

Alums Win Essay Contest on Indonesia in NZ



Emma's photo in the 1998-99 Middle School Yearbook

Allison Scott and Emma Nichols attended JIS at Pattimura and the Middle School in the mid-1990s, but did not know each other until they met by winning an essay writing competition in New Zealand that was sponsored by the Indonesian embassy in Wellington. Allison and Emma won an all expenses paid trip to Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Bali and took the time on their journey to visit JIS last December. Allison then wrote to us by email about the contest and their subsequent return to Indonesia:

Please tell us about the essay contest.

The Indonesian embassy in New Zealand ran an essay writing competition organised by the Ambassador to New Zealand, Amris Hassan. Each entry was a 3,000 word essay on one of four topics. Emma and I both chose to write on "What fascinates me most about Indonesia." The prizes were awarded at the Indonesian Independence Day celebrations in Wellington. I live in Auckland and was flown down by the embassy to receive my award.

How did you meet Emma?

Emma and I first met purely by coincidence at the ceremony when we received our awards. Although we both attended JIS we were at different campuses at different times and I left Indonesia before Emma made it to the Cilandak campus. After I heard someone say to her that she must be happy she was finally getting to go back, I asked Emma if she had been to Indonesia before. She said she used to live there and had attended Pattimura. We've been great friends ever since though unfortunately we live in different cities.

What was it like to come back to JIS?

I know that for both Emma and I going back to JIS was one of the most rewarding parts of the trip. It was great to go back to Pattimura and relive all the great times I had there over three years. We were both 'Pattimura Singers' and so we climbed onto the old stands and posed like Mrs Wrensen taught us so many years ago. For Emma, Cilandak was more special as she spent more of her time at that campus. We really appreciated the way everyone treated us at JIS, the staff and everyone we spoke to and especially Beth were lovely. When we were at JIS it was like going back in time, there is no other way to describe it other than wonderful. There is no place like JIS. We were both lucky enough to catch up with some former teachers so that was good fun also.

The following are excerpts from Allison and Emma's winning essays:

What Fascinates Me Most About Indonesia
By Allison Scott

Indonesia has fascinated me for 13 years. At age eight, while attending Jakarta International School, my class was asked to create a pretend travel diary through the archipelago which formed our adopted home. The project was designed to stimulate our interest in Indonesia and as our minds travelled through the various islands, learning about each, I realised just how appropriate Indonesia's motto 'Unity in Diversity' is. During my three years in Jakarta, and on subsequent trips to Indonesia, I saw many things which impacted upon me, but none more so than the diversity which Indonesia lives and copes with every day.

As part of the curriculum during my schooling in Jakarta, students were placed in *Bahasa Indonesia* classes. We learned songs to help us remember the names of the days of the week in Indonesian. Classes were fun; it was always entertaining to watch new students attempt to wrap their tongues around the long vowel sounds and the rolling 'r' required by the language.



Allison (front, center) in third grade at Pattimura. 1993-94, Mrs. Nava's class.



Emma and Allison with their music teacher, Gina Rosbrook, while visiting Pattimura.

Perhaps the most famous and certainly one of the most interesting of Indonesia's cultural aspects, is the music of the Javanese *gamelan*. Learning to play the giant brass instruments in elementary school was, for me, an entrancing and fun experience. The music my class produced was a poor imitation of a true *gamelan* orchestra, but to us it sounded beautiful. In music class we also learned about another unique musical practice in Java, playing the bamboo *angklung*. The music we produced in class, playing the *gamelan* and the *angklung*, were not equal to the alluring sounds both instruments produce when played properly, but it was a delightful experience and introduced me to the captivating traditional music of Java.

During a JIS school trip to Yogyakarta, we learned a traditional Javanese dance. Later that day we played the *gamelan* and enjoyed a Ramayana performance. During the same trip we visited Bali, watched a *kecak* dance and attended a Balinese cremation festival. Each of these experiences was compelling and fascinating, though extremely different from each other. The very fact that such varied festivities and performances co-exist demonstrates the diversity which encompasses Indonesia.

Batik is yet another of Indonesia's diverse and alluring traditional cultural arts. In art class at JIS, I gained an insight into batik, a very interesting traditional art, by creating my own unique piece. Each class member designed and made their own wax stamp, or *cap*. Then we used our *cap* with wax to imprint the design upon the cloth and later dyed it. The result was a unique piece of batik which today is proudly displayed in my New Zealand home. Indonesia is diversity. It shares such varied language and cultural practices and architectural and geographical wonders. Indonesia stole my heart as a child and continues to hold it. Each region in Indonesia which I have visited has been unique and interesting its own way, and I intend to see and experience more of this delectable nation.

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Allison is now at the University of Auckland, New Zealand

What Fascinates Me Most About Indonesia

by Emma Nichols

As a little seven-year-old blonde New Zealand girl my eyes were opened and my senses overwhelmed with the exotic sights, sounds, and smells that were Maliaboro street in Yogyakarta. As the years passed, my appreciation for Indonesian culture and her people grew as I did, each day I learned something new about this rich tapestry of a nation. I grew to love those Indonesians around me, both my age and my parents' age, and the richness of the history and culture that surrounded me for five years.

After eight years since my return from Indonesia, I have still not had the opportunity to return. The country I spent so much time growing up in still holds a special fascination for me that is being added to through my studies at university and the newfound appreciation I have gained for just how amazing a nation Indonesia is. As a student I have come into contact with Indonesia in a political, economic, and historical sense. What I have learned has added a whole new dimension to my childhood experiences, and made me realise that Indonesia is truly a uniquely intriguing and beautiful country, populated by some of the most beautiful and tolerant people I have had the good fortune to meet.

My essay includes descriptions of the unique geographic nature of Indonesia's environment and the exotic, extremely diverse flora and fauna that make Indonesia such a visually beautiful country; the proud history of the Indonesian nation; the Indonesian economy and political structures; and of my deep love and appreciation for the kind and beautiful nature of the Indonesian people in their religiously and ethnically diverse society. It is hard for me to remember Indonesia without a smile and that is predominantly because of the smiles I received every day while I was there. I have never been in country where I can receive the same amount of smiles in a bustling urban city street as I can on a rural back road. Riding my bicycle through the *kampung* behind my house was always a fun experience, full of laughter with the Indonesian children on their bikes riding with us. Indonesians I have found to be a welcoming, hospitable people, unfailingly polite and gentle. I have never heard an Indonesian raise their voice in anger in public, and I have never not had a smile returned to me. There are some traits that cross all cultures on a national level, across Javanese, Ambonese, Acenese, Balinese, Sudanese, Irian Jayans, Bataks, etc.



One could talk forever about Indonesia and how it is a fascinating place, yet only ever scratch the surface. There are too many deeper cultural insights to be had, too many sights to take in, too many delicious food dishes to try, too many economic opportunities to be had, too many amazing people to meet. All I can say is that I am fascinated by Indonesia, and am sure that one day in the future my fascination will draw me back there, in order to experience as an adult all that I missed as a child.

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Allison and Emma during the award ceremony at the Indonesian Embassy in Auckland.