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## Internship Final Report for IE3

### Part 1: The First Day

I entered Tenaganita's office with no expectations and was pleasantly surprised by the office's welcoming atmosphere and diverse staff. There are approximately 8 full time staff, 3-part time / intern positions, and rotating groups of about 6 young lawyers that alternate each day of the week for a 15-week duration. On an average day, there are roughly a dozen workers in the office all doing a variety of activities. Although it was a bit confusing when I first started at the organization, this flexible management style seems to work well for Tenaganita. Because there are rotating Young Lawyers and other interns that come varying times a week, most cases and projects have several people working on them. I can already tell that I will have great support during my internship.

On my first day, I had a chat with Glorene, the co-director of the organization. She was incredibly welcoming and has an approachable demeanor, which are good characteristics for a leader. To familiarize myself with the organization, I read Tenaganita's 2008 publication titled "The Revolving Door: Modern Day Slavery Refugees", which contains ten or so personal accounts of refugee's experiences of arrest and detention in an immigration center. Reading their stories brought the various types of trafficking to life for me. The stories were gruesome as they recalled a number of violations to their basic human rights, yet, at the same time, the stories had an air of resilience and determination. Delving into some background information about Tenaganita and interacting with various communities in Malaysia aligns with my goal to strengthen my vocabulary about human rights and enhances my perspective about the realities community's face so that I can address injustices in a way that is ethical and productive.

### Part 2: Communication

I was surprised to hear English advertisements on the train and see billboards in English upon my arrival in KL. Because English is the main mode of communication in Kuala Lumpur, I have not enhanced my language skills in Malay as much as I had originally hoped. During the last half of my internship, I made it a goal to learn more phrases in Malay, which comes in handy when traveling outside of KL. I also set aside time to learn some greetings in other Southeast Asian languages so that I could greet Tenaganita's shelter residents in their native tongue as a way to connect with them and, more often than not, bring a laugh when I mispronounced a word.

### Part 3: Benefits from the Internship

Personal – Initially, my personal goal was not to be a stereotypical "tourist" during my

internship in Malaysia. I had developed this goal when I was still in the states so I did not really know how this goal could be achieved. In my first month in Malaysia, I did several touristy activities such as going sightseeing to various museums, viewing some famous monuments, and going to well-known shopping hotspots. However, after having made friends with locals, I was able to tool around with them during their typical activities. For example, I had a meal with a one of the young lawyer's families, attended a wedding, and played badminton. In addition, the best way for me to feel established in Malaysia is to develop a routine. I was able to incorporate activities that I was familiar with doing at home such as going on weekend hikes with new activities such as reading a book at a peaceful temple.

Professional – Throughout my internship, I have developed new skills by being given new roles and responsibilities within the organization. I had the privilege of being a team player throughout the initial response to the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement, which Tenaganita took a strong position against. In addition, I assisted with interviewing and compiling data for a study about fishermen. Towards the middle of my internship, I was able to conduct legal research for a draft bill that seeks to protect the employment rights of Domestic Workers. Lastly, I managed a display area for Tenaganita's 25th Anniversary event. Being both directly involved by assisting lawyers in individual cases and being involved in an administrative sense has greatly added to my perspective and has helped me build confidence professionally.

#### Part 4: Challenges

Personal -- My greatest challenge has been separating between "work" time and "personal" time. As I have gained more job duties at Tenaganita, I have found myself working on projects late into the evening. Though I absolutely love the work, I need to value my personal time. I can see how working in an NGO setting can be an all-consuming career; therefore, it is vital for people in this line of work to develop good habits that allow themselves to renew their energy.

Professional – Like all workplaces, it takes time to adjust to how the workplace operates. In reflecting on these last six months, it is truly incredible to think about all the work that a full time staff of less than a dozen people has been able to accomplish. Nevertheless, in the moment, sometimes the issues that the communities face are so great that there does not seem to be an end in sight. I have had to remind myself to appreciate the good that Tenaganita has done for the communities they represent without constantly feeling like there is more that should be done.

Cross-cultural – My experience with talking to Malaysian youth about their growing discontent for their country changed my perspective about my own hometown. I have commonly heard Malaysians say that they are wary of their government and feel that corruption takes precedence over the common good. This lack of hope is all too familiar, because growing up I, too, viewed my hometown from a negative lens. It was only by living elsewhere that I learned to appreciate the unique quirks of my hometown. In recent talks with my youth friends, I have found myself encouraging them to try to change the things they do not like about Malaysia.

## Part 5: Becoming an Asset to the Organization

Before individuals can make themselves an asset to an organization, they must first know who they are. Then they can align their personal characteristics with their work ethic. For example, I have long been a perfectionist; therefore, in a work setting, I do best by prioritizing quality work over quantity. Rather than trying to change aspects about myself to suit the internship, I was able to adjust some aspects of any given project I was working on so that I could be the most efficient. For example, most of the projects I worked on did not have a deadline. I discovered that when I do not have a deadline, I do not complete it in a timely manner. Therefore, I made my own deadlines to ensure that my role in the project was completed. This attribute made me an asset to the organization because any time I agreed to work on a project with a staff person, they knew I would give them quality work in a timely fashion based on my reputation.

Initially I got involved in as many projects as I could get my hands on so I could learn which circumstances I worked best in. However, after my initial month, I had to learn time management, which I learned meant that I sometimes had to acknowledge when there was too much work on my plate. This internship taught me that being an asset to an organization is not to say yes to everything, but rather it is assess the needs of an organization and reflect about how you can use your skills to make a difference.

Often times individuals are the most observant when they first set foot in a new place. Then as time goes along, they become accustomed to the way things are. Therefore, I think it is important for interns to make note of their initial observations while still bearing in mind that they are neither experts nor are they fully aware of cultural biases. After becoming more familiar with the internal workings of the organization, I started presenting some of my observations along with solutions both in small group meetings and in our larger group discussions. My supervisor and the directors of the organization acknowledged my ideas to make some internal operations more efficient and they gave me the space to make changes. The organization noticed that I took initiative when I saw fit and I truly believe that is when they gave me more respect and saw me as an asset to the organization.

Equally as important, I think it is important to view the organization as an asset to you and give those affiliated with the organization your utmost respect. Never lose focus of your objective at the organization. My objective was to develop practical experience, to understand the internal workings of an NGO, and to present my ideas in a way that is culturally respectful and can be continued even after I have completed the internship. I truly hope my efforts have a long-term impact on the organization, as I know that Tenaganita has had a significant impact on my future direction. My greatest reward has been getting to know my strengths and what career areas may be the best fit. I really enjoy organizing and establishing internal procedures to ensure that the organization is running efficiently.

## Part 6: Support

My advisor through IE3 was also incredibly helpful, especially when I was preparing for the internship. She was always informative and timely in her responses to emails. In my final month at the internship, there was a conflict in a suburb outside of KL and she emailed to make sure I was ok. Knowing that she was just an email away was reassuring during my time abroad. I received limited guidance from the academic faculty at my university.

When I initially joined the organization, I was given a direct supervisor. She and I worked very closely on several of the major projects I assisted with throughout my internship. She is a great person to work with because she clearly lays out the objective of each project and I can easily approach her if I have any questions. She was also aware of the other projects I was working on with other staff and she was quick to give constructive feedback. At the same time because the organization is very tight knit, I felt like I received support from everyone. They wanted to make sure I was having enjoyable weekends, they even invited me to their church/home, and our jokes at lunchtime melted away any stress I might have had. Throughout my internship, I truly felt like the office was not just a place to work but was a place of support because the staff felt like family.

## Part 7: How My Initial Impressions Changed

Reflection on the host culture: Prior to this trip, I used to categorize countries as "developed" and "developing". I have found this categorization to be rather limiting and harmful in terms of how I view people. Malaysia is neither developed nor developing, but, rather, it is changing as it confronts global and domestic issues. In a similar manner, I have had to adjust my perception of thinking that American norms are the best. For example, just because a Malaysian tradition is to eat with the right hand does not mean it is more primitive. In fact, I think the food tastes better when you eat it with your hand because you are able to blend the spices.

Reflection on the host organization: I had originally thought that NGOs should be very structured. However, I have found that NGOs in Malaysia are rather relaxed, which, coming from a more punctual Western culture, can be both frustrating and rewarding at the same time. I am amazed at how much work is accomplished in a less stressful environment.

## Part 8: Daily Routine

My typical weekday in Malaysia looks like this:

- 8:10 Wake up, shower, eat oatmeal or cereal for breakfast, and make a cherished cup of coffee that can be enjoyed before the temperature gets too warm for hot beverages
- 8:45 Leave the terrace house I'm staying in and walk about 15 minutes to the train station
- 9:10 Catch the KTM train from Subang Jaya to Jalan Templer
- 9:30 Walk from Jalan Templer to the office, which is about a mile and half walk
- 10:00 Arrive in the office and browse the newspapers for articles related to human trafficking.

One of the things I have learned to love about Tenaganita is that each day and every consecutive week greatly varies. At first, I was craving routine and structured projects to work on but now I love showing up at the office not knowing what the day will look like.

6:00 Leave the office. About half the time, I'll fetch a ride with a coworker or one of the young lawyers.

7:30 Reach home. I'll typically grab a bite to eat or a refreshing smoothie at one of the numerous café's/coffee shops in Subang Jaya. Some evenings I'll go for an evening stroll or go out to eat with one of my housemates.

9:00 I typically do some reading or journaling to wind down for the night

12:30 Go to bed.

Office Activities: I have found that going out once a day on a mission with the young lawyers is quite beneficial. These tasks vary from going to embassies, immigration, or police stations to scouting out employers suspected of labor violations. My first excursion was following one of the case managers and a young lawyer to the flat of an Indonesian woman and her two young children whose husband recently died due to a work related accident. Tenaganita assisted with legal support to sell the late husband's motorbike along with emotional support. Another memorable excursion was accompanying a domestic worker to the police station to file a report against her employer who is unjustifiably holding her passport. Since 2007, it is illegal for employers to hold an employee's passport although it is still such a common practice that the three policemen that accompanied my Indonesian friend and two lawyers did not know that it was illegal to harbor someone's passport. If I go out with a case manager or group of young lawyers in the morning, I will stay back at the office in the afternoon to work on administrative projects. I have been compiling valuable information about the organization's partners, volunteers, government officials, and media so that they are accessible and can be easily updated after I leave in addition to editing press statements, grant proposals and other awareness materials when needed.

Weekends: My weekends greatly vary. Though I am by no means a morning person, I have befriended some individuals who go for early morning hikes around 7am. Usually on Saturday I will join them for a walk and a yummy brunch. Saturday afternoons I usually do laundry and lounge around the house. Sundays I work on homework for my university class and Skype with family/friends from home. Some memorable outings I have done is going to Batu Caves, Bank Negara, KLCC towers, National Mosque of Malaysia, National Museum of Malaysia, a Catholic Church Service in Serebam, Jump Street (trampoline park), Arena 51 (archery tag), and a much needed massage after said activities.

## Part 9: Tips Prior to Arrival

### A. NOT TO WORRY, ATMS ARE EVERYWHERE!

Prior to arriving in Malaysia, I was quite nervous about the process of exchanging money. However, my worries were unnecessary as every mall has a money exchanger and

several ATMs accept visa/MasterCard. Though I brought a lot of cash with me, I would suggest bringing less cash and simply withdrawing money from a debit/bank card at ATMs.

## B. BRING YOUR STUDENT CARD FOR DISCOUNTS

Several museums and other various tourist attractions offer a discount for students. I had to learn this lesson the hard way because I left my university student ID at home. Sometimes the discount is quite significant, up to 50% off from the regular adult price. Having your student card will be quite beneficial when you go sightseeing.

## C. THE LESS CLOTHES YOU BRING, THE BETTER

Trust me on this one. I know it initially sounds strange to only bring a couple outfits for a several-month internship, but you will want to pick up new clothes in KL and having an empty suitcase makes it much easier to bring your new clothes home. This is especially true if you are a girl, though my brother doubled his wardrobe when he was here for 3 weeks. Prior to this trip, I never would have categorized myself as a shopper; however, one of the major pastimes in Malaysia for young people is hanging out at shopping malls because they offer an escape from the Malaysian heat. I was surprised by how cheap clothing is in Malaysia, especially at street stalls and rural areas. I have been able to buy exotic clothes and "normal" wear for about 1/3 the cost of clothing at home. Since I am currently packing and racking my brain about how to get items home, I would strongly suggest you spare yourself the headache and pack lightly.

## D. HAVE A GOOD BACKPACK

As an intern at Tenaganita, you'll be carrying your "office" on your back daily as you commute to work. I commuted a little over a mile each way to get to the train station.

## E. BRING (OR PLAN TO BUY) SOME PRACTICAL SANDALS

Prepare to walk. A lot. I have found that most folks wear sandals because it is the most suitable for KL's hot climate and city streets. It can rain at a drop of a hat (be sure to bring a small umbrella or rain jacket) and I have learned from experience that wet closed toe shoes is less than ideal.

## F. TRAINS AND BUSES

My first two months here, I was a stickler about only taking the train to get around. For work, I would take the KTM from Subang Jaya to Jalan Templar, which is about 4 stops away for the cost of RM2.10 (about 50 cents at the time of this writing). Not only is public transpo incredibly cheap in KL, it is also quite convenient.

More recently, I've been taking Grab to work then walking/train on the way home. The best

thing about using the Grab Car app is you put in your pick up and drop off location and there are a handful of options. I usually use the grab economy car because it's a fixed rate. From my house to the office the cost is RM14 (or a little less than \$4 at the time of this writing). I don't have to worry about added costs if there is a jam or not because it's a flat fee though it is significantly more costly than taking the train.

I am not very experienced with taking buses. There are several buses around KL that are free/under 25 cents. There's a green colored bus in Petaling Jaya (PJ) area that is free and drops off near the office but I have only taken it twice. I have found that buses are often unreliable and crammed so I try to avoid them when I can walk instead.

## G. AVOID PUBLIC TRANSPOR AT PEAK TIMES, IF YOU CAN

The peak time for traffic is from 7am-9am and 6pm-7pm. Malaysians refer to heavy traffic as "the jam" and people often excuse their late (if ever) have a deadline. This is something to bear in mind when assisting on projects.

## I. COMMENTS ON ADJUSTING TO THE HEAT

There's really no way to get around the heat. Malaysia is not only hot but it is also humid. This combination can take a while for your body to adjust to. I would suggest that you bring along a small water bottle you can carry around with you in a purse or backpack to ensure that you're not getting dehydrated. Also, when you initially arrive try to do jolt your body from extreme hot to extreme cold. For example, movie theatres are notoriously cold so after I went for a movie because I thought it would help me cool off, I had a poor night sleep because my body couldn't adjust to the hot.

## J. HOUSING ARRANGMENTS

You shouldn't worry too much about housing arrangements because Tenaganita is quite accommodating. I am renting a room in a terrace house in Subang Jaya. My landlord is the daughter of the late founder of Tenaganita Irene Fernandez. Subang Jaya is a very happening place just outside of Kuala Lumpur. There are two colleges located nearby so the area is bustling with young people and there are lots of coffee shops to accommodate students. It is also only about a 10-15 minute walk from the train station. By taking the KTM to KL sentral, it's quite easy to get anywhere in the city. The room I rent is quite spacious and suits my needs. The four-bedroom house is occupied by two other housemates and my landlord. I enjoy living with others with the added bonus of having a place to unwind in my own room. My housing situation couldn't be more ideal.

Be sure to let the IE3 advisers and Tenaganita know what type of living accommodations you would prefer, specifically whether you would like to be located near night life or if you would opt for a location with a minimal commute.

## K. RECOMMENDED SIGHTSEEING PLACES

In the Kuala Lumpur area I would recommend going to KLCC towers, Taman Paramount park, The Islamic Art Museum / National Mosque, SS2 street vendor to eat Durian fruit, Bukit Bintang for night life, and Batu Caves. If you're missing western food, I would suggest going to Bangsar and eating Mikey's newyork pizza or MyburgerLab.

If you want to go for a weekend trip, I would suggest Melaka for its relative proximity to KL and historic riverfront, Penang for its food and historic charm, Tioman Island for a beautiful island experience, and Kuantan to have a more rural experience.

## L. APPS TO DOWNLOAD

Waze for navigation as it is more accurate and thus more preferred than Google Maps.

Grab in order to acquire accessible and safe transportation throughout KL.

RapidKL which shows the train schedules.

## Part 10: Future Direction

Prior to this internship, I had considered working for a nonprofit organization; however, I didn't fully understand what that would mean on a day to day basis. After having completed a 6-month internship with Tenaganita, I have a better understanding of the workings of an NGO. I am still strongly considering an NGO/nonprofit as my future career path and I would like to pursue some volunteer opportunities with other nonprofits when I return to America.