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Took me by surprise

It was the end of October when I was in the middle of finishing my IISMA enrollment essay. I was stringing up words that could be considered as **worthy** of the program when a thought passed. I had always been looking for study abroad programs with scholarships the past few months, a couple of other options were presented but what caught my attention the most was this program. An exchange program, fully funded by the government with the top 100 universities from various countries to apply to. I've had some small online international programs at ITS but nothing compares as this is the first program I applied to where I'll be going abroad physically. **The thrill from the unknown both** excited and spooked me so I had to stop typing my essay to imagine what may lie ahead. I had been very enthusiastic and committed to applying to this program which is not wrong but could be dangerous for me.

The thought made me adjust my hopes, lowering it but not low enough to slack off and put it just the right height for which if I fail, it will not burden me. I continued to give my best on all the stages while keep praying to God while also trying my best, not to feel overwhelmed. It was my first prominent study abroad program I am applying and failing will be a valuable lesson. After weeks of screening stages, **the result somehow took me by surprise.**



New Frontier

Filling up forms and bustling through personal documents was nothing new for me but somehow the cause was ever-changing throughout my life. Applying for high school, for university, enrolling in organizations, and then this exchange program. The whole process was **clinging onto each other** where one thing needs another thing. Although in this stage the majority of activity I am doing is waiting on documents for another necessary documents, I was also **demanding to be agile and vigilant** when the important documents come so further pre-departure steps could be done.

Stressful as it might seem, it is all still **manageable as I am not doing it all alone.** We fellow awardees from the same host university work together to gather all the needed documents and help each other out if there are any problems. Along the way we also **get to know each other better** and I start to feel joy managing all the pre-departure antics and theatrics. We all looked forward for our journey and having company exploring **this new alien territory might not seem so bad.**

A stroll in a somewhat alien park

One month in, me and my friends have finally settled in our dormitories, **we decided to share our room to cut costs** and start to settle down for the rest of the semester. The semester has started which means that assignments and projects start to seep into our daily activities. The “homework” we have to do was very much time-consuming, especially the ones not from our major.

Albeit the struggle, UTM which is my host university was **very kind to us**. They helped us during our arrival and surprisingly they also **planned for us** some trips to popular places in Malaysia. The UTM International Office invites us to visit local and historic places where we had different activities there. One of the trips that stick with me is when we go **snorkeling in Terengganu**. Terengganu is a different city from where I studied so we had a 5-6 hours trip to the city and stayed for 3 days. **It was a blast**, we went to different and beautiful snorkeling spots, and we also went to a cultural village where we learn how to make traditional foods and clothes.

The whole program taught me about Malaysia which is a country that is similar to ours but is also **unique on its own**. It made me understand that we are neighbors and that having similar cultures is to be expected.

Onto new heights!

Part of the journey is the end. A saying I kept close to me on every exciting occasion I had which is IISMA at the moment. I learned mobile application programming as one of the courses in UTM and fell in love with the possibility it can potentially give. Along the way, I also made international friends and had **a good network with lecturers**. I meet good people, make good connections, and learn valuable lessons throughout this experience. Going home to Indonesia felt like coming back from **grandma's house, fully stuffed and satisfied**.

By the time I am writing this, I am currently in **Tomsk, Russia**. I enrolled myself in a double degree program, continuing my undergraduate study here at Tomsk State University. My adventure and experience in the IISMA program encouraged me to **conquer new heights**. IISMA helped me find my calling and I decided to further develop it here at TSU.