



2018 Re-inventing Japan Project (Long-Term)



**Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, División de Ciencias Económico
Administrativas, Licenciatura en Comercio Internacional ✨ 3rd year
Monica Elisa Baca González**

Tokyo NODAI Department: Agribusiness Management

My name is Monica, I am from Mexico and I studied in Japan for five months, I had the pleasure of being part of the 2018 Re-Inventing Japan Project (Long Term) program which is a project initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) with the aim to foster future global leaders who can serve as a bridge between Japan and Latin American countries. It was a wonderful experience, full of unforgettable moments, beautiful places and a totally different culture to my own; My life had big changes. Studying in Japan has been one of the most pleasant and rewarding experiences. What I lived, not only represented important experiences in my academic life, but also in my personal and cultural life.

I started studying International Trade with the objective of working in national companies and exporting products of agricultural origin to Japan. I am passionate about the idea of helping as a professional to reaffirm the relations that Mexico has with the Japanese country. Being part of the Chapingo Autonomous University, with its competent environment, the professors so devoted to the art of teaching and its students who study to improve the situation of their families and most important of their country has allowed me to want to overcome my knowledge and skills even more every day. I not only believed that I could obtain an excellent academic education, but also a richer social and cultural formation than the rest of my generation.

One of my main objectives of participating in this program was to be able to observe closely the type of treat that Mexico has with Japan and study it in an economic, legal and cultural way.



I was interested in living in an environment different from Mexico City and to recognize the differences between these two rich cultures, the important aspects of the development of the opportunity areas for the Mexican market.



Without leaving aside all that I owe to the Chapingo Autonomous University, I appreciate the opportunity offered to me by the Tokyo University of Agriculture, since it was a wonderful experience. As a student of international trade, learning how another country operates economically and culturally is an important factor as to why I was interested in this program. More importantly, Japan is among the most powerful and influential countries in the world. With that said, I was hoping of becoming a more capable person and student.

The experience began in April 2018, I met two other girls who were in the same program as me: Suzuki Mie from Amazon and Guatura Gabriela from Brazil too, there was another girl from France, her name is Marie. I can say that I am very happy to have met them and be able to live with them in the same bedroom. These Latin American girls were very supportive. Being in a strange country, in a different school and being far away from our families and friends can be intimidating, but living with people from a neighboring culture was comforting, they inspired me confidence and after a time we became great friends.

A feeling of emotion filled me that I experienced in the first days in Japan, it was overwhelming at the beginning, due to the change of schedule, the different gastronomy, the people, the culture, the religion; even in things as simple as the right side to walk on the street.

Something I can assure you now, the fear vanishes when you find support, and I found it, in the coordinators of the program who are always on the lookout for one, in the other dormitory roommates, in the foreign students you meet at the University and even in strangers who give you a comforting smile when passing or a simple chat in a restaurant.

On April 19th, a welcome party was held for the visiting students from four countries (Brazil, France, Mexico, and Taiwan) who studied at Tokyo NODAI for one semester. The party was attended by our hosting professors, staff from the Center for International

Programs (CIP), and Tokyo NODAI students who wanted to study in our home countries of visiting students. The party began with warm and encouraging opening words by Dr. Yoichi Sakata, Director of CIP, followed by students and our professors having casual and lively chats over dinner and food from our home countries.



I started to find out as many things as I could from Japan, its customs and traditions, I tried many types of food as I could, I attended many events, not just Japanese culture, also cultural international events, walk as much in the streets of the city as it was possible, security was something that I enjoyed during my stay in Japan, it gave me confidence to go out and know several places, even chat with strangers.

The courses offered at the Tokyo University of Agriculture for foreigners are in English and varied, from different areas of knowledge; according to what the student seeks. I am a student of an agricultural sciences school, we do not think of agriculture as a business, but as a way of life. So, I wanted to take the opportunity to be in a school of such magnitude and I took as many courses as possible, even if they were not subjects I mastered, my desire to learn was greater. These were:

1. Food and Environment in Economic Development
2. Global Food Systems
3. Environment and Agriculture
4. Life History and Applications of Landscape Plants
5. Planning and Design of Landscape Architecture
6. Vegetable Production Technologies for International Cooperation
7. Comparative Nature Study from Cultural Perspective

As part of some courses that we took, we had field trips to different areas of Tokyo and other prefectures, in the city or in the country side climbing mountains or visiting a lot of temples. But I leave you some pictures of our field trips



I was intrigued to know what education was like in Japan, now I can easily say that education is the pillar of a country and values are fundamental. It was there where I found one of the first differences between our countries.

I enjoyed greatly the classes in NODAI, in some courses there was more than one teacher who taught the class, for each class there was a new teacher and always a different topic, there were no nonsense repetitions. The teachers always attended classes, these were always interesting and rewarding. The courses had students from different countries, not just Japanese; and the chats in the sessions were attractive, we shared stories of our countries, of our different cultures, of food and even of politics and economy.

In addition to the courses in English, I also took Japanese language classes, especially for foreigners who started studying at NODAI, it was nice for me to share class with colleagues of different ages and backgrounds.

The lessons were very demanding and started from the basics like hiragana and katakana to the more complicated as kanji. It was difficult to keep up with my classmates and now that I return to my country, I am interested in continuing to learn the language for the challenges of the future. There was a lesson that I greatly enjoyed, it was for us to learn the basics of traditional calligraphy (Shodō), an ancient technique that originally dates back to China. Writing kanji with a brush and ink was very difficult, but it was a different and attractive experience for foreigners like me.



It's normal choosing a laboratory and teacher within your department as a student, I had the pleasure of being welcomed by the laboratory of Bio-Business Administration with Professor Kihara Koji, he is a very kind person who was always taking care of me. He advised with the research I was doing about the Japanese Economy and the governmental sector. I can say that he always tried to integrate me with his students, we made lunch parties together and he encouraged his students to talk with me to practice and improve their English. We enjoyed days of good talk with coffee in the rainy days and ice cream in the hot days.



The NODAI students were very kind, my closest interaction was with foreign students, because they knew how intimidating our situation could be, they were good tour guides on some occasions. In my case, I had two partners from my home university who were also in NODAI, so it was common to talk and go out with them, and I made good friendships with Japanese students of the courses I took. We even went out on weekends and we also went to karaoke. The friendship was so good that even one of them invited us (the other foreigner students and me) to a barbecue on the beach with her brother's school. It was a great experience to have been part of this activity, we were able to see how the families organized themselves and enjoyed a day at the beach, roast marshmallows and help the fishermen to pull the fishing net, we could enjoy fresh fish thanks to everyone's effort.



As part of the program, together with the girls from Brazil, we had an internship at ERECON (Institute of Environmental Rehabilitation and Conservation) that is an international non-profit organization. It contributes to sustainable use of natural resources in Asian countries. This organization pursue the environmental rehabilitation and conservation as well as the environmental education for the harmony between the agricultural and urban development and the natural environment.

There were four intense days in which we made excursions to an organic farm in Machida, Tokyo. This farm was run by retired men and women who did not seek any monetary benefit, but were in search of an activity that kept them working in which they could make use of all their experience collected by the years. We were dedicated to comprehend what was a Satoyama, we perceive it as a socioecological production landscape and seascape (SEPLS). And the



Satoyama Initiative is dedicated to the conservation and promotion of SEPLS throughout the world. This experience was kind of fun, we made barbecue with the farmers, we did presentations about Satoyama in our own countries and we talk about the situation of the natural resources in our cities and ideas that we could implant in our societies.



I'm trying to build myself as a professional on International Trade and it's essential to know about the current situation in the world, the logistics process, the traditions and cultural differences. This exchange was very helpful for my formation because it complements very well with my intentions of being able to participate in the business between Japan, Asian countries and Mexico.



At the end of the semester I got the chance to travel to Kyoto, Nara and Osaka. These cities which are significantly more compact than the capital, is also famed as the birthplace of such cultural traditions as the tea ceremony and flower arranging, as well as the most revered craftsmen in the country.

But Kyoto is not just about the past. Despite its well-preserved heritage, it effortlessly embraces the future, with modern buildings, a high concentration of universities and a thriving technology industry (it's the birthplace of Nintendo).



I'm glad to say that I learned behavior and cultural manners that the Japanese have. This would help me in the future to make negotiations with the country and companies established in Mexico and make proposals to improve the development of those relations. I learn about the value of punctuality, effort and team work, those are keys for professional performance. Thinking about the other before yourself and showing it in very simple acts, with acts that revealed how much you value the other people. You don't take what doesn't belong to you, even if you find it on the street, doesn't matter if someone has lost it or dropped it, so they find a way to return it to its owner.

My personal advice for those students who are interested in this program, I got a few things to say: Don't waste time thinking about it, this is a once in a life opportunity, this is a chance to mature and know other culture, new places, new people that once the exchange its finished you'll be in touch with. Grab the chance to visit Japan and walk by the cities, appreciate the architecture, share moments with its people. Do all the things that the insecurity in your country doesn't allow you. The most important thing that you can do is being curious, appreciate everything, the gardens, the food, the people, the kids, the fashion, the nature, the trains and roads. And make friends, built friendships that you can trust and make plans for the future. Make a plan about the places you want to visit, the time is short and it's not enough to visit a lot, so choose carefully. A couple of things: make it count, take everything you can and use it to help your university and your country. And don't be afraid of being far of your family and friends, the Japanese will make you feel like home.



Finally, I would like to thank NODAI, Azael and Naomi for all the attentions and comfort you offered me and the unforgettable moments. And count on me with future projects related to our Universities, I would gladly help with everything I can. I will never forget the people and the experiences that Japan gave me.