

27th MILE Programme – Kanazawa Technical Collage (KTC)

On 10th December 2016, we arrived on a cloudy morning at Komatsu Domestic Airport after a long and dreadful flight from Singapore. As soon as we collected our baggage, we were warmly welcomed by a trio of KTC staff who have specially arranged a bus to pick us up from the airport to KTC where we will be meeting our respective host families.

Homestay Experience



Figure 1: My house buddy (left) and myself (right)



Figure 2: A picture of my host family before we leave for Singapore

Although our command of the Japanese language and their command of English was limited, language barrier did not prevent us from genuinely trying to get to know each other better. With the aid of Google Translate, we could easily communicate our ideas and feelings through verbal cues and broken English and Japanese. Just like us, they had actually attended a very basic language crash course in school just to host us. There was never an awkwardly silent moment during the car rides around town as they would always try to strike a conversation with basic questions such as “do you enjoy your day?” “Is this song popular in Singapore?” It was as though they were more excited to meet us than we are to meet them.

Every Tuesday night, my host family will drive to one of the nearby high school at night to have a game of volleyball with other families from the neighbourhood without fail. Despite their hectic schedule, they will always find time to stay active and fit even during the winter. A lifestyle which I believe we Singaporeans should learn from for a healthy ageing population and to dis-stress. Although we lost all games on that night, it was through this night that we actually became more bonded.



Figure 3: After a tiring game of Volleyball in winter



Figure 3: The daily view when I cycle/walk to school

Japan Cultural Experience



Figure 4: Traditional 'A' Frame houses at Shirakawago



Figure 5: Visit to the 21st Century Art Museum

Throughout the 10 days, I was exposed to both the traditional and modern day Japanese cultural intensely. I was given a chance to paint my very own lacquer ware with guidance from the master craftsman and also visited many heritage sites. Despite being more than a century years old, most of the architecture marvels are perfectly preserved and structurally sound. The landmarks gave us a deep insight of what was Japan a century ago and how it has progressed to be one of the Asian Tigers. From young, the Japanese were taught and trained to be public minded such that littering, spitting and vandalism is seen as an act of taboo and often scorned by the public. Such behaviour ensures that the buildings and streets are well maintained and preserved due to their graciousness.

As Japan became more modernised and the usage of plastic bottles and metal cans became an everyday norm, so does recycling. The Japanese split their thrash into combustibles and recyclables at home, in school and even when they are outside. Perhaps this is one practice that I strongly believe us as Singaporeans should strongly adopt which we don't currently, despite having all the necessary bins placed out for us.



Figure 6: Me and my Japanese friends at 'Little Kyoto'



Figure 7: Master demonstrating how to use the brush to apply colour

Educational Visits to Schools

During our stay, we visited schools across all levels from nursery to university to learn about the education system in Japan. Unlike Singapore, private schools in Japan are commonly perceived as more prestigious, well-funded and academically better.

At nursery level, children are taught cognitive and creative skills through a ‘learn-by-playing’ model and equipped with the necessary skills such as IT and communication skills so that they can become a 21st century citizen at a very young age. It was truly a unique experience for me and it gave me a keen insight into the early childhood industry. Similar to Singapore, government subsidies for early childhood education are available to all (percentage varies based on income level) due to the Japanese government efforts to increase birth rates.

We also visited a local government high school which was quite similar to our Singapore secondary schools in terms of academics, subject combinations and extra-curriculums. But the most unique thing about their high school system is that semester test results are openly publicize so that students or parents know how they fair against the cohort. In Singapore, the abolishment of posting of PSLE results and statistics were a result of our parents ‘kiasu-ness’ as this adds unnecessary stress to the students as the results were used by students themselves and parents to compare with one another. In Japan however, the Japanese students see it as a way to gauge themselves and where they stand, encouraging self-improvement instead of competitiveness. After the visit, I do feel that an attitude for self-improvement is essential for everyone instead of comparing ourselves to others as each of us are unique in our own ways and have different starting points in life. It changed the way I look at our test results statistics whenever I asked about it from my lecturer.

Even though it was a mere 10 day’s trip, it has really been a unique and enriching experience for me as an individual. It allowed me to develop a global mind-set and opened my mind to the different cultures and practices in Japan. The trip has allowed me to see how and why Japan became one of the 4 Asian Tigers in terms of technology, economically and academically. It has also taught me to appreciate the daily little things in Singapore that we take for granted such as the warm weather, usage of English as main language and the access to rubbish bins.



Figure 8: Building cognitive skills through hands-on session



Figure 9: Test results being display at the common corridors



Figure 10: Group photo with Director of the Board of KTC and KIT



Figure 11: Candid photo at 'Little Kyoto'