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Singapore and Its Red Dot RubyConf

By keithrbennett on May 10th, 2011

The Conference

On April 22-23, 2011 was the first ever regional Ruby Conference in Southeast Asia (http://reddotrubyconf.com, Twitter tag *#reddotrubyconf*). (Conference links and resources provided by @cheeaun are here). It was really cool seeing people from so many different countries in the region unite around their appreciation of the Ruby language.

In additional to the regional speakers and participants, Matz (the creator of the Ruby language, for those who don't know) made the trip from Japan, as did Dave Thomas, Tom Preston-Warner, Gregg Pollack, Sarah Mei, and yours truly from the United States for this historic (in the Ruby world, anyway) occasion. Matz handles his celebrity well, and didn't mind when a few of us asked him for photos with him.

Matz with Paolo Falcone from Friendster Philippines

The conference was held at SMU, Singapore Management University, on their beautiful campus in the middle of the city. It was a one track conference, with sessions held in a comfortable and spacious auditorium.

SMU (Singapore Management University), RedDotRubyConf Site

Pivotal Labs is, well, pivotal, in Singapore's Ruby community. They've invested time and money in events such as the conference and provide a lot of technical expertise in the community. (Carl Coryell-Martin (http://pivotallabs.com/users/ccoryell/blog), head of Pivotal Labs Singapore, worked with Andy Croll of Anideo and Jason Ong to organize RedDotRubyConf.) Some of the Pivotal crew is working with Friendster in Manila for Friendster's new makeover. Pivotal employs an intense but humane work style, with only rare exceptions to colocation and almost continuous pair programming. They say that while their work day is generally limited to eight hours, it can be an exhausting eight hours. The Pivotal folks, as everyone else, were friendly and welcoming (MINSWAN – Matz is Nice So We Are Nice).

They hosted an evening Rails installfest the night before Thursday's Rails tutorial, and I stopped by to see if I could help. After sitting down, I turned to the person on my left, and it was Matz! I spared him the three bows and instead said a friendly hello.

Jason Ong

I had been corresponding with Jason Ong, one of the principal organizers, for a while before the conference and was happy to finally meet him in person. Jason runs a Rails consultancy and is also a

Keith Bennett (Me) with Jason Ong

musician. He's
quick to laugh, but thoughtful and serious too, caring a lot about Singapore and the world.

On one of my first days in Singapore, Jason brought me to a typical Singaporean Hainanese chicken joint. Hainanese chicken, he explained, is prepared by boiling the chicken and then immersing it in freezing cold water. This has a special effect on the fat that makes the chicken especially tender.

...and Andras Kristof

After dinner Jason and I went over to the Starbucks, where Andras Kristof happened to pass by. Andras is originally from Hungary, but has spent several years each in Japan and Singapore. The three of us chatted for a couple of hours. Andras is the Senior Director of Engineering for http://www.viki.com, a unique and awesome web site where movies can be viewed with subtitles contributed by the users themselves in many languages (including Klingon!). He had intended to work on his upcoming conference talk, but decided he'd enjoy chatting more.

Andras Kristof of Viki.com

My US mobile phone is a Verizon phone, CDMA, not GSM, and is therefore unusable almost everywhere in the world outside the US. I have an old and simple GSM phone I use for my travels, but I felt I needed an Android phone so I could stay in constant email contact, and wander the cities of my travels more intelligently with GPS and Google Maps. So I asked Andras where I could find a cheap used Android phone, and he offered to give me an old phone he was no longer using! (I tried to pay him for it, but he refused.) It's a cute half size Motorola phone with a swing-out keyboard. The phone's been a great help and has gotten a lot of compliments. (The coin below is included for size context; it's a 10 Philippine peso coin and is about the size of a U.S. quarter.)

Andras' Motorola Android Phone, Closed

Andras' Motorola Andro

HackerspaceSG

While in Bangkok, I visited Bangkok Hackerspace (blog article at http://krbtech.wordpress.com/2010/03/02/bangspace-bangkok-hackerspace/), and learned that the Singapore Hackerspace (http://hackerspace.sg) was looked up to as a very cool space. As a result, I wanted to check it out, and finally, after the last day of the conference, Jay Fajardo and Jason Torres of http://www.proudcloud.net in the Philippines joined me on an urban trek to the space. We must have looked funny, stopping frequently to pore over the tiny phone to study the map and figure out where we were going. Well, ok, *I* must have looked funny.

Keith, Jay, and Jason at HackerspaceSG

We finally arrived in the Arab Quarter, where the hackerspace is located. The Hackerspace is on the second floor and is a homey set of rooms. There's a main area that has chairs and tables for working and for holding meetings. There's a kitchen and rest room in the back, and then there's the more private area where there are working booths (something like a library's quiet area). Here's a photo of the three of us in the doorway of that section. Note the sign — although Singapore is a strict place, it's not *that* strict, and they're only kidding.

The next day I went back to Hackerspace and met Shara and Brian, a

couple of Rails developers from KL (regional-speak for Kuala Lumpur), Malaysia. Also there was Ben Scherrey, American developer in Bangkok and owner of the building in which Bangkok's Hackerspace has been housed. Ben is doing some interesting Android work, writing code in C++ using Android's NDI.

HackerspaceSG Main Room

Keith, Jason, Ben, Shara, Brian at HackerspaceSG

Now for some things of tourist interest…

Durian Crepes Stand in Chinatown (yummy!)

Making the Durian Crepe

Adding the Durian to t

The Awesome Singapore National Library Building

Singapore National Library

Inside the Hindu Temple in the Bugis Area

Inside the Hindu Temple at Bugis

Goodbye, Singapore, until we meet again…

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