food (another reoccurring theme) and visited Bah's house. Bah is Lyonel's student from his university class and she invited us to her Durian farm where her family and some friends from her village cooked us a traditional Thai meal- it was such an experience. The next day was Mrs Tan's birthday so there was cake, birthday celebrations and a fantastic meal at the end of the day. After which we went to a bar to listen to some live music and for Armaan to cheat at a very competitive game of pool against Master and Lyonel...The other trip to Thailand was to visit what used to be a communist camp. It was really interesting to see how they had lived and the lengths they had gone to survive.





In Malaysia it's self we did a trip into the jungle; had to SOS over the walkie-talkies to be rescued when miss Cheangs car broke down, drove through a huge river and went rock climbing up the river right through the jungle before having a BBQ and lots of photos posing on the rocks. I also visited KL's bird park, China town, the Bateau Caves, Various temples, The Petronas Towers, ate at the revolving restaurant up the KL tower and even went to a Malaysian wedding!! One weekend I went to the Perhentian Island which were beautiful and the water so clear for snorkelling I saw most of the cast from finding nemo. AND!! In June we spent a while just travelling around Malaysia which was tons of fun too. By this time Armaan's sister had joined us out here and Callum had gone home. We spent a few nights at Lake Awana which is beautiful and staying in a five star hotel just about topped it off. We then went on to the coast where we stayed in another amazing hotel, made sandcastles on the beach, went banana boating, ate the worlds nicest stuffed crab and best of all got to release baby turtles into the sea and watch a mother turtle lay her eggs. Amazing! On the way home master de-toured for Durian and to show us the elephant sanctuary something I had really wanted to visit and which I loved! I really was well and truly spoilt whilst out there!



To top my trip off I also got the chance to compete in three competitions whilst I was there. It was a great chance to practice what master had been teaching me, try some new things out and gain some valuable experience on the mats. I did 3 competitions and came home with 16 medals... a good ending to an amazing 6 months!!

Coming to Malaysia is something I will never forget. Master Tan and his family have taught me so many valuable lessons and given me the chance to have some truly amazing experience. It had its lows, where I missed home or got utterly frustrated with training but I wouldn't change any of it for the world. The tough bits taught me patience and made me stronger and the rest of the time? Well I loved every minute!! I could write forever about those 6 months but really you've got to experience it yourself to properly understand. It's a unique feeling when you achieve something you didn't think you could and out there I was constantly surprising myself with what I could do. Simple things made me very happy; constantly when I was there I had bets with Lyonel and Master as to how many laps I could do running. When I got there I could run 3 laps and I left being able to run 16. Lyonel and Master say I should have done 20! (Ha ha) but I felt like I'd won the London marathon or something- feeling proud is a great feeling and I felt proud a lot of the time I was there. I think most of all though, I will miss being part of Masters Vision Malaysia family. You are constantly bombarded with insults, shouted at to train harder and faster, and get in the ring with any of them and they'll happily knock you for six but they are some of the most loyal, utterly hilarious and brilliantly talented people you will ever meet. It's an awesome family to be a part of and one I hope I'll keep for life.