Outbound Exchange Programme to Ariake National College of Technology (ANCT)

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By Lim WenYu

Diploma in Perfumery and Cosmetic Science

Year 2
Straight after getting off the plane, we went to Kyushu National Museum (九州国立博物館) and Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine (太宰府天満宮). At the airport we were very happy to see Yamaguchi Sensei and Konoe Sensei there to receive us. Both Senseis accompanied us around for the whole day bringing us to places of interest around the museum and the shrine.
In the museum, there are a lot of ancient artifacts that dated back to periods as long as BC 30,000. The exhibits are placed in a circular shape with small rooms at the sides. These small rooms provide extra knowledge about that period of time the area is focusing on. For example, I went into a room that focuses on musical instruments during the 7th – 11th century. Inside the room, there is drums, gongs, and bells from that century on display. You are allowed to touch the instruments. What I have noticed from the museum is that in every of the small rooms, there will be a guard or an attendant on duty. If you have any questions about the exhibits, you can ask the attendant for help and they will answer your questions. This is very helpful as you will be able to learn more about the exhibits and what they stand for. In Singapore, I have been to the Art Science Museum. Inside the Museum, it is quite different from Japan as the only place you can get your information from is from the audio or the small audio speaker that is on the wall next to the exhibit. Hence I feel that in Japan the system is more flexible as you will be able to get information easily. After exiting the exhibition site, at the ground floor, there is also an area that you can experience the games and the lifestyle of ancient Japan. I tried the puzzle and the clogs. The clogs were seriously very difficult to walk in.
After visiting Kyushu National Museum, we went to have lunch at a nearby restaurant. The food was delicious! Different from Singapore’s Japanese restaurant, we are not provided with spoons and forks. There are only chopsticks provided. For all of our meal in Japan, we have to use chopsticks to eat. The rice there is sticky hence it is easy to use chopsticks to eat the
rice. In Singapore, the method of cooking rice is different hence it is almost impossible to use chopsticks to eat therefore we use spoon and fork instead of chopsticks. I had difficulty at first but in the later part of the trip, I grown accustomed to the way of eating. After eating our lunch, we walked to Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine. The scenery there was very beautiful with a lot of trees and ponds along the way. When we reached the Shrine, we saw a lot of youngsters about the same age as us there also. Yamaguchi sensei told us that students will normally come to this shrine before their exams to pray for good results as this is a shrine dedicated to the spirit of Sugawara Michizane, a scholar and politician of the Heian Period and is also associated with Tenjin, a Shinto deity of education. There are also rules to follow while praying in the shrine. First bow and throw an ‘offering’ of 5 yen. In some of the shrines there is a bell with a long string that you ring to inform the deity of your presence. Then after that you pray and clap your hand twice and bow three times. There is also an area where you can ‘wash’ your hand.

Compared to Singapore’s temple, the Shrines in Japan are more lively all year round. Singapore’s temple are more lively when there is an event like New Year and Hungry Ghost Festival etc.
After visiting the places of interest, we went to Mr Max, a big convenient store that sells items ranging from household products to food. We bought a lot of tidbits and drinks as we thought we might be hungry when we were in the dorm. After that we went to our dorms. When we got off the bus, we saw some familiar faces waiting for us outside the dorms. Kisato came during the previous March trip and I was happy that she was one of our dorm buddies!
HOMESTAY

Yukako Tanaka, Jing Jing and my host.

She is a good friend of mine as she came to Singapore in May and was in my group. She is very friendly and we really had a lot of fun with her and her family.

This is the railway we took to Yukko’s house. Different from Singapore’s train system, Japan has a variety of train systems from railways to Shinkansen. When any train is approaching, there will be sounds warning people crossing to hurry up and people that have not cross to wait. After the warning sounds, there will be barrier let down to prevent people from crossing when the train is coming. In Singapore most of the train tracks are not on the ground so this type of tracks are very new to us.
We took the train to Yanagawa station which is where Yukko live. Her mother came to fetch us in their family car. After that we went to Yanagawa City’s top attraction which is boat riding. We sat on these long wooden boats with a boatman ferrying us around. Along the way, the boatman will also tell us about the history of Yanagawa and sing some traditional songs. This is very new and interesting to us as Singapore is also a city surrounded by water but not as much as Yanagawa. The sceneries along the rides were very beautiful with old and new buildings merging in harmony.
For dinner that night, we got invited to Yukko’s father company dinner. It was to celebrate the end of one year’s sales. We were very honored as they were dining in a high class sushi restaurant. Yukko’s whole family was there too. We got to eat all sorts of eel. From grilled to steamed. It was one of the most delicious meals I had ever ate in Japan. Unlike in Singapore’s sushi restaurant, the food there is very fresh and we do not sit on chairs. Technically we have to kneel the whole dinner but our hosts knew that we are not used to this way of seating therefore we just sat however we like. After dinner, Yukko’s mother took us to a disc rental shop. Japan’s disc rental shop is very huge! They have all sorts of rental from music disc to movies to dramas and I even saw Chinese Mainland dramas! In Singapore, we can only rent movies and dramas. I have not seen music rentals in Singapore. It was very cool!
Day 2 of homestay

We went around Yukko’s hometown. For the start we went to a hotspring for feet. As I had never went to hotsprings before, the water temperature was a bit unbearable for me. The temperature difference of the surrounding air and the water was huge hence I need time to adjust. On the other hand, Yukko and her mother was used to the temperature difference hence they just went straight to the hottest part of the spring. Jing Jing and I went to the middle part first as it was not that hot. In Singapore, our hotsprings are in forms of shops and mostly for stress relief and relaxation. In Yanagawa, the footbath there is open hot spring and free! In winter, it is for families to go and warm up and bond. When we were there, we saw some old people sitting in the hot spring and talking. There was a family of three there talking also. They were all very friendly. When we were there, they tried to talk to us but because we could not really understand so Yukko mother had to answer for us. After the hot spring, we went to 2 shrines, Fukugon Temple and Hiyoshi Shrine. In Fukugon Temple, we saw the coming-of-age ceremony for children ongoing. It was an eye-opener as in Singapore we do not have this tradition. We even met the head priestess of the temple! She was a kind and cute grandmother. After that we went to Hitoshi Shrine where we saw shrines for curing leg soreness, stomachache etc. It seems that Japan Shrines have deities for all kind of illness! We went for lunch at a udon store after that. Different from a typically Singapore restaurant, you are able to choose whether you want to sit at a long table one by one or sit in fours with the normal tables and chairs or Japanese style. The udon there was delicious and in a huge portion! For dinner, we ate with the whole of Yukko’s family. For the whole of our stay there, they were very hospitable and they even took time off to drive us around Yanagawa and to have dinner with us. From what they told us, the family do not usually have dinner together as they have different schedules. When we were leaving, Yukko’s brother and mother gave us lots of presents! We were really very touched by them and if given another chance, I will be more than happy to stay there again and when Yukko come to Singapore, I will try to give the best experience to her also.