

Essay

Report of Residence in PT. KYBI

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1. Introduction

I worked in PT. Kayaba Indonesia (hereafter referred to as PT. KYBI) for 4 years and 10 months from January 2011 to October 2015 as a technical advisor.

I had always hoped to work abroad and my wish came true. However, there were ups and downs during my residency there. In this report, I will explain part of my life in KYBI.

2. Relocation

In early April 2010, I was busy visiting my superiors and colleagues at work telling them the date of my wedding ceremony which was going to be held in six months' time. However, one week after I gave them the wedding notice, my boss assigned me to work in PT. KYBI. Although I was a little baffled by the situation of having a newly-married life and a new life overseas at the same time, I accepted the relocation. In this way, I moved to Indonesia in January, 2011 (Photo 1).



Photo 1 View from my apartment

3. About Indonesia

The official name of Indonesia is the Republic of Indonesia, and the country consists of about 17,500 islands. Its area stretches for about 1,900 km north and south across the equator and about 5,100 km east and west, and it's about 5 times as large as Japan. Although the official language is Indonesian, there are some unique

languages due to the different dialects spoken in each region.

During my expatriate life, I was somewhat confident with my Indonesian. However, I could not understand the conversations in regional languages between locals.

The official religions are Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and Chinese Confucianism. More than 90% of Indonesians are said to be Muslims and many of their education, culture and laws are based on the teachings of Islam. For example, in 2015, a law enforcing sales of alcohol, which is banned among Muslims, only in commercial complexes for foreigners or stores above a certain floor space threshold was established. It was aimed at redressing the situation in which young Muslims can easily access alcohol out of curiosity. Actually, whether the law is effective or not is uncertain, as you can ask "Bir ada kah? (Do you have beer?)" and the staff will say "Ada (yes)" and then will grab one from behind the counter even in shops which are not allowed to sell alcohol.

Until a decade ago, cars were only used by some wealthy individuals or foreigners. In the last 10 years or so, income has rapidly increased and the so-called middle class has started to own cars. However, the road infrastructure hasn't improved to cover the increased number of cars. Almost everywhere in major cities including Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta (hereafter referred to as Jakarta) struggled with huge traffic jams. Huge numbers of motorbikes also cut across the traffic and eventually made it not even worth it to drive. Roads were clogged by cars (Photo 2). The city was seemingly in a negative spiral.

It usually took me 1.5 hours and sometimes over 3 hours to commute just under 30 km by car through a motorway from my home in Jakarta to the MM2100 Industrial Complex (Bekasi Prefecture) where PT. KYBI is located. This experience made me a lot more patient with traffic jams during holidays in Japan.



Photo 2 Traffic jam during commuting

It is said that Indonesia is a pro-Japan country. In fact, people around me always offered empathetic help when I came across any trouble during work or in my private life. I think this is partly a result of efforts made by Japanese companies that have provided employment and benefits to Indonesia for over 40 years. Do you know there used to be Japanese soldiers who stayed behind in Indonesia after the war? During World War II, Indonesia was occupied by the Imperial Japanese army. Before that, it was governed by the Netherlands as the Dutch East Indies. When Japan was defeated and the war ended, the Netherlands took its governance again. Some of the soldiers from the Imperial Japanese army stayed behind in Indonesia and fought for Indonesia's independence in the war against Dutch forces in order to realize the promise made with Indonesian people during WWII. In August 2014 Sakari Ono, the last Japanese soldier who stayed behind, died. The news of his death made headlines in local newspapers and TVs, and I was able to watch his funeral. Emblazoned with an Indonesian flag, the coffin of Ono was carried to the hero's graveyard for burial, led by the national army. This fact is not written anywhere in Japanese history textbooks. However, he was a Japanese soldier who stayed behind and played a major role in Indonesian history. Indonesians might see Japanese people as dear friends who supported the country's independence with their loyalty.

4. Work in PT. KYBI

In PT. KYBI, I was appointed as a technical advisor for products related to shock absorbers for four-wheeled vehicles.

I was responsible for giving instructions to local staff mainly in departments including quality assurance, production, production engineering, maintenance and production management on the method of working and dealing with defects, and communicating with the Japanese office to pass on instructions. Although I didn't belong to any organization, I was intimately involved in part procurement, target costing, and safety and health

divisions. It was rather difficult for me to directly work in other departments in a foreign country, as I had been engaged in production engineering only since I joined the company. Of course, I attended a series of lectures and learned Indonesian before moving there. However, there wasn't much I could do with such little knowledge, and I hadn't been able to provide good advice to local staff when they asked for help.

In particular, I had trouble with quality-related work. For example, staff members contacted me on my day off or in the middle of the night sometimes saying, "the performance of products is out of standards. We need to ship them today. What should we do?" When I started working in PT. KYBI, I was just giving any instructions I could think of regardless of their usefulness. Now, I am able to collect necessary information and give appropriate instructions on how to deal with any problem. If a flawed product left the factory by mistake, the client would contact me directly to make claims, and I would have to visit them to report by myself. I probably gave too many instructions and directions from the sense of unsettlement and urgency. I was annoyed by local staff who didn't carry things out as I told them, and I sometimes spoke in a rough tone. I began to feel that this was not a job I should take on. However one day, I saw a phrase in a local Japanese newspaper: "Don't panic, rush or expect too much. Don't get bored and give up."

These are the words of Terutake Kikuchi, General Manager of "Kikugawa," the first Japanese restaurant in Jakarta, which he advocated to his Japanese customers in 1969. This has now become a proverb in the Japanese community in Indonesia. In this country, troubles that we have never had in Japan happen one after another. It is impossible to make people who have different languages and cultures understand what you say immediately. Kikuchi said the most important thing when working in Indonesia is not to get bored, give up, and move on together with locals. I suddenly felt better after reading this article. I started to think I can move forward step by step without pushing myself too much. Although it was difficult for me not to panic and rush when there was a flaw, I think I managed to maintain my patience.

I greatly appreciate that many people from Japan visited our company during my stay in Indonesia. As aforementioned, I was in charge of divisions outside of my field and I lacked abilities needed to cover all the duties. Therefore, I requested support from professionals in each area. Acquiring a visa for entering Indonesia was difficult. Many of those who took a business trip here had acquired a business visa before travelling. However, this visa only allowed meetings and interviews. Although visitors were allowed to enter the factory, they were unable to engage in any business operations. If they wanted to be involved in operations, they required a working visa and a residence permit like us expatriates. We didn't try to go through the application process much, since it took around two months to prepare

documents. Visitors were unable to touch actual products and demonstrate how to operate them. Because of that, I believe many of them had difficulty in communicating with local staff using words, gestures, and illustrations. As a technical advisor, assisting communications between these visitors and local staff was also an important responsibility of mine.

Based on what had been indicated by visiting experts, I had to give clear, detailed direction as to what local staff should do and what kind of output was required. At the same time, it was necessary to listen to what local staff required and what they had questions about and to pass that on to the visitors. If I failed to do these things, most techniques and methods that were taught wouldn't have been passed on before the period of the support program came to an end. I therefore had always held meetings before and after work during the support program in order to promote mutual understanding among colleagues. As a result, not only did the local staff learn a lot, but I did as well.



Photo 3 PT. KYBI main entrance

5. Food

Although the cooking methods and taste are not exactly the same, some Indonesian dishes are similar to what we eat in Japan.

Typical examples are: Nasi goreng (cha-han or fried rice), Mi goreng (yakisoba or fried noodle), Ayam goreng (tori no kara-age or deep fried chicken), and Sate ayam (yakitori or char-grilled chicken on skewers). To me, they were more delicious than Japanese dishes. Having said that, the above four dishes were the only Indonesian food I would pay to eat. No other dishes appealed to my palate.

Most Indonesian dishes were either spicy or sweet. I even sensed an odor in white rice. We had a monthly lunch event at our staff canteen. I feel sorry saying this but I just couldn't enjoy the food there. Every day, I bought Japanese food in a Japanese supermarket or similar ingredients and cooked for myself. Japanese food

ingredients in Indonesia cost 2 to 3 times more than those in Japan. However, better the purse starve than the body. When I ate out with Japanese expatriates or visitors, I always had Japanese or Western food and rarely went to Indonesian restaurants.

In contrast, my wife often went to Indonesian restaurants with her friends. As my daughter was usually with my wife, she became fond of a rice cracker called Kerupuk. They also asked me if they could try various snacks from street vendors. I was strictly against the idea because if they had fallen ill it would have had a great impact on me.

As you know, Indonesia is a tropical country. Fresh tropical fruits were delicious and cheap. Prices of fruits were less than a third of Japanese prices even in large supermarkets. In a market, they were five times cheaper. Our typical breakfast fruit platter was comprised of papaya, dragon fruit and mango. In the late rainy season, we would often eat mangosteen, the queen of fruits. We will never be able to have breakfast with these fruits again in Japan unless I work in Southeast Asia again. I never tried durian, the king of fruits because of its strong smell.



Photo 4 Traditional Indonesian food

6. Weekends and public holidays

Like Japan, most companies in Indonesia have a five workday per week system. In PT. KYBI, we were basically off on weekends and public holidays. Many Japanese expatriates go to play golf on their days off. I was no exception and I played golf three to four times a month. Although I played many times, I was not very good at it. My skills didn't improve probably because I always thought, "I had a poor score today but I might play better next week," and I never really practiced.

As I had accompanying family members, we would go to large-scale shopping malls and restaurants near our home. As you know from the traffic situation mentioned above, almost all expatriates and their families hired a private driver. We paid our driver about 30,000 yen

monthly by ourselves, but I thought it was rather reasonable considering the risk of having an accident in an overseas country.

Every day, our driver would come to the waiting station of our apartment and drove to the entrance to pick us up when we gave him a call. We rode in the back seat and got off at the entrance of wherever we wanted to go. The driver waited in the parking and picked us up at the entrance to drive home. We felt as if we were celebrities on TV. On the other hand, when I returned to Japan, it took me a long time before I had the driving feeling completely back.

Public holidays are based on religion except for New Year's Day and Independence Day, including those of Islam, Christianity and Chinese Confucianism. Many Indonesians around me did not work on public holidays. I had to consider this not only for PT. KYBI staff but also drivers and maids.

The biggest national holiday in Indonesia is Lebaran, a festival after fasting in Islam. Muslims fast during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and the first two days of the following month are the festival days. Most companies and government services take a total of around 9 to 12 days off before and after the festival, making it the only long holiday in Indonesia.

It is basically like having the New Year and Bon festival in Japan at the same time, and most people return home to see their family. All supermarkets, shopping malls and restaurants are closed, and people told me that we would not have enough food if we stayed in Jakarta during the holiday.

As you may have expected, the mass exodus of travelers heading to their hometowns on the first day of Lebaran was beyond my imagination. Cars and motorbikes filled the entire length of roads and were stuck for hours, and horns resounded throughout the city. In an effort to reduce traffic as much as possible, road maintenance and improvement works occur all over the place every year before Lebaran. However, the speed of construction works had not caught up with the traffic as the number of people using cars and motorbikes had been increasing year by year.

Although many expatriates visit Japan during this holiday, our family travelled to Bali every year (Photo 5). Bali is one of the world's top resort destinations. As most people are Hindus, they spend time independent of Lebaran. Beyond that, the Lebaran holiday of PT. KYBI starts earlier and finishes later than the general holiday period. We could therefore travel and spend our holiday comfortably without experiencing major traffic jams. As the cycle of the Islamic calendar is two weeks shorter than the Western calendar, Lebaran comes 2 weeks earlier every year. While I worked in Indonesia, Lebaran happened to fall on the middle of the dry season and the weather was always nice. Thanks to this, we were able to enjoy walking around the beach, mountains and the city.

If we were to travel to the same place for the same

length of time from Japan, it would cost a lot of money. However, domestic flights were reasonable and there were promotional prices for working visa holders in hotels which were much lower than those for other visitors. Needless to say, we had the advantages of various good conditions for these holidays, which we would never have again. We took our first daughter there three times, but never the second daughter who was born just before we returned to Japan. I don't know how I will make an excuse or make up for this when she is old enough to understand things and complain that we didn't take her there.



Photo 5 View from the hotel lobby in Bali

7. Return

In October, 2015, I returned to Japan and started working again in Gifu North Plant. I requested to return there as I wanted to learn skills in the mother plant, although I gained valuable experience and acquired a lot of knowledge in Indonesia. I am proud of myself for having gained more than a little capability of managing staff, items and time and giving directions to local staff toward achieving goals.

However, I felt that my technical abilities were not adequate towards the end of the program. One of the reasons for this was that it was becoming increasingly difficult to pass on the latest methods and the idea of process in the mother plant. In my early days of working in Indonesia, I explained what I had actually seen and experienced. Later, I started telling local staff what I hadn't experienced but only heard. I was often moving forward without fully understanding what was going on. I then began to think that I would like to return to my old workplace, the Production Engineering Dept., and improve my skills there. I appreciated when the then branch manager in PT. KYBI told me that he would like me to stay longer. I felt bad about telling him my wish to return to Japan as he supported me so much. Eventually, he understood my wish and accepted it.

I am currently engaged in the development of a new

line in the Production Engineering Dept., Gifu North Plant. I would like to make efforts to compensate for my inadequate technical skills during the program in Indonesia.

8. In Closing

I would like to express my appreciation to the branch manager, who gave me directions even though I was

helpless, colleagues, people who visited us all the way from Japan and provided support, and everyone in PT. KYBI who always encouraged me to move forward, for your support over the 4 years and 10 months. I couldn't have carried out my duties overseas without their help.

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