

I Had "The Experience That Matters" – Do You Want it Too?

Contributed By Laura Booker

Inspired by the success of Junior Team Canada's (JTC) Economic Mission to Mexico, I decided to share my experiences. Thanks to PEI companies' interest in international trade and building youth capital, I was able to represent PEI as a JTC Ambassador. Their resources and support made the 2003 JTC Economic Mission to Mexico a success.

JTC provided me with the opportunity to be a Canadian Ambassador. Opportunities included meetings with government officials, hosting press conferences, networking with business leaders, learning to thrive off healthy competition, touring Mexican plants, interacting in the various business cultures across the country, and representing sponsor companies in Mexico.



The Experience of a Life Time!

What can somebody say about an experience that was completely different from anything experienced in the past. For starters, "wow". My participation as a delegate on the Junior Team Canada economic mission to Mexico was undoubtedly an experience I will always carry with me. Everything from the travel and cultural submersion to participating in the economic growth of two nations, to making life long friends, made this experience one worth a million words.

Everything started with just one email. My university colleague Morgan Paine sent me an email on Thursday May 22, 2003, advertising the Junior Team Canada Training Center the following Monday. It was short notice, but I got permission to attend. (Thanks Bernadette!) The training day was full of life, excitement and learning. We had presentations from Team Canada Division, DFAIT, part of the Prime Minister's Trade Team. During lunch we enjoyed networking with business, industry and government leaders, followed by a presentation from Export Development Canada (EDC). At the end of the day the delegates that par-

ticipated in the JTC Training Center were able to apply on the Trade Mission to Mexico. I applied hoping for a chance and out of 100 delegates nation wide, was chosen to represent PEI as the JTC Ambassador. I can't even tell you how excited I was. Since my career goals are to work in the international trade industry it was like landing the perfect job.

And work it was, I raised \$4000.00 in sponsorship money thanks to [a number of Island companies, businesses, and associations]. Thanks again!

On August 2nd, I flew into Ottawa after convincing the flight attendant to let me on the plane - I guess he thought my luggage was a little too heavy (only by 125kg!). What can I say; I didn't want to be missing anything on my trip. Arriving in Ottawa I met up with 2 other delegates, one from N.S. and one from Vancouver. We made our way to the University of Ottawa where we stayed for the next 5 days. During our mission preparation and training, we worked hard researching and gaining valuable information for our sponsorship companies, visited DFAIT, and met with representatives from CIDA, Industry Canada and EDC. We also had the privilege to dine with the Mexican Ambassador at the Mexican Embassy - Ma. Teresa Garcia Segovia de Madero. What an experience we had, including Mexican Margaritas - I had once small sip and thought I was going to hit the floor. There was no shortage of Tequila, but I was going to Mexico!

As the week of preparation wrapped up we got ready for our trip south. I was told we be carrying all our own luggage, so needless to say I had to downsize mine and leave 1/3 of it at the university.

August 8, 2003 - As we approached Mexico City, Mexico's capital, population 30M (Pop. of Canada 33M). All I could do was stare. What a view! I have never seen so many buildings, cars, people and smog. Leaving the airport and driving to our villa, I didn't know if I as going to make it or not - I think the cabbie drove faster than the pilot. Between him playing chicken with several cars and speeding around turns, we did actually arrive at the villa in one piece. Throughout our 7 day stay in Mexico City we visited the Canadian Embassy, met with several corporations wanting to learn

more about Canadian firms and met with Governors of several states. We also had the opportunity to see some sites - we visited the Teotihuacan Pyramids, toured the downtown streets and toured a Bombardier Manufacturing Plant in Haldigo. My biggest learning experiences taken from Mexico City are that the food is out of this world, it is the most important distribution centre, the police are not the people you turn to if you are in trouble, and 60% of the population is poor.

August 14, 2003 - On the plane heading for Guadalajara, population 3M, Mexico's second largest city. We discovered that Guadalajara was called the "City of Flowers" and soon found out why. Everywhere you went someone was trying to sell you flowers, the streets were covered with them and the landscaping proved to be much more enjoyable than the smoggy city. During this part of the trip I didn't get to see as much because a small illness I developed from the food, didn't last long and I was back in the game. The group took tours of the many churches and visited a furniture expo and visited the University, Tech de Monterrey. Even though our stay was short we met with the President of Bancomext, the country's financial provider and Canaco, the Young Entrepreneurs Program. The lessons taken from this leg of the journey were that the businesses are mostly run by young leaders, this part of Latin America is known as "Silicon Valley" and women are treated like gold. Guadalajara is also one of Mexico's main agriculture and agri-food producers, cultivating the cactuses to make tequila.

August 19, 2003 - Our stop in Monterrey was only 2 days but what a city. It is the largest commercial development in Mexico and houses several thousand businesses in diverse specialties including an Aerospace Development Park like we have in Slemon Park. These two days were filled with several meetings and a little dancing. I just loved the latin music.

August 21, 2003 - Our last leg of the journey we were hosted by the Governor of Tlaxcala. We stay in a 5 star hotel surrounding a pool with Mexican music playing constantly. The culture really hit home on our stay in Tlaxcala. The streets were filled with music, food and dancing. We had media press conferences with the Governor and learned about the

history of Mexico. Only receiving it's independence from Spain in 1916 the mix of cultures were prevalent. The markets were filled with silver, artwork and craftsmanship. The opportunity to walk the streets and experience the old landscape was enough to fill my dreams for a life time.

Now It's Your Turn! Pack Your Bags!

Getting the "experience that matters" is not only a slogan of JTC, but also something that I can attest to. Already my resume looks so much better! This is not to suggest that you should only consider this experience a "resume booster", but it most definitely has that effect. The truth is that the experience you gain from actually *doing* something is much more valuable than what you can learn by sitting in a classroom. The fact that not everyone has this opportunity is what makes it valuable; it is what truly *matters*. Even though I was completely exhausted and sick for a week after returning home, I would not trade my time with JTC for any old summer job, time at the lake, nor summer semester. The enjoyment, experience and camaraderie I experienced this last August with Junior Team Canada was truly one of the best times of my life. I would encourage anyone to apply.

Now that I have experience a Junior Team Canada Trade Mission, effort has been put into follow-up with Mexican contacts, briefing sponsors, writing reports, gaining media awareness, and other post-mission duties such as promoting the experience to my province. I hope to attract fresh faces to attend the 2004 JTC Training Centre on March 25th, 2005 at UPEI and urge everyone to apply for the 2004 Economic Mission to Asia this August.

Salud!

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Mexico 2003

For more information in JTC Training Centre 2004 email me at laura@bookerinternational.ca or visit www.gvconnects.com.