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

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Year 2
In the museum, there are a lot of ancient artifacts that date 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 focused on musical instruments during the 7th – 11th century. Inside the room, there are 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 inside. If you have any questions about the exhibits, you can ask the attendants 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 are 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 information board 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 from 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 was only chopsticks provided. For all of our meal in Japan, we had 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 feel that I had 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 too. Yamaguchi sensei told us that students would 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.
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 Yukako’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 sound warning people crossing to hurry up and people that have not crossed to wait. After the warning sound, there the barrier will be 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 track are very new to us.
We took the train to Yanagawa station which was where Yukko stayed. 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 would 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 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 eaten 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 hot springs 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 hot springs are in forms of shops and mostly for stress relieve and relaxation. In Yanagawa, the footbath there is open hot spring and free! In winter, it is for families to go and warm up their body and to 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.
Day 4

School visiting starts from today. To start off the campus tour, a Japanese seminar was organised for us to familiarise us with the Japanese Language. Although we had a basic Japanese workshop before the trip, it was still good to revise on the basics from time to time. After the seminar, we went to the different departments to understand how the subjects are taught in Japan. The education system there is quite different from the polytechnic system. In ANCT, they have fixed class timing similar to the system of Secondary and Primary school. Between classes they will have a five minutes break to rest. Unlike in Singapore Polytechnic, our classes are based on the timing our lecturers slot us in. We will have different timing from others and breaks can be as long as 3 hours. We can even have no school on a particular day depending on how many modules you are taking. During the tour, we have to introduce ourselves to the students quite a number of times as we will go into different classes. The only similarity between ANCT and SP might be that there are many hands-on experiment that the students can experience. We had lunch in the canteen in ANCT. Although we did not get the chance to use the vending machine to order food (as the school had already order our food for us), it was still something different from how we usually order our food in Singapore. In Japan we also have to not only clear our own dishes but also to separate the uneaten food, utensils and the bento box used. This is actually a good habit to cultivate. After lunch we went to attend a creative design seminar. It is actually similar to the design thinking projects we do in SP. During this seminar we attend, the students presented their projects to us in English (which is very amazing!) and the teacher invited us to ask questions and give suggestions. Their project mostly is to improve on daily household products and they will have to apply engineering and make the actual product out. It’s actually similar to what we do in the Science modules where we have to use design thinking to formulate a new product out for the current market. We had time to interact with the students to talk about their projects and to know more about them. The group Jing Jing and I interacted with did on the problem of carrying luggage up and down the stairs. It was very interesting and we had fun playing a few games too. After this class interaction, we went to the welcome party that the students had planned for us. There we saw more of the students that had come Singapore before and we were very happy to see them! We introduced ourselves and did a performance for them. The school band also
performed ‘RPG’ a famous Japanese song for us to welcome us. Speech by the teachers and student council president was given (in English) and then it was free and easy time for us. We talked to the students and had fun until it was time for dinner. It was actually quite fun and memorable for me as I get to meet a lot of friends I made from the previous trip and new friends that are coming for the next trip!
Day 5

Today we visited the each department in detail. In each of the department there is a teacher there to explain either the projects done or how the subjects were taught in school. We also went into one of the architecture classes to experience how the architecture class was taught. In the science department, instead of learning specifics modules like in SP, students there learn generic subjects. In SP, we learn specifics that are relevant to the course we chose for example Perfumery and Cosmetic Science and Applied Chemistry in Pharmaceutical Science focuses more on Chemistry and Biomedical Science focuses more on Biology. While in ANCT, students learn from a wider source similar to JCs. After lunch we split into groups of 2 and visited each department separately. I got to visit the science department with Rian and it was a very interesting visit. We visited the labs and the students in each lab will explain their projects to us. The most surprising thing for me was that students in Year 4 do mostly research in labs and that they are allowed to use the lab even though there is no lab assistant or teacher present. In SP, there is a strict rule about using the labs when there is no teacher or lab assistant present. Overall I feel that for lab work it is similar to how it is taught in SP and it is really surprising to know that we are using similar software (ChemDraw) to do projects! After visiting the different labs in ANCT, we went for a tea ceremony experience. In Japan, the process of making traditional green tea is actually very important and much emphasis is placed on it. The posture and process are very important for both the person making the tea and the person drinking the tea. Traditionally we have to kneel throughout the whole process but because we are not used to it, we are allowed to sit however we want. But some of us still tried to kneel for the entire process but the result is extreme leg pain when we got up. We got to try to mix the tea together. It was very enriching. We got to drink both the tea made by the student and the tea made ourselves. Both are delicious with the sweet given to us! After the tea experience, we went to the Japanese Archery club. Although it was freezing outside, the member of the archery club still waited and performed for us. We tried the bows and the practice slings. It was really not easy as you will have to maintain the posture to aim and the bow can be quite heavy. We were really thankful to the member of the archery club and tea ceremony club who took time off to let us experience
their culture and especially to archery club as the weather that day was really very cold and the wind was very strong! We were outdoors!
We went sight visiting again today. Manda coalmine is one of places of interest near the school. It used to be under the government in 1873 but in 1889, it was bought over and modernised using new technology from Europe. The history behind Manda Coalmine is very rich as it is around for quite a long time. It underwent modernisation of Japan. It is really amazing that the structure is still standing after so long although some places have been renovated. The guide that brought us around took the trouble to translate the explanation for us into English. It was very comforting to know that. We learnt a lot from the guide about the history of Manda Coalmine. An interesting fact about the Manda Coalmine is that they are trying very hard to get into the UNESCO World Culture Heritage in 2015. After visiting Manda Coalmine, we went to AEON mall which is a HUGE shopping centre. We went there for lunch and had a few hours of free time. I went to the bookstore which was really big and bought a few books and magazine that could not be found in Singapore. After that I went around looking for souvenirs and stuff I could buy for myself. The sales assistants there were all very friendly! They will always say ‘いらっしゃいませ’ which means ‘Welcome’ in Japanese. The service attitude there is very good, the sales people there are always polite regardless of whether you patronise the store or not.
Day 7

Kumamoto Castle is the first stop today. Our guide can also speak English. Kumamoto Castle is also a historical site that date back a long time. It just like a scene out of the historical dramas that we always watch. Although it’s all renewed just one year before, it is still preserved the same way as it was in the ancient times. The fascinating sight for this Castle was that the scenery from the top of the castle is very beautiful! At first when I went up the top, there were glass panels near the window but when you go to the other side, there is no glass shielding you from outside! The site was breath-taking. You can almost see all of Kumamoto from the top. After Kumamoto Castle, we went to Kumamoto Hotel to have lunch. The lunch was of course delicious! It is Chinese Cuisine. After that we went to Kumamoto University Fifth High School Memorial Museum. It turns out that Kono Sensei had graduated from this university! This museum showcases the history of Kumamoto University. It was quite interesting as this school had gone through World War II and inside the museum there is a replicate of the classroom and even the ink bottle that was used during that time. We went for flower arrangement next. Flower arrangement was not my forte. You will have to use the flowers given to you to create something new. I was really amazed when the student did the flower arrangement demonstration. It was really very pretty! We got to bring home our flowers and the equipment needed to do flower arranging. Kendo was next on our list. Firstly, the students from the kendo club did a demonstration on how a kendo match is carried out. We got to try out their uniform and how to start a kendo match too. It was really cool! Although the uniform was heavy and I got whacked on the head quite a lot of time (from Song Yu mostly), I really had fun! We went to the boys dorm to play games after dinner. We played ‘10 lives’ and a Japanese card game that requires the players to find the picture card that correspond with the sentence being narrated out. The picture cards are in Kanji and this game requires imagination and memory work. It was a fun and good game to bond people together. All of us had fun bonding together and although we were all tired after that, it was still one of the best days I had in Japan!
Today is the last day we will be spending in the dorm with our dorm mates. We all took lots of pictures and exchange line and facebook id. First event of the day will be going to pottery. It is my first time doing pottery and I am looking forward to it! The master there taught us the basics of making basic items such as bowl, cup and saucer. It is actually not easy to make as you will have to do it layer by layer and make sure it is thick enough as the volume will decrease by about 20% after heating. Some of us made two items while some of us invested all on one (dragon and unicorn, you know who you are). I did a cup and saucer. After lunch in ANCT, we went to Richard Sensei’s English class to participate in their class. It was very fun as we played an improved version of musical chairs! We have to go around the class and sit at different seats to talk to different people on different topics. There’s topics like movies, family, habits etc. This is a good way to bond with the Japanese student although some are quite shy and did not move from their seats often. I got to talk to some Japanese and although there is a language barrier, we still managed to talk quite a lot. This is the last class participation for us so I’m glad that I got to talk to some of the students. We have some free time before dinner hence we went to YouMe Mall for more shopping. It was smaller compared to AEON but it’s still good enough for us. We took a public bus there and the bus there was completely different from the bus in Singapore. The entrance of the bus is at the back of the bus and the exit is in front. You have to pay the bus fare when you are getting off the bus. It is the complete opposite from Singapore as in Singapore if you are not using card for the bus fare, we will have to pay at the starting of the trip. One thing I noticed from the bus trip is that the buses there are very punctual and that the bus driver will repeat the station name when it is near the station to remind passengers to alight. The driver will also say “Welcome Onboard” and “Thank You” every time the bus stop at a station and when passengers alight or come onboard. Another thing different is that in Singapore when you want to alight, you will have to press the bell before the next station but in Japan it is a little different. You only press the bell when you are not alighting at the bus stop but somewhere where there is no bus stop (halfway up slope to ANCT). This is something different from Singapore. When we got back to the dorm, there was not much people left as it is the last day of school and
the dorm will be closed on Saturday therefore most of them went back home to spend the holidays. It was quite sad and we really hope to see them again either in Japan or when they come to Singapore.

Day 9 & 10 (last day 😊)
Today is our last day in Japan and it’s a free day! We travelled by bus to Fukuoka with some of the Japanese students and teachers. After reaching the hotel, we went to have lunch at a nearby place. After lunch we checked into the hotel and went out sightseeing and shopping! All of us went to Tenjin as there seem to be both shopping and arcade there. The arcade there was 5 stories high! Every level has different games and the last level has a lot of neoprint machines! We spend a long time in the arcade with some of us getting hooked on the UFO catching machine. We went to walk around the Hakata area after eating dinner. The lightings there were very beautiful and since Christmas is coming, the decorations were all about Christmas. Around 9.30 pm, we went back to the hotel and said our goodbyes. I must really say we really made a lot of new friends during this trip and these friendship bonds would not be broken easily. I hope that we will be able to meet again either in Japan or Singapore!
- Japanese are very punctual and very organized with their activities and events.
- The students will try their best to get the message across to us to make sure we learn something from them.
- Able to step out more of my comfort zone to try new things and talk to other people who speak different language from me.

- Japanese are good host and are really respectful.
- Admires how well the teachers hosted us and made sure we are welcome here. I can really see the effort they put into making us feel at home.
- school is much smaller as it is not a government school and the courses offered by the school are also very limited compared to SP
- First year male students have to greet very loudly whenever they see their seniors
- Part of the Japanese school culture

- Cleanliness level in Singapore is already well-maintained, yet I found Japan to be a cleaner place
- Hardly see any cleaners going around cleaning, which indicate that it was the Japan citizens’ efforts which kept the country so clean.
- Rules and regulations in the country and in school might be a little too strict, but when it comes to informal activities they are able to put down their status and cultures, adapting to our style of living and so to make us feel home.