A peek into corporate life

LIANG SHUYI chats with SMU students about their field trips around the Asia-Pacific region

A dinner organised by the Singapore Business Association there before deciding on their next move. Fortunately, their next move was decided for them.

The wonders of networking worked its magic at the dinner and the team managed to get an interview with an official working in Hong Kong Disneyland. They were taken to the newly-opened theme park and briefed on the challenges Disney faced in starting their operations there. This made for one of the more interesting project reports in the class.

In their grab bag of memories, what the students recalled most fondly was the genuine hospitality shown by their hosts in the various countries.

Aoso Ba-Lan, a German exchange student, was hosted personally by Lim Chin Looon of Xinghian Steel Mesh Company in Shenzhen, China. Besides giving Ba-Lan's team a comprehensive breakdown of the technicalities involved in the steel plant's operations, Mr Lim graciously hosted a dinner for them, inviting corporate figures from the hotel, the UOB group and Fargus to join in the night's revelry. It was an informal, light-hearted affair where hilarious anecdotes of working in a foreign environment were related and stories about cultural differences exchanged - pam si, the Asian notion of forging relations out of goodwill, at its finest.

Went out of their way

What amazed the students most in their meetings with their hosts was the sincere manner in which the latter went out of their way to ensure that the students' needs were met. Victor Sim Zhiqong, the lead teaching assistant, recalled feeling intimidated at first when he wrote e-mail messages to bigwigs of firms as he helped students to liaise with their companies. Yet, after a few correspondences in which perfectly friendly responses were given, his confidence was bolstered. "After a while, it felt like a completely normal thing to do - writing to the CEO of a company, the way you would to a friend, perhaps only in a more formal manner."

Overall, the field trips were a good opportunity for the students to go beyond mere textbook learning to experience for themselves what the corporate world in the Asia-Pacific economy was really like. Many gained perspectives of what awaited them in the corporate world upon graduation. Yong Yiling, a fourth-year business student said: "The trip was really the high-light of my university education."

Robert added: "It felt surreal going back to the classroom as a student when I had been wearing suits and meeting CEOs for the entire week before that."