

Outposted

– the diary of an Australian Federal Police Liaison Officer in Hong Kong

With the Women and Policing Globally 2002 Conference set to convene in Canberra next month, Platypus takes this opportunity to visit the experiences of an AFP officer on posting overseas.

Federal Agent Kylie Flower is currently posted as a Police Liaison Officer attached to the Australian Consulate in Hong Kong and here gives us an insight into her daily personal and professional life.

Since June 2000, I have been posted to Hong Kong as one of four Australian Federal Police Liaison Officer's at the Australian Consulate. For the first 16 months of my posting I was one of two female officers at the post – the first AFP post in Asia to second female officers, however, since this time, we have seen a female officer posted to Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Papua New Guinea. The AFP has 38 Liaison Officer's located in 23 countries around the world.

The Hong Kong post's areas of responsibility include Hong Kong, Macau, Japan, Korea and Taiwan. Liaison Officer's perform many functions including:

- Facilitate enquiries between host-country and Australian law-enforcement agencies;
- Establish and maintain contacts and information sharing between Australian and international law-enforcement agencies (both within the host country and with third-country agencies, including the US and Canada);
- Coordinate long-term multi-agency investigations which often involve several countries, requiring the Liaison Officer to become actively involved in the investigation in cooperation with the respective case officers; and,
- Facilitate the attendance of host law-enforcement officers on training courses and operational visits to Australia as well as facilitating visits to the host country for training and operational visits to the host country and attendance at conferences and workshops in the region.

A Liaison Officer is also a member of the diplomatic community and therefore required to attend and participate in functions and activities of the mission. This is not always an onerous task.

This description of tasks is by no means exhaustive and I imagine that any Liaison Officer would be able to jot down hundreds of examples of tasks they have been required to undertake over the years. I guess it's fair to say that no two days are ever the same and the work never gets boring.

When I first discovered I was moving to Hong Kong, I didn't really know what to expect. The first thing that struck my husband and I when we arrived on Hong Kong Island was the size of the buildings – they are so tall. Our apartment is located in Mid-Levels, half way up Victoria Peak. If you lean over the balcony we have a great harbour view! Thankfully we are only on the third floor of our 34-storey building. Our apartment complex has a population larger than the country town that I grew up in, however, you never see anyone and no one knows each other, which is so unlike my home town.

And speaking of view's, the view from the Hong Kong post's window – overlooking Victoria Harbour – is unrivalled by any view I have ever seen from an office before. I think it is the AFP's best-kept secret. Every day, I must admit, I spend at least 10 minutes gazing out the window and thinking, "Wow, how lucky am I?"

The Hong Kong post has grown from two members to four in a relatively short period. Consequently, our office had become a little crowded – fortunately we have just relocated to premises actually within the Consulate, specifically designed to accommodate our expanding needs. The new office was opened by the Commissioner on March 21 this year. Judging by the comments from our colleagues within the local law-enforcement community, it has created quite an impact. Our new environment is certainly world class.

Our first social function at the Australian Consulate was intriguing. The most commonly asked question

by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) officer's was, "Is this your first posting?" I think our open mouths and constant cries of, "Have you seen how much things cost?" gives us away (the most useful piece of advice I remember reading on the plane on the way to Hong Kong was in the Lonely Planet which mentioned that, as a visitor to Hong Kong, don't mention how expensive everything is to your friends who live there – they already know. And isn't that the truth? But believe me, some days you just have to have that AUD8 cappuccino!)

Most DFAT officers are career diplomats, therefore, experience multiple postings during their careers – quite unlike the AFP. Fortunately, many AFP officers in Hong Kong were on their first posting, which, I think, creates a lot of enthusiasm at the post. I think that the realisation that this will probably be your only posting allows you to enjoy everything so much more – both the professional and personal opportunities that living overseas for three years affords you.

Other agencies represented in Hong Kong include the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade) and the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). There are about 25 'A-based' staff in Hong Kong, being Australian-based officer's posted overseas. The Consulate is a tight-knit community, with many of the spouses working part-time there also, performing roles such as the Community Liaison Officer (CLO).

The CLO performs many pastoral-care type functions, such as looking after new arrivals to ensure they settle in, as well as providing guidance and assistance to officers before their arrival at the post.

My husband, Alex, was informed by many of the male spouses (who, at the time of our arrival, outnumbered the female spouses, which I thought was an excellent start to a posting), that he was now a STUD. He was soon to learn that this meant Spouse Travelling Under Duress. He was quite happy with this label and will tell anyone willing to listen. He has, however, been under anything but duress – and makes a lot of mileage out of the title.

On a recent visit to Hong Kong, Alex shared this intelligence with John, husband of Christine Nixon, the Chief Commissioner of the Victoria Police, who quickly sought permission to adopt the title. The male spouses, however, are generally not too impressed when they receive their Hong Kong Identification Cards, which state that they are the husband of xxx. The female officers all make a lot of mileage out of that one!

Alex's second introduction to Hong Kong was the local hardware, or should I say, the many little shops that appear to sell what resemble building materials. He soon realised that Hardware House has not yet hit Asia and he was in real trouble if he thought he was going to be a carpenter in Hong Kong. This fact was confirmed when a "tradesman" came to our apartment to fix the toilet, hang the pictures, install the dishwasher and wire the clothes dryer. However, this



did not daunt him and he spent several months being a Hire-a-Hubby for the many expatriate's that love having a carpenter who can speak English.

Alex has now found his niche in life. He is a teacher's assistant at the Australian International School. He assists an Australian teacher with a class of children aged four to five years, helping with everything from painting, gross motor skills, reading and writing and soccer training. His first year was complete when he came home from school with a Principal's Certificate for his outstanding contribution to the school. He does admit that that was his first!

The Consulate organises many social activities including junk trips to some of the outer islands, Christmas parties — complete with Santa, social gatherings with members of the other consulates, trivia nights, wine tasting (Australian wine and cheese of course) and pizza nights to watch the many nights of fireworks that Hong Kong provides. These functions assist members of the consulate and their families, in forming a close-knit, supportive community.

Professionally, the work in Hong Kong is very rewarding. Hong Kong is a major hub within the Asia-Pacific region and the post is extremely busy, illustrated by the doubling of staff in the past three years.

Living and working in Hong Kong has also given me an appreciation and understanding of a different culture, which you can't acquire on a holiday or during a brief stay in a country. My job has allowed me to meet so many different people in law enforcement and from the wider community, and to form firm friendships that bridge the cultural differences. I have

Staff in Hong gather for a photo (left to right) Kaylene and Terry Allen, Kylie Flower, Alex Love, Bill and Mei Lee and (front) Mick and Ronae Duthi

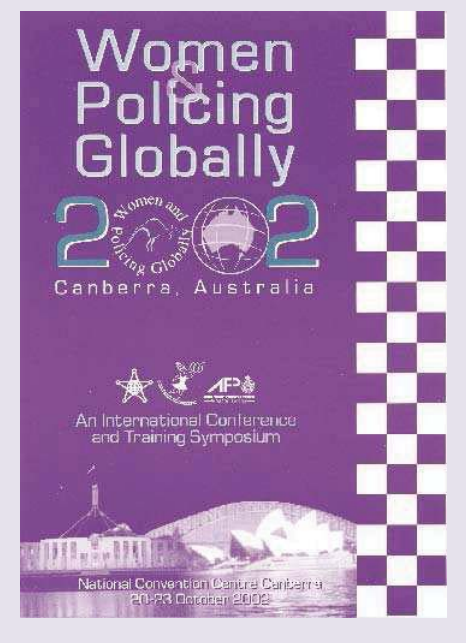
Next month, the Australasian Council for Women and Policing (ACWAP), in conjunction with the AFP and the International Association of Women Police (IAWP) will host an international women and policing conference in Canberra.

Women and Policing Globally 2002 - October 20 to 23 - will provide an interactive forum to discuss current and future trends facing women and policing and is a unique opportunity for Australian law-enforcement professionals to meet and establish networks with overseas counterparts.

This is the first such conference to be held in Australia.

Conference sessions will cover women's role in peacekeeping, investigating war crimes, improving the status of women in policing, policing violence against women, increasing diversity within the policing and law enforcement environment, identifying best practice in policing and the role of police and law enforcement officers in protecting women's human rights.

Delegates from across Australia as well as Africa, Canada, Romania, Sweden, China, USA, West Indies and the Philippines have registered for the conference.



been invited to Chinese barbeques (now that's a different experience) and to take a colleague's young child for a ride on a bicycle - something she had never done before.

I have learnt a lot from my exposure to the Chinese culture, although my Cantonese is only useful as a source of amusement to the taxi drivers I attempt to practice on but only end up entertaining. However, I have found that hand signals and sign language are very effective, no matter which country you are in.

Any concerns that I had about being a female Liaison Officer in Asia, based on perceptions and historic information, were ill founded. At no time in the past two years have I ever had a negative experience with a law-enforcement officer from the host country, nor has an officer treated me any differently than my male colleagues because of gender issues.

I quickly understood that respect and trust from our host law-enforcement agencies and officers must be earned, and this is achieved by being a competent and trustworthy officer. It is not based on age or gender.

I must admit though, that at a recent conference on drugs in Japan, only four of the 120 delegates and observers were women, but one of my colleagues observed that this was four more than a few years ago, so progress has been made.

I am also pleasantly surprised how many senior officers in the discipline services and the government in Hong Kong are women.

Most families have a live-in maid, who also minds the children, which enables many women to return to the workforce three months after having children, which, by their own admission, ensures that they are not disadvantaged by being a parent. Many female police and customs officer's whom I speak to, attribute their ability to continue their careers after the birth of their children to the fact that they have full-time, live-in domestic assistance. I guess this is a distinct advantage to women in Asia compared to in Australia.

As I've said, I have been exposed to many different professional experiences, investigations and opportunities. Some of these include:

- Coordinating enquiries for more than a year for a joint AFP/Hong Kong Police/National Crime Squad (UK) investigation involving money laundering and human smuggling, resulting in simultaneous warrants and arrests being executed in three countries and millions of dollars being restrained;
- Facilitating enquiries on behalf of the National Crime Authority over several months, which led to the seizure of 150kg of MDMA in Australia and both Australian and Hong Kong citizens being arrested;
- Coordinating enquiries between the Hong Kong Independent Commission Against Corruption, the AFP and DIMIA in relation to a corrupt government official and migration consultant;
- Participation in a seminar involving money-laundering experts in Hong Kong and the new anti-terrorism legislation being enacted internationally, providing an Australian law-enforcement perspective;
- Representing Australia at an Asia Pacific Drug Conference in Japan and liaising with other Liaison Officers from around the world as well as Japanese National Police Agency officers;
- Attendance at functions including the Police Night (similar to a Military Tattoo), Police Passing-Out Parades and liaison functions;
- Witnessing a Customs and Excise Ceremony where new vessels are taken to the Tin Hau Temple and blessed in a ceremony involving traditional Chinese Customs;
- Attend a dinner with senior law enforcement officers, hosted by the Consul-General for Rear Admiral Shalders, the CEO of Coastwatch in Australia (at that time);
- Performed the role of a Senior Facilitator on the AFP's International Management of Serious Crime (IMOSC) course in Singapore for three weeks (a role I performed in Canberra before transferring to Hong Kong), which was attended by representatives from 10 countries in the region; and

- Attendance at the Hong Kong Police International Triad and also the Transnational Organised Crime Conference, at which both the AFP Commissioner, Mr Keelty and the Victoria Police Chief Commissioner, Ms Nixon, were keynote speakers.

These are a few of the many things that I have been able to attend/do, however, it provides an overview of how diverse the role of an LO is.

A major part of the Liaison Officer's role is also to represent the AFP and the consulate at diplomatic functions. This can be a lot of fun, and often provides our spouses with opportunities to attend. Some examples of the functions that we attend include:

- The Australian Centenary of Federation Races at the Happy Valley Racecourse, attended by many members of the Hong Kong Government, senior representatives of major companies and members of the large Australian community;
- Australia Day Receptions at the Hong Kong Country Club;
- Cocktail parties and receptions at the Consul-General's residence in Deep Water Bay (attended by people including Hong Kong business people, Australian media representatives, restaurant owners, members of the racing community, members of Australian companies based in Hong Kong and members of the Hong Kong Government);
- Dinner with Jim Bacon, Premier of Tasmania, on a visit to Hong Kong;
- Accompanying Senator Jeannie Ferris to the Anzac Day Dawn Service and Breakfast, attended by many Australians and New Zealanders and people from Hong Kong; and,
- A cocktail reception on board the USS John C Stennis, a US aircraft carrier en route to Afghanistan. The highlight was our ride to the flight deck on the aircraft lift to view the aircraft and the huge deck.

The social life of an LO is certainly different to the life we lived in Australia, with most nights of the week spent at functions, entertaining visitors to Hong Kong or enjoying the hundreds of restaurants that Hong Kong has to offer, not to mention the Happy Valley and Sha Tin Races and the many formal balls that are held each year.

Hong Kong also offers many bush walks, on both sealed and dirt tracks, on both the Island, the New Territories and on the many outlying islands. It is a fantastic way to spend a Sunday morning.

Alex and I have also travelled extensively on holidays, as Hong Kong is an excellent springboard to travel in the region. We have visited Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia (including Sarawak), Mainland China and Nepal. Our two most amazing experiences would have to be standing on the Great Wall and flying over Mount Everest.



My time as an LO has given me an insight into the important role that Australia, and Australian law enforcement, plays internationally. Australia, and more importantly, Australians, have an excellent reputation overseas, as does the AFP and other federal and state law-enforcement agencies. Furthermore, most people I deal with have either visited Australia, in a personal or professional capacity, have conducted investigations in cooperation with federal or state policing services, or have family that live in or have visited Australia. So, they have a genuine interest in what we do, where we come from and what our life is like in Australia.

I consider the opportunity to serve as an AFP officer overseas an honour and I will always value this period of my career. I highly recommend it to anyone contemplating such a career move.

Mick Duthie,
Kylie Flower and
Terry Allen take
in the sights of
Hong Kong