Centre for Environmental Policy (CEP) – Eden Project Visit

Thirteen (13) PhD students from various interdisciplinary backgrounds at the Centre for Environmental Policy (CEP) journeyed to Cornwall and visited two beacons of sustainability; the Eden Project and the St Austell brewery. CEP has many different work streams which can often make it hard for a majority of PhD students to fully appreciate the valuable breadth of work that goes on in the last three houses (13, 14 & 15) on Prince’s Gardens; this can often be more so for first year (and new to Imperial) students. Trying to foster a greater sense of community, togetherness and trust is critical to successful cooperation and collaboration in academia and work; developing this in the early stages of a PhD enables individuals to more effectively communicate and understand each other. A two day, one night stay in Cornwall was the perfect opportunity to bond, gain perspective and gain appreciation for the environment we seek to enjoy, work in and protect in equal measures.

Day One of the itinerary consisted of the train journey to St Austell in Cornwall and a visit to the St Austell brewery. There we learnt about the corporate and social responsibility of the company, where they provided us with the narrative of how they take social and environmental considerations into their business plans. We got to see the whole production process, from ingredients, to processing, fermenting, and packaging. We learnt how synergies with local agriculture and businesses (including the Eden project) have eliminated waste going to landfill from the Brewery. It was a multi-sensory experience – even a tasting!

Later that evening we arrived at our hostel – the great value and sustainable Eden’s Yard Backpackers after a trip to the local town for consumables. At the hostel, our welcoming hosts prepared a group meal where we ate outside and shared stories of how we came to be PhD students, as well as a candid chat about our successes and challenges. There was a post-digestion three minute thesis competition which allowed us all to practice our lift pitch and gave us insight into the amazing talent within the group – sometimes the quiet ones are the most eloquent. We also played some group games which drew us all closer together.

Day Two started with a trip to the Eden Project, a large environmental site dedicated to the public awareness of environmental issues and nature – primarily the flora of the world and their habitats. There we had a talk and tour hosted by the project’s knowledgeable staff, visiting the world’s largest indoor rainforest and a slightly smaller Mediterranean biome. We were lucky enough to witness the rare bloom of the giant Titan Arum (or corpse plant). We discussed habitat loss; the plants that shaped the world; current ecological issues like biodiversity loss and conservation; and the future environmental challenges like climate change that all 13 of us, in some way shape or form with hope to aid through our research. We then made our way back to the train station on foot, exploring the historic and winding country roads.