

## Trip to Lismore

We had just completed our convocation with SIPMM in April 2000 and the thoughts of going to SCU in Lismore were already on our minds. We wanted to see the SCU campus for ourselves and receive our scrolls from the source.

The group comprised 6 graduates from the 1<sup>st</sup> batch headed to Lismore on 4.5.2000. The flight to Brisbane took just 8 hours and we arrived there early in the morning. Cleared the customs and immigration formalities and headed to our rented car and there we went to Lismore in our Toyota Tarago, a very comfortable vehicle that could take 8 persons easily.

Our first stop was in Gold Coast for our breakfast. We stopped at Pacific fair but none was ready to serve us breakfast so we went to Surfers' Paradise and had that familiar McDonald breakfast. It was already 0900 hours then and after breakfast, we headed to our 1<sup>st</sup> stop over in Currumbin Bird Sanctuary and the Super Bees that was located just beside it. We managed to have a very good briefing by Super Bee and gave the park a miss, as we did not have much time to cover that big an area. It would probably need a full day to cover the entire park. So we went to David Fleay Wildlife Park instead. We did not feel the trip there was worth the effort and in less than one hour we headed towards Coolangatta for our lunch stop over. We had our fish and chips for \$3.50 and it came with a free wine...mmmmmm why not for that price. It was sumptuous lunch indeed and the wine was reasonably good.

After lunch we pushed on to Byron Bay lighted house. It was another 2 hours drive. Our trip to Lismore was filled with various attractions en route. In no time, we were in Byron Bay lighthouse, the southeastern point of Australia. We had only an hour to see the place as it was closing at 1700 hours. As usual, visitors refused to leave till the security had to sound the siren to remind them that it was closing time. This magnificent lighthouse and the natural surroundings were a rare sight indeed and we enjoyed every moment there. The wave beating in continuously was really something we would never have a chance to see back home. It was already getting dark then and not wanting to waste any time, we headed straight to Lismore to take advantage of as much daylight as possible.

It was already dark by the time we arrived in Lismore at about 1830 hours. It was then that the real excitement came. We could not locate Invercauld House. Calls after calls and turn after turn brought us to nowhere. The signboards of the university were around but it was too dark to read go around looking for the university then. Everyone was really tired not only the driver. Finally, we found Invercauld House that was located on the hill-top. The entrance to Invercauld House was excitingly strange in every sense to almost everyone in the car. Everyone knew what each one was thinking but all tried not to say anything till very much later. Our accommodations were also arranged such that surprised all of us. We were house in different units, which was a distance apart as if it was pre-planned. The reason for placing us apart added more fright then, really. Those who remember the show Scream or Friday the 13th would understand what we were thinking then.

Dinner was in Lismore town and we had our first Australian charcoal grill. It was a nice country-eating place and nicely arranged. The food was a little disappointing though except for the free flow of vegetables and side dishes – that was good.

The group retired to their accommodations and had a good night rest for we have to get up early to go to the university to meet Keith Sloan. When we arrived there at about 1100 hours after our breakfast, Keith was already waiting for us. We were then brought around for a tour of the university compound and introduced to the various faculties. We were then treated to a simple lunch as described in the email to us. But when it was brought out to us, the sandwiches were more than a simple lunch. It was the best sandwiches that we ever had and some of us helped themselves to 3 helpings. We can never find such sandwiches in Singapore, I bet. After lunch, we prepared for our convocation at 1430 hours. We assembled outside the hall and were then led into the auditorium filled with family members and friends of the graduates. We felt a little lonely then and really wished that our family members and friends were there to join this joyous occasion to commemorate our first milestone in territory education.

The entire ceremony was traditional and filled with songs presented by the SCU choir. The Australian national anthem was sung and then followed by the speech by the Vice Chancellor and then the Rector. Then came the final moment we were waiting for, our names were called upon to collect our scrolls from the Chancellor of SCU. The feeling was great and the sense of achievement remains till today. The feeling was beyond what words could describe. It was a great moment for every one of us as we walked to receive the scroll from the Chancellor. It was the proudest moment for all of us – our long hours of hard work, the sacrifices that we had made at the expense of our family and friends alike had finally paid off.

As we were special guests to the university then, we were invited to the staff room to join them in the reception. We got to meet up with Dr Brenda Hall, Tom Walter and some other lecturers. We had Champaign and those huge sandwiches could not escape our eyes and some of us actually gobbled them and enjoying every bit of it. The warm reception extended to us were unforgettable.

The evening was supposed to be the graduation ball but due to some miscommunication, we were informed that there was no booking so we headed for our dinner in a Thai restaurant in town. The food was really good. After dinner, we went to the union hall to take a look at the graduation ball and to our surprise, there was a table nicely laid out with our names printed on each chair! The organiser was wondering what had happened to us and though we had already the dinner then, the organiser was really generous and kind. She offered us wine and invited us to join in the evening. We were really feeling a little bad that instead of being penalised for being absent from the dinner we were treated to free wine and the entertainment of the evening. Other than the warm reception from the organiser, we felt that the attendance to the dinner could have been better. There were so few people there! More effort is needed there.

The next morning was time for us to leave and say goodbye to Lismore. Not wanting to leave so soon, we headed back to SCU to have a final look and feel the air in SCU. It was Sunday and there was no one there. We took some final shots of the surroundings. It was with that sad feeling that we finally drove off and headed north back to Gold Coast in Queensland where we spent the rest of our 5 days there. The group visited various tourist attractions, visited some nature parks, waterfall and of course shopping in the Surfers' Paradise. The group then split as two of them had to return home and the rest proceeded further north to Brisbane city and northward to Noosa head, Ginger factory, Big Pineapple and other attractions along the way.

On 11.5.2000 was our final day in Queensland and again it was another sad feeling that we were finally heading back home. The memorable trip to Lismore still stay with us and whenever we meet, it was the first topic of our discussion. It really brings back good memories. You must be there!

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