

Re-Inventing Japan Short Visit Program 2017

I am Saif, a 2nd year Japanese Language and Linguistics major student for the 2016/2017 academic year session. Right before I started my 4th semester, I was given a chance to join the Re-Inventing Japan Project Short Visit Program from 10th to 20th of February. It was held in Fukuoka, Japan. This program was hosted by Kyushu University under financial support by JASSO (Japan Student Services Organization). I went there along with 5 other students from UM; 4 from Law Faculty and 1 from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Other universities that have also participated in this program include Chulalongkorn University from Bangkok Thailand, National University of Singapore (NUS) and Ateneo de Manila University from The Philippines. The main objective for this program was to expose students to the importance of conserving world heritage sites that meets the outstanding universal value and the procedures in getting them recognized by UNESCO.

I was informed about this program by my lecturer, Dr. Woo Wai Sheng before the 3rd semester ended which was around November. I thought this was one best chance for me, as a Japanese Linguistics major, to go to Japan for the first time ever and get some firsthand exposure to the Japanese language and culture which I have never gotten to experience before. After telling Dr. Woo that I was interested to join, he then nominated me as the representative for Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, and handed me a form to fill and asked me to prepare a passport and travel insurance meanwhile for other things like flight tickets, accommodations and transportation in Japan were taken care by Kyushu University.



On the flight to Fukuoka

During the first 4 days there, we went to Nagasaki to visit 6 churches and 2 castle remains which are nominated as the world heritage sites by UNESCO. On each visit, there will be a local instructor giving a lecture on the history of how and why each church was built from around 19th to early 20th century. And then we also learnt about the hidden Christians whom practice Christianity in secret due to ban on Catholicism in 1565 and 1568 because Christianity was repressed as it was a threat to national unity at that time. After the trips to all the heritage sites, we were divided into groups and asked to prepare a presentation regarding the sites visit

and whether they meet the Outstanding Universal Value to be recognized as world heritage sites under UNESCO. From the 5th day onwards, we went back to Fukuoka and were divided into groups with many other Kyushu University students. Each group represented one country from the UNESCO committee states for the Simulated World Heritage Committee Meetings. Despite the seemingly packed schedule, we were actually given plenty of 'free-time' since the activities usually end around 6-8pm. And then we are free to explore the nearby places, shops, grab dinner and many more with the help and guidance from the Kyushu students.



Some of the churches we visited



Castle remain sites

Throughout this program, I really learnt a lot about the importance of world heritage sites and the obstacles that came along in preserving them in both practical and cultural value. Before this, I always thought that the act of preserving historical sites were just mainly for us and the future generations to look and appreciate the aesthetics. But then I realized how wrong I was in this entire time because there are many more crucial benefits apart that. For instance, they can be the reminder of a culture's complexity at that time and this can be the guide for us to take it as a lesson and prevent the same thing from happening again. Just like the commonly used saying, "Lest we forget history, we are doomed to repeat it."

Apart from the things that I have learnt from the activities, I have also been exposed to the cultural differences by working as a team with the Japanese students and communicating with the local people like shop vendors, taxi drivers and policemen there. Through group activities and discussions, I found out that the way the Japanese students work is pretty much the same as Malaysian students. We would finish the given task and discussion as quickly as we can and then hangout together afterwards. The only slight difference would be the drinking party with classmates/colleagues culture. As an example, after we finished the Simulated World Heritage Committee Meetings, we had a drinking party in a seafood restaurant. Despite not drinking, I still got the chance to join and feel the loud and cheerful atmosphere of everyone congratulating each other, chit-chatting and playing games. Then, I also got to experience the warm hospitality from the university staffs and very polite customer services whenever I visit a shop, restaurants or mall there. They would speak very politely and were more than willing to help me when I got confused with the notes and coins, when I searched for things to buy and even when I got lost in Nagasaki during one night-outing. Despite knowing how polite Japanese generally are, due to the mass media that keep highlighting that part of Japanese culture, experiencing it myself has really amazed me.



Group photo session after The Simulated World Heritage Committee Meetings



Dinner at a famous 80s themed restaurant in Nishijin

To all my juniors, I really encourage all of you to find the opportunity and join an outbound program. Be it a summer exchange or semester/year exchange program, I believe that your participation in any of these programs will be fruitful for you. They can give you hands-on exposure of other country's language and culture which can be beneficial for your study especially if you are majoring in that language. You will get to see and experience the other part of the world by yourself, not from the story of others. This will help you to form your own perspective and encourage you to be independent which are vital for self-development and getting yourself ready for the challenges ahead of you after stepping out of university.

By,

Saif

Participant of Re-Inventing Japan Short Visit Program 2017