

2016 Re-Inventing Japan Project (Long-Term)

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INTRODUCTION

My name is Antonio, I'm from Mexico and I studied in Japan as part of the 2016 Re-Inventing Japan Project (Long-Term) program. This wonderful experience filled with unforgettable moments, beautiful places and culture changed my life. Studying in Japan is the best thing that has happened to me, because it represented not only an important moment in my educational training, but also cultural and personal.

I always admired Japan for its economy, culture and history; It was also a country that I dreamed of visiting since I was a child and I saw anime or documentary programs about this beautiful country. When I started high school, I was interested in Japan's education and technological advances, and then I thought about visiting it. For us in Latin America, Japan is a very distant country, almost unattainable, so my dream of visiting this country seemed far away.

I am currently studying International Trade in Mexico. I like the economy, business, marketing and languages; I am also interested in Asia with respect to these issues, so Japan was my main goal for a school exchange when I had the opportunity. The Re-Inventing Japan Project is a very comprehensive exchange program that helps you build your career by integrating educational and cultural learning.



MY EXPERIENCE

DECEMBER

The first month I was in Japan was about adapting and discovering a new culture. During this month I learned to do basic activities in Japan such as attending classes, buying food and moving around the city. This exchange I realized with Alfredo, a student of Chapingo, student of



Science of the Plants.

Arriving in Japan, we were very well received by Tokyo NODAI. The first day we were taken from the Tokyo bus station to the Tokyo Agriculture University, it was a very interesting tour, because those were my first impressions of Japan. There was no trash on the streets, everything was

very tidy and quiet. Arriving at NODAI we went to eat and then they showed us our rooms.

During my exchange I shared a room with 3 foreign students: from France, Netherlands and Malaysia; In addition, the classes I took were in English, so I was able to practice my English too. The classes I took were taught by Japanese teachers who speak English, most of the classmates were foreigners, and only two or three were Japanese.

In the first week of school we met with the teachers and in our laboratory. My laboratory belonged to the Bio-Business Department. I got along well with my classmates, a part of the students there were foreigners, so most of the Japanese had some English practice; I also appreciate the work that Professor Uchiyama did with me, because I was able to find activities that contributed to my professional training.

A week after arriving we had a welcome party with the other Latino students: two Brazilian boys and a Peruvian girl; our laboratory teachers attended and other Japanese students that we met in Mexico a few months before also. This was the first of many activities organized by people responsible for the NODAI Exchange Program.



Another important point was that during this month I learned to move through Tokyo. The Tokyo subway is wonderful, it's hard not being astonished at its punctuality and service. Actually, it's not that hard to use. If I needed to move around the university, I would walk, I would only take the subway when I went to Shinjuku or Shibuya, which were the first neighborhoods I visited outside of Setagaya (NODAI's neighborhood).

As we, the Mexicans, arrived in December at NODAI, we were not able to take the Japanese language class that exchange students use to take; But instead, a Japanese student who spoke 100% Spanish gave us one class a week. These classes were very funny and we learned words and phrases that served us day by day. On the other hand, with the aim of helping Japanese students interested in the Spanish language, NODAI opened a conversation workshop in Spanish, we call it "Spanish Café", although there were also Portuguese. There I met several students of NODAI interested in the Spanish language and in exchange to Mexico or Peru.

Something I was waiting for was the arrival of Christmas in Japan, not only because it is a very special holiday in Mexico, but also because December 25th is my birthday. However, the celebration in Japan is very simple for Christmas, of course there are pictures and even Christmas publicity, but it is not so noticeable; Japanese people usually celebrate more New Year Day. Despite of this, they place many

Christmas lights in various parts of the city and it is very entertaining to go visit with friends. A couple of friends celebrated my birthday with a small cake and sashimi, it was small but very significant for me. Dislike New Year, in Japan Christmas is usually celebrated with friends or your couple.

During the New Year I spent in Shizuoka with a Japanese friend and his family. On December 31st, I traveled together with my friend from Tokyo to Shizuoka by bullet train, it was an incredible experience that I enjoyed very much; Despite being very expensive, I recommend not to miss the fact of traveling by bullet train, even once. My friend does not live in a very large city of Shizuoka, but in a town, and that is what made this day very traditional and meaningful. That night I met his family; His mother had prepared a traditional Japanese New Year's dinner, including the Toshikoshi soba, noodles that are eaten on the last day of the year, to dismiss the old year. After dinner, we watched the television, a program with artists who sang and danced to dismiss the new year. It was simple, but at the same time it was quiet and meaningful. I was grateful for all the attention they gave me at home.

JANUARY

The next day, in 2017, we had osechi breakfast, which are the food that is usually eaten the first 3 days of the new year, these are all prepared before January 1, so mothers can rest the first 3 days, in those days they should not cook. The osechi has sweet, salty flavors and some slightly greasy foods, because in this way they are better preserved during those three days. After breakfast I was taken to Tatsuo Shrine, the first shrine I visited in Japan, very quiet and full of people getting the year 2017.

In the afternoon we visited Kakegawa Castle, a yamashiro type castle, where I learned about samurai and ninja culture. At night we all went to have sushi dinner and to spend some time at the karaoke, it was my first time at a karaoke in Japan and I had so much fun. We sang many anime songs and



other Japanese and American artists we knew. The next day in the morning I returned to Tokyo, I could see the first rays of sun of 2017 on Mount Fuji while traveling on the bullet train. A beautiful view.



The year 2017 started in a unique way for me. The month of January was the month to know better Tokyo city and to carry out final activities in the classes. We delivered final papers to teachers and in the

laboratory I had a special task, which began at the end of January. However, one of the first activities we did in January was visiting the Museum of the train and bonsai gardens in Saitama, almost all the foreign students of NODAI attended, so I could exchange ideas and visions with them.

During this month I met places in Tokyo, together me and Japanese friends of NODAI, like the Korean neighborhood in Shin-Okubo, Sky Tree, Ikebukuro, etc. I have to admit that climbing the Sky Tree was fantastic, you can see all of Tokyo and locate many places that you have gone or you would like to go.



I also visited the temple of Sensoji, in Asakusa, is the oldest temple in Tokyo and one of the most important. Its structures are beautiful and colorful, there are many people and sell many traditional things. Many foreigners attend this temple.

About my special laboratory activity, this consisted of visiting Mr. Yoshiya Hiroyuki, an ex-Ambassador of Japan in Mexico, who is currently working in the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan. He also has experience in WTO negotiations. My task with him was developed in 3 stages, and for me this was the best academic experience of all, because it was really connected with what I am studying: International Trade. The first stage was done at the end of January, and consisted in attending the ministry with my laboratory teacher, and talking with Mr. Yoshiya, who prepared a presentation for the two of us. This first meeting was to meet and to talk about international trade. In this special way concluded January.

FEBRUARY

This month was one of many educational activities of the Re-Inventing Japan Project. This month began with a trip to Wakayama that I did with my lab's teacher and the students about to graduate. The teacher was so kind to invite me, so I took the opportunity to go and visit that place. Wakayama is located far from Tokyo, south of Osaka. This trip lasted two days, we were in total 11 students, 8 girls and 3 boys (including me).

The first day was a trip and a visit to a temple. On February 4, we left Tokyo for Wakayama, transported by subway, but then rented cars. During the trip I got to know my colleagues a little better, and I spent a very pleasant time looking at the landscape. After noon we arrived at a temple, but we had to walk uphill from a mountain before arriving. It took about two hours to get there, but it was really worth it. The view was



spectacular, and the weather was excellent. After a few hours we returned to the cars and traveled to the hotel.

Arriving at the hotel the plan was to enjoy the onsen before dinner. This was the first time I took an onsen bath; In Mexico we have hot springs in very few parts of the country, and people do not come in naked, but with bathing suits; however, it was no problem for me to try something new. Of course I did not know how to use an onsen or his routine, so my Japanese friends helped me, it was very interesting and fun. If you travel to Japan, you cannot miss the experience of bathing in an onsen, it is very relaxing, your body feels rested after a bath with hot water.

After the bath we had dinner at the hotel's buffet. That was one of the most delicious dinners I had in Japan. I like Japanese food very much, but the one of that night was very traditional and exquisite. It was a very pleasant moment. We slept on Japanese futons, on tatami, and the balcony view was beautiful, you could see the sea and, as the hotel was a bit out of the way, the stars were perfectly observed.

The second day we visited the Whale Museum. That day, unlike the sunny day before, it was very rainy and cloudy. Even so, we were able to see the dolphin show and feed the whales. Later we ate in a restaurant where I could try the whale meat, something that I never imagined I would eat in my life. After buying some souvenirs, we took the road back home.



In February were the last meetings that I had with Mr. Hiroyuki in METI. The first meeting had place on early February, and the last one in final of month. The second meeting was very important for my formation, because I prepared a presentation for Mr. Yoshiya. My presentations was about bilateral economic exchange between Mexico and Japan, some differences and challenges. Mr.

Yoshiya made a lot of comments about my presentation and helped me to open my sight to a wider one. We discussed about current issues about economic and trade policies of Mexico and Japan as well. The last meeting was just for make an analysis about Mr. Yoshiya's presentation and mine, and how to help to develop the developing countries.

We also had a very nice visit to the Chiba University. Chiba is like the “technology and studies” city, so I was excited about this visit. We learnt a lot about Japan’s agricultural technology, since LED light green houses until special robots for farming. I really enjoy this visit.

On February 18th, we had an special activity in Yokohama. We, the exchange students (RJP Program), attended Ichiba Pier in Yokohama with the purpose of selling international products which are made by NODAI. These products are made of imported products from several countries, like Peru or Asia. The aim of this activity was learning to sell and having the experience about sells with MERCADO members.

I visited also Universal Studios Japan in Osaka, and Disney Tokyo. This parks were very funny and I enjoyed them a lot. It’s a little bit expensive, but they worth it if you are an Universal or Disney fan.

For finish this month, NODAI took Latin-American students to know Atsugi Campus. With this activity we knew all the facilities of Setagaya Campus and Atsugi Campus. It’s very interesting how Atsugi is different to Setagaya, but belongs to the same university. Atsugi is calm and has a nice landscape. I really loved the Department of Human and Animal-Plant Relationships, it is very interesting and I have never seen this kind of department in Mexico (we might have one in some places, I guess). So I recommend you look for all the departments before coming to Japan, because they have very interesting places.



MARZO

And my last month in Japan came with an awesome visit to Hakone. Alfredo, two Japanese friends and I went to enjoy our last month together, and this may be my favorite place near to Tokyo. Hakone has beautiful landscapes and places, it’s very calm and pacific. You have to take an onsen bath in Hakone!



We also visited an amazing store which sells wood magic boxes. I don’t how they are made of, but you need to discover how to open them. Behind of the store, the maker has special rooms with puzzles that you have to solve using your brain. We really enjoyed a lot this place.

Days later, Alfredo and I went to snowboarding with another two Japanese friends. This was not my first time in snow, but my first time trying to snowboard. Alfred almost broke his nose, but we enjoyed a lot despite of that.

The last activity was the Institute of Environmental Rehabilitation and Conservation (ERECON)'s course. We learned a lot about prevention of natural disasters and how technology helps to improve the security in Japan and the world. We visited the Earthquake Museum as part of this course.

Unfortunately, I couldn't enjoy this course completely, because I became seriously ill, they even had to perform an operation that stopped all my activities during my last week in Japan. Of course nobody expects to have a problem like this ever, and less when it is in a fascinate place, and sometimes you do not know when or how will you get sick; but the reason why I write this is because I feel that I have no way to thank all the attention that NODAI gave me and how much they worried about me. NODAI does an extraordinary job and cares about its students. I never felt alone during my period in the hospital. Thank you very much NODAI.

SHAPING MY CAREER

As a student of international trade it is essential to know about the world economy, logistics processes, customs processes, international cultural and business differences. This exchange was very useful for the formation of my career because it complements very well the subjects that I am studying. Thanks to the visit I made to METI, I was able to learn more about Japan's economy and public policies and inspired me to research the differences between the Japanese and Mexican economies.

Many elements I learned from this exchange can be applied in practice; For example, if in the future I am in an international negotiation with some Japanese, it will be a little easier for me to understand behavior and cultural codes. Another way to apply knowledge is to analyze the differences and similarities of the public policies of my country and Japan, and then to elaborate proposals to improve the development of Mexico.

The comprehensive training that is achieved through this exchange allows you to not only improve as a professional, but also as a person. In Japan you learn the value of punctuality, effort and teamwork, key pieces for professional and personal performance.

ADVISE FOR STUDENTS

For those students who want to know Japan and learn from their culture, this exchange is excellent. As advice I suggest that they try to coexist more with Japanese students than with the rest of foreigners who study at NODAI. While it is good to meet people from all over the world and make friends, by engaging with Japanese you can learn much more from this beautiful country.

Also, I highly recommend being observant. Foreigners sometimes find it easy to act just like we would in our country, that can be a bit problematic in Japan. Try to observe and learn Japanese behavior and customs, but if you're wrong, many Japanese comrades will understand and teach you how to do it, they are very kind. There are students who also want to learn your language or know your culture, so you can explain some things about you and your country.

Another tip would be to plan in advance the sites you would like to visit, because at least you realize your stay is over. You can investigate some places of interest and, once you are in Japan, ask your classmates and teachers.

SUGGESTIONS

I am very satisfied with the Re-Inventing Japan Project (Long-Term), it includes many elements that help the training of students. As a suggestion could be to participate in more activities such as the one we do in Market or related to economy of agricultural products. Another suggestion is to include cultural activities that involve the participation of foreign students as in a festival or exposure of foreign cultures. It would also be great to have more Japanese classmates in English classes.

Finally, I would like to thank you for all the attention and support you gave me at Tokyo NODAI, I have always been helpful and cared for my well-being, I will always be grateful for that.

If you are interested in living a unique and full of learning experience, the Re-Inventing Japan Project is an excellent choice. Try it!