

Yamanashi Cycling Tour Project by Garuda Indonesia

~ More than just cycling ~

[Jennifer Sarah]

Sport has the power to change the world, the power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way that little else can (...) It is an instrument for peace.

Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa (1994-1999)

Introduction:

Sport is an effective and powerful instrument for reaching individuals in every corner of the globe. In Japan, sports have transcended borders, increased dialogue, and exposed foreign participants to Japanese culture. Outside of official channels, sports diplomacy connects people on a personal level through common interests, values, and passions. Through this medium, Yamanashi Prefecture has been strengthening bilateral relations with Indonesia. One example of this is the cycling project on May 14th, 2016 between Yamanashi Prefecture and Garuda Indonesia, the biggest national airline of Indonesia, headquartered at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in Tangerang.

Historical background:

Yamanashi Prefecture has recently started to promote inbound tourism from Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous nation, the world's 10th largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity, and a member of the G-20. It all started with the establishment of bilateral relations through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with Garuda Indonesia in 2013. The first project was a cycling tour event in Fuefuki Fruits Park, Yamanashi Prefecture on April 14th, 2013. At the time, the President and CEO of Garuda Indonesia presented two mountain bikes to Yamanashi Prefecture as a symbol of strong relations between Indonesia and Japan. After that, various projects have been under development to foster mutual understanding between both countries. After 3 years, the same event was held at the foot of Mt. Fuji.

What makes the 2016 Yamanashi cycling project special:

The 2016 Yamanashi Cycling Project by Garuda Indonesia was a significant historical event for both countries. Various private organizations participated—such as the Yamanashi Cycle Project (YCP) Team, created by the nonprofit organization of the same name, and the *Kobarin* Team, a road bike fan team created by customers of the Kobayashi Bike Store (the only road bike store in the Fuji Five Lakes Area). The Yamanashi cyclist team made a concerted effort to assist the Indonesian cyclists and show them how to fulfill their goal of cycling as far as 65 km. At the foot of Mt. Fuji, almost 50 Indonesian and 30 Japanese cyclists enlivened the roads of Lake Kawaguchi, Lake Yamanaka and the Oshino Hakkai Area.



I also had the opportunity to take part in this event, using a bike that the former CEO and President of Garuda Indonesia presented to Yamanashi in 2013 and riding it with Yamanashi and Indonesian cyclists. While cycling with them, I saw how the language and cultural barriers between them melted away through the connections they forged. I felt how their trust and respect for each other developed despite their skin color, race, religion, or any other different characteristics they may have had.

That mutual trust manifested when some of the Indonesian participants got injured and decided to quit, as many of the cyclists were not professionals, but beginners with low stamina. However, the Yamanashi team helped those participants and tried to give them support so they could finish.



Maintaining the win-win relations between Garuda Indonesia and Yamanashi Prefecture:

This event may have finished, but the cogitation between the cyclists has developed through the experience. Yamanashi Prefecture itself wants to maintain this win-win relation with Garuda Indonesia, so this cycling event is not the end. At a banquet dinner the night before the cycling tour, many various projects to the current President and CEO of Garuda Indonesia, Mr. Arif Wibowo were suggested. "This should be a step to achieve greater mutual understanding" said the current Yamanashi Governor, Mr. Hitoshi Goto,

To achieve this goal, it has been decided that there will be another tour event between Indonesia and Yamanashi, possibly holding a tour at the Shingen-Ko Festival, a parade festival acknowledged as the largest gathering of samurai in the world, with more than 1000 people in samurai costumes.

When Yamanashi Prefecture decided to cultivate its partnership with Indonesia, Yamanashi Prefecture started to employ Indonesian staff, which gave me the chance to work for Yamanashi from August 2013~August 2016. Since I first came to Yamanashi until now, I have seen that renewing and enhancing the relationship has proven more important as time goes on, with both sides always working to keep the relationship fresh through new ideas and projects. Both sides think cultural diplomacy is crucial in bringing together key representatives from both countries and several sports organization, creating a great opportunity to maintain peaceful ties between both countries.



Jennifer Sarah is an Indonesian CIR who returned to her home country last summer. She already misses her favorite onsen, the delicious fruits and especially all the mountains around Yamanashi Prefecture. She hopes that everyone is doing fine and is looking forward to seeing them again next time!