



Indonesian Battalion in Shingen-Ko Festival

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Every year on the first weekend of April, Yamanashi Prefecture holds a major event in its capital, Kofu City, called the Shingen-Ko Festival. In order to celebrate the heroism of Takeda Shingen, who was lord of Yamanashi Prefecture (called Kai Province at the time) during the Warring States Period in the 16th Century and one of the strongest warlords at the time, this festival reenacts the war deployment ceremony. This is the largest samurai parade in the world, recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records in 2012 when more than one thousand "samurai" participated. By going to this parade, you can experience for yourself the heroic spirit and historic atmosphere created by this event.

Yamanashi Prefecture has been trying to attract more tourists from Southeast Asia and from Indonesia in particular. In 2013, the Prefecture signed an agreement with the airline Garuda Indonesia to promote tourism on both sides. Thanks to the close relationship between them, representatives from Garuda Indonesia had the privilege to participate as the first ever foreign battalion in the Shingen-Ko Festival. This year would be the 46th festival, held in 2017 from April 7th to the 9th. Around forty people from Garuda Indonesia, including Indonesian celebrities who helped promote this event to their social media followers, took part in the parade, and they were all extremely excited to march through downtown Kofu dressed as samurai along with the other battalions, of which there were five: the Fuu (wind), the Rin (forest), the Ka (fire), the Zan (mountain), and the Honjin (main). It was here, the main battalion, where the Indonesian Battalion marched.

Before the big day, the Indonesian Battalion was told to be prepared rain or shine. The parade would be held no matter the weather conditions as long as there were no major storms, and based on previous festival data the festival was held twenty six times when it was sunny, six times when raining, one time when snowing, one time during a spring storm, and so on. At the least,

the Indonesian Battalion had to be prepared to face the cold and the wind. Not that this would be easy – us Indonesians are from a tropical country after all!

On the day of the festival, after all battalions had changed into samurai attire, we strolled around to enjoy the festival's food stalls and rehearse. The parade started from four o'clock. All battalions marched from the Yamanashi Prefectural Government office to Kofu Castle, where the war deployment ceremony would be held. We enjoyed the cherry blossoms along the walk. Even so, we were worried about the cloudy weather, but thank God there was no rain. Phew, we were saved!

Once at the castle, all battalions began parading to the downtown area. The Fuu battalion was deployed first, followed by the Rin, the Ka, the Zan, and finally the Honjin battalions. First, we marched to Kofu Station. The "General" from each battalion was mounted on horse, and one by one they and their battalion were deployed by "Takeda Shingen." We were surprised when we saw many people waiting to see the samurai parade on both sides of the road. Some of them even greeted us in Indonesian thanks to the festival announcers who had kindly introduced the Indonesian Battalion to everyone present. Then, as we marched, we waved to the crowd, giving high fives to the kids and taking pictures with crowd members. What a festival! We really enjoyed it.

The photos and videos uploaded by the Indonesian celebrities to their social media accounts helped to attract much attention. Garuda Indonesia also published an article about the festival in their inflight magazine, which can be accessed online helping to spread the news to other media outlets in Indonesia. We were all happy that our participation in this festival helped raise awareness about Indonesia and the relationship between Indonesia and Yamanashi. See you during the next Shingen-Ko Festival!

