

SI Convention – Kuala Lumpur - Overview

(Diane will start)

The very first thing I think I've told everyone about convention is that we have no idea what humidity is!!! Let me just say, the humidity in Kuala Lumpur in late July just takes your breath away the minute you step outside and it zaps your strength in a matter of minutes. Temps were in the high 80's to low 90's with 90% humidity.

With that being said, we didn't let it totally stop us from seeing some of the country and having a good time. When we headed for an outdoor excursion, we simply donned our cooling towels (which definitely were not a fashion statement) and away we went.

We arrived in Kuala Lumpur two days prior to convention so that we could do some sightseeing and venture into different parts of the city.

- First, we went to the Batu Caves which is a limestone mountain with a series of caves and cave temples. It is one of the most popular Hindu shrines outside of India and is considered to be around 400 million years old. At the base of the mountain you are greeted by a 141-foot tall gold statue of one of the Hindu Gods. There are 272 steps up to the main temple which we considered climbing but found out since we were in shorts that we had to don a very heavy wrap around our legs in order to go up. Needless to say, we were already hot so there was no way we were going to put that on and climb the stairs which would have added to our heat exhaustion. So, we admired the colorful steps along with the statues and the long-tailed monkeys from the base of the shrine. The monkeys were an added thrill as they were so cute and many of the visitors were feeding them, so we had fun just observing their actions.
- From there we went on a city tour which included a trip to the Royal Selangor pewter manufacturing site. This is considered the largest pewter manufacturer in the world. We were given a tour of the plant and learned about the different processes involved and of course we did some shopping

afterwards. Then we had a tour of the Batik Factory where we were shown the process of designing and printing and again given an opportunity to make some purchases. Part of the city tour included stops to view the Petronas Towers, the Kings Palace, a National Monument, The National Museum, a National Mosque, and the Sultan Abdul Building. So, this was a full day of sightseeing.

- The next day we spent a full day at the Kuala Gandah Elephant Sanctuary. The sanctuary is dedicated to protecting elephants and educating the public with encounters with the elephants. First, we were given a short tour of a typical Malaysian aboriginal community and saw how they live and were told about their culture and traditions. From there we witnessed the elephants being bathed and we were given a short demonstration of the intelligence and strength of elephants. Afterwards we were allowed to pet and feed the elephants and observe how they interact with people. The baby elephants were the most adorable and the one that made me say “ahhhh” was a baby elephant with a cast on it’s one leg. It had been found caught in a trap and was injured while trying to escape. Spending the day here was certainly a highlight of the trip.

(Karen can take over here)

- The next 4 days were spent going to the various meetings and functions of the convention itself, which we have both said was one of the most informative conventions we think we have attended. The convention was opened by Malaysia’s Queen who not only spoke excellent English but was also very humorous. She told us “we are God’s gift to men”.
- There were so many fabulous keynote, federation, plenary session and workshop speakers that it’s impossible for us to say any one was better than

the other. Plenary session topics covered were: Gender Equality; Water and Food Security; Working to end violence, trafficking, and exploitation; Women Leading in Technology and Innovation; Healthcare and Lifetime Wellness; and Climate and our responsibility and actions.

(Karen can talk about the workshop she attended at this point)

- We heard from each of the federations on what they are striving to achieve, how they are going about it and what progress they have made.
- We learned that the SI board made a unanimous decision to approve a 5th Federation subject to them reaching the 2000 membership criteria and to an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the clubs in Africa. Mary Muia serves as the Task Force Chair for the SI Future Africa Federation (SIFAF). She told us they have worked long and hard to make this a possibility and that they hope to have the required number of members to charter by April of 2020. As of convention time they had 1,890 members with 106 clubs in 26 countries and they have challenged each of the clubs to bring in one or two new members by December of this year and they are already in the process of chartering a few new clubs.
- We heard about the two most recent federation president's appeals, "Educate to Lead, Nepal", under past SI President Yvonne Simpson and "Women, Water and Leadership" under current SI President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen and the progress we have made in each of these endeavors and then of course we heard from our incoming SI President, Sharon Fisher, who has adopted "The Road to Equality" as her president's appeal.

(Karen will now elaborate on the new President's appeal)

(Karen then turns it back to Diane)

- After convention we departed Kuala Lumpur for an overnight trip to the city of Malacca which offers a fascinating glimpse into the history of Malaysia. We visited the Red Square, the Cheng Hoon Teng temple, Cheng Ho's Cultural Museum, and the Baba & Nyonya Heritage Museum where we actually toured a real residence and learned how the people live. We had dinner at a Portuguese Village and ended our evening with a river cruise. Upon our return to Kuala Lumpur we took time before departing for home to go up in the Petronas Towers, walk the connecting bridge between the two towers and view the city from the 86th floor.
- In conclusion I would like to share with you one of the quotes from convention that has stood out most to me. It is a quote from former International President Yvonne Simpson, who said "we are not four federations we are one world and one voice". I think this applies to all of us not only as federations, but regions and clubs. We are here to help not just the women in our communities and states but to help women and girls worldwide by being their voice for the future.