

Understanding Similarities

My Trip to the CAM Conference in Fiji

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In February of 2018, the Commonwealth Association of Museums hosted the *Museum Education in the Pacific* workshop in Suva, Fiji. There were representatives from Australia, Belau, Canada, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, and, of course Fiji. With support from the Canadian High Commission in New Zealand, I attended as an Indigenous representative from Canada.

I found the Fijians to be incredible hosts during our visit. Throughout the workshop I noticed that, as In-

igenous people, we have similar histories after contact; learning English, converting to the Catholic/Christian Religions, Western influences to our educational system, food, and housing. It was interesting to see how meals were the same in my community and in Fiji. We began with a prayer, song and welcome and then we were seated at an honorable guest table and served first, very much like we treat guests at home.

In Suva, if you can climb a coconut tree, the coconuts are free for the taking. Just about every house I saw had a banana tree in their yard

and other traditional food. I was very inspired by their ability to live off of the land in a city centre. I'm planning to add Indigenous medicinal and food plants into my yard as I plant my conventional garden this year.

Our Ancestors have shown incredible strength and resilience in adapting, while maintaining the core of our cultures. We also use museums as a resource to engage with visitors and community members alike. The Australian Museum hosts an annual Pacific Youth Reconnection Project to address the over-representation



Above: Commonwealth Museum Association conference go-ers, Fiji 2018.
Photo credit: Richard Wood, Commonwealth Museum Association

of Pacific youth in the juvenile justice system. The goal of the Project is to reconnect marginalized youth with their cultural heritage to help create a positive self-identity. The Museum of Samoa hosts a program to bring in Master Artists to work with students to inspire them to learn a craft.

At the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre, we run similar programming to encourage and share our culture. The Aboriginal Youth Ambassador Program is an immersive cultural and business program. It teaches the foundations of business through the lens of a First Nations Museum, while introducing and encouraging our youth to celebrate our culture. We also have an Artist in Residence

Program that brings artists on-site to foster relationships and inspire both staff and guests to learn more about their artistic process.

Our lives and worlds are different, but we have many things in common. Although our educational programs are intended to engage with visitors, we also use them to ensure our children learn valuable parts of our culture. The conference was a great way to connect our museums and cultural centres and together and build relationships with one another.



Alison Pascal - Mixalítsa7 is of the Lil'wat Nation. She is the Curator at the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre in Whistler, BC. She has curated the 'Sp07ez Workhouse' and 'Honouring the Gifts of our Forest' at the SLCC, and has co-curated exhibits at the Museum of Anthropology (Culture at the Centre) and the Sunshine Coast Museum & Archives (Woven through Time).

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