

The first venture abroad – Malaysia
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On 15 October 2011 the Plurabelles met at Dublin Airport to travel to Malaysia for the International Dragon Boat Federation (IDBF) inaugural Cancer Survivors World Cup. Our first international competition! We travelled with Etihad Airways, who gave us sponsorship. The World Cup was held in conjunction with the Malaysia International Boat Festival on 22 and 23 October. The event took place at the Putrajaya water sports complex, a magnificent setting situated 40 km from Kuala Lumpur.

We were very fortunate to be the crew representing the Plurabelle Paddlers. What lay ahead of us we had no idea, but we knew we had trained hard. We soon discovered that the event consisted of sixty teams, comprising 1,500 participants from 14 countries – more paddlers than we had ever seen before.

The crew stayed at the Furama Hotel in Kuala Lumpur. The standout memory of the hotel was the fabulous breakfast buffet every morning, offering endless healthy and delicious choices to start the day. We put in a request for extra bananas at breakfast on race days – imagine our surprise when they kindly delivered enough bananas for the whole team on Friday night and also had more available for us at breakfast on Sunday morning.

We had five days before the event to acclimatise ourselves to our new surroundings and immersed ourselves in sightseeing, shopping, manicures, pedicures and building new friendships with girls we hardly knew, let alone travelled with before. A number of these days and nights also included a downpour of rain, thunder and spectacular lightning.

The event's managing director, Datuk Herman Chin, soon took us under his wing, which was undoubtedly due to the rapport our wonderful Fiona Tiernan had built up with him. We were

invited to a dinner hosted by him in a traditional restaurant and also on another evening to a fabulous meal and party at a venue he owned. The word was out that the Plurabelles knew how to enjoy themselves and have fun!

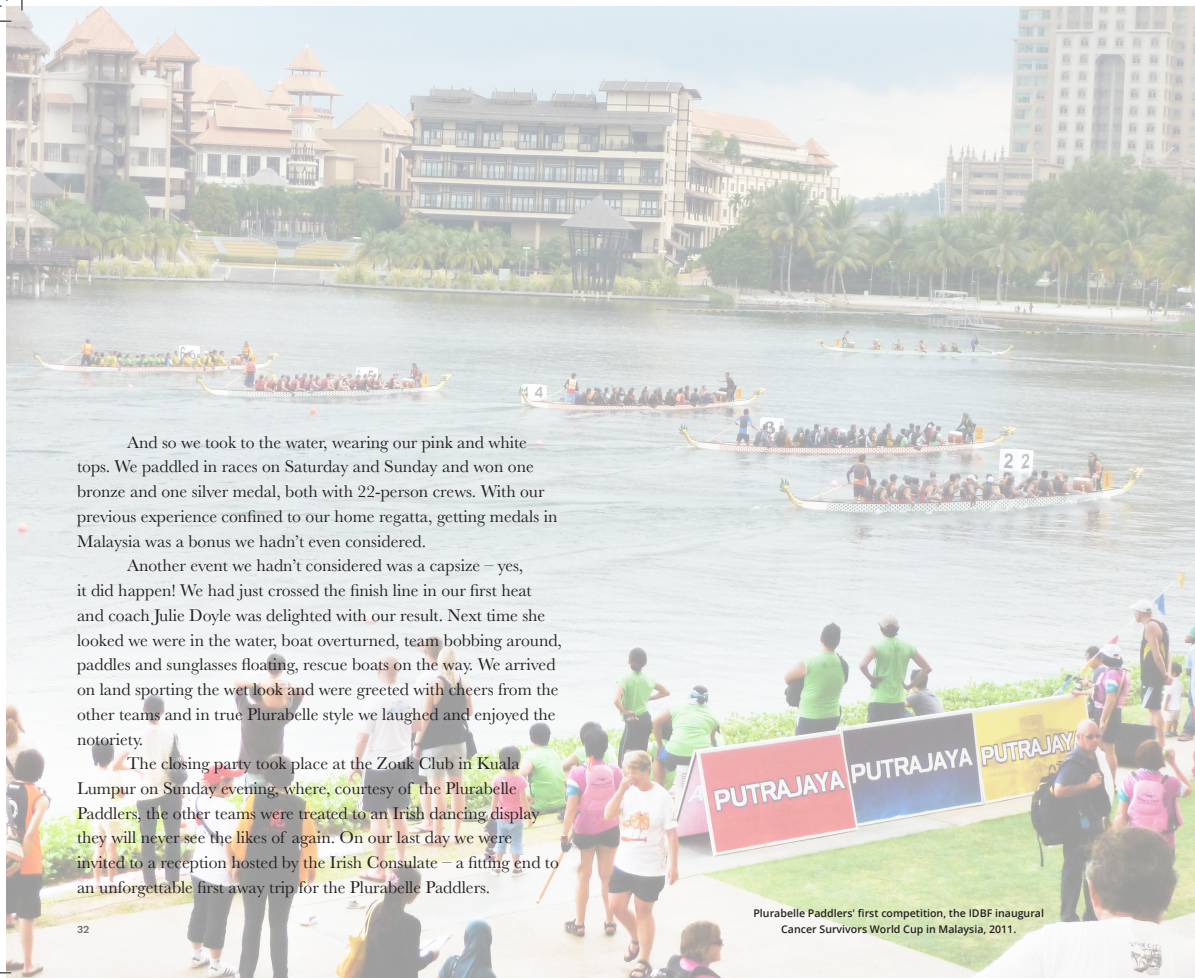
We had two on-water training sessions, but little did we know that we were being watched. A reporter from *The Star online* had spotted us:

The teams were seen training at the Putrajaya Maritime Centre during the official training sessions and one of them was the Plurabelle Paddlers from Ireland. Clad in green, the year-old breast cancer support group may be novices but they are ready to take on the challenge. According to team captain Fiona Tiernan, they arrived in Malaysia last weekend but had been training twice a week in Dublin since May. She credited their coach Julie Doyle, who paddles for the Great Britain Dragon Boat Team, for training the team which comprises members in their early thirties with the oldest member at age 72. 'We are the first dragon boat team in Ireland and have taken part in the Dublin Dragon Boat Regatta,' she said.

We arrived at the venue early on Saturday morning full of anticipation and excitement, but I don't think anyone was prepared for the spectacle that greeted us – teams in their colourful kit, team drills of warming up and cooling down, dragon boats lined up, the sound of the drums. Colour, noise, excitement, fun, camaraderie and sportsmanship – it was all there.

The opening ceremony on Saturday was spectacular, carried out with the pomp and pageantry of the traditional rites of dragon boat racing. The team was in high spirits and our supporters' enthusiasm was infectious. Apart from family and friends, we had the support of Penang Medical College.

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And so we took to the water, wearing our pink and white tops. We paddled in races on Saturday and Sunday and won one bronze and one silver medal, both with 22-person crews. With our previous experience confined to our home regatta, getting medals in Malaysia was a bonus we hadn't even considered.

Another event we hadn't considered was a capsized – yes, it did happen! We had just crossed the finish line in our first heat and coach Julie Doyle was delighted with our result. Next time she looked we were in the water, boat overturned, team bobbing around, paddles and sunglasses floating, rescue boats on the way. We arrived on land sporting the wet look and were greeted with cheers from the other teams and in true Plurabelle style we laughed and enjoyed the notoriety.

The closing party took place at the Zouk Club in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday evening, where, courtesy of the Plurabelle Paddlers, the other teams were treated to an Irish dancing display they will never see the likes of again. On our last day we were invited to a reception hosted by the Irish Consulate – a fitting end to an unforgettable first away trip for the Plurabelle Paddlers.

Plurabelle Paddlers' first competition, the IDBF inaugural Cancer Survivors World Cup in Malaysia, 2011.



Malaysia 2011 Supporters



Caption needed

The famous capsizes in Malaysia that has gone down in Plurabelle lore!

