

2019 Re-inventing Japan Project (Long-Term)

University of São Paulo

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Introduction

Firstly, I would like to introduce myself to start this report about my experience in Tokyo, Japan. I am a Forest Engineering student at University of São Paulo – Piracicaba Campus and a descendent of Japanese. I've always had a contact with Japanese culture because my uncle came from Japan and he doesn't speak Portuguese well. Furthermore, I have been living in Aichi province for almost 8 years and also studied in Japanese school for 3 years. All of these factors helped me to apply to this experience.

When I saw the news to apply for a long-term study abroad in Tokyo University of Agriculture (Nodai), I couldn't miss this opportunity because I haven't been in Japan for 11 years and I was excited to know more about the forests, wood technology, and agriculture and food production in a developed country. Moreover, I remember when I met and had a conversation with the Japanese short-term students in my university. They said to visit them in their university, so it was one more reason to get enthusiastic about the program.

Wood processing and technology in Brazil it's a little bit unstudied and it has a few articles and studies about new technologies. And I have had a great interest in Cross Laminated Timber (CLT) which is a relatively new wood processed material and nobody study its properties and applications in my country, so I saw a research institute in Tsukuba prefecture that studies it and decide to choose Laboratory of Wood Technology in Nodai.

Departure and Arrival

The butterflies in my stomach started early few days before the trip to Tokyo. I had known only one student of University of São Paulo out of 5 students (included the University of Rural Amazonia) and we had created a group in Whatsapp to interact each other and exchange information. When I met the other 4 students in Guarulhos Airport, was really good because I felt like we were already friends. Maybe this is a Brazilian thing.

When I sat on the airplane seat, I realized that I would stay in other country for 5 months and I got a good feeling about it. The trip was cool and we had a connection in Paris before arriving in Tokyo.



Picture 1 – Students of Brazil in CDG airport

After arriving in Narita Airport, we had the first experience with Japanese people. We were instructed to buy tickets from Narita to Shibuya, but the Japanese woman at the ticket window wasn't able to speak English. But it all went well.

Arriving in Shibuya probably was the most wonderful and impactful moment at the same time, because even I who had experienced Japan didn't know how Tokyo was. The people, big panels, big buildings, so much people and the most beautiful one: the cherry blossoms. At that moment, I was really grateful for being able to know that wonderful place.

Three days after arriving, we did a tour in the Shibuya city guided by a Mexican nodai student (Eduardo) because we hadn't an idea how to get the train or use the bus. This tour was the first strong contact with the other international long-term students. It was really hard to get used to speak English with them, but it helped me a lot to practice. There were students from Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Taiwan and France and met them was one of the most adorable experiences in Japan. I really hope meet them again someday in my life.



Picture 2 – Shibuya with cherry blossoms



Picture 3 – International Long-term Students

Subjects and Field trips

One week before the class starts, we took a program of classes in English and we were able to choose which one we are interested and take it. The interesting part of this process is that we can go to the class and if you don't like it or think it is not the subject that you want to learn, you can change and delete your class grid. I strongly recommend maintaining this schedule, because we can adjust in our own way according to laboratory activities.

In the first week of the classes, I chose to take the Japanese Intermediate (1B), Japanese Intermediate (2B), Forest and Forestry I, Food and Health I, Planning and Design of Landscape Architecture 2 and Japanese Agricultural Development. At this moment, I wasn't sure about my laboratory schedule and activities during the week, so I made a meeting with my host professor Ohbayashi Hiroya (Laboratory of Wood Science and Technology) and made my laboratory schedule.

After all, I decide to take only "Japanese Intermediate 1B and 2B", "Forest and Forestry I", "Global Food Systems" and "Planning and Design of Landscape Architecture 2". In the Japanese Intermediate 1B and 2B, I thought that it would be easy because I already had a knowledge of the Japanese language. But no, I couldn't even write my name in Hiragana (most simple characters) because I had forgotten almost all in writing skills. I was able to read, listen and speak but no write. The professor (Suzuki sensei) had a conversation with me and suggested me a guide of study to remember some things I had already learned.

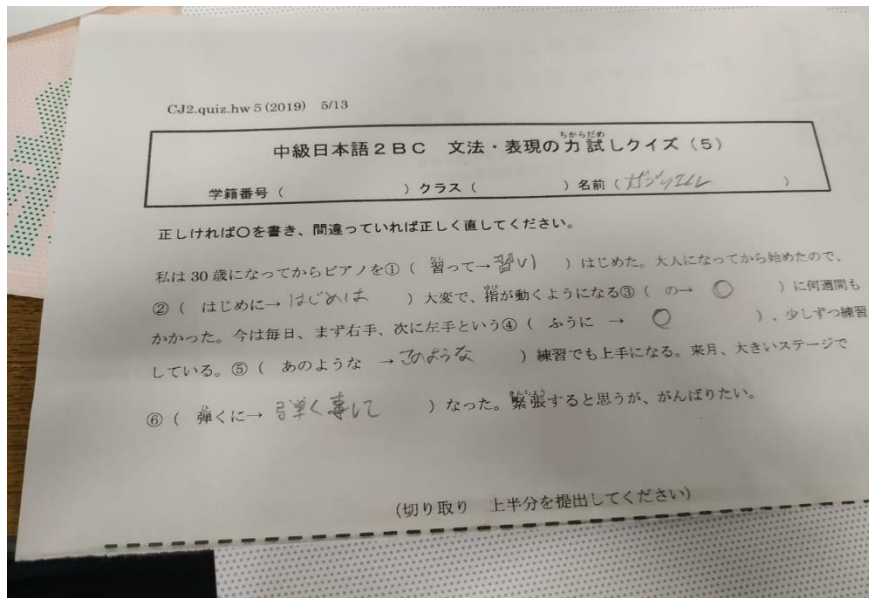
It was fast to remember the things that I had already learned and my roommate Rodrigo Hideki Mano from same university as me helped a lot to this process (he took the same Japanese class too). In the Japanese Intermediate 1B, the schedule was to learn about how to make an interview, how to make slide presentation, how to speak while presenting and stance during the presentation. We had homework every week and It helped me a lot to learn new words and kanjis (Chinese characters) out of class. I met three good friends in this Japanese class: Kuma from Indonesia, Ba from China and Chan from Taiwan. We helped each other in the homework and preparations for the presentation. Chan was an international long-term student as me and Rodrigo, but Ba and Kuma were nodai undegraduation students, so we had different schedule and motivations.

The presentation in Japanese was really good for me. I'm a person who don't like to speak in front of people but in this class, I learned a lot and lost some of shame and anxiety in speaking. The experience to interview some Japanese people at the university was good to me too because I had more interaction with these people.



Picture4 – Chan presenting the interview results in Japanese 1B class

In the Japanese Intermediate 2B, the schedule was to learn how to read and listen a Japanese N2 level (in a scale N5 to N1 in JLPT). There were different people other than 1B class but Kuma, Ba and Chan were there too. This class was more simple and “normal” because we always had short test in the beginning and end of it. Besides that, homework every week and 2 tests during the semester. Even so, it helped me a lot to practice and improve my Japanese skills and I learned new things from the texts and audios.



Picture 5 – Example of a short test in 2B class

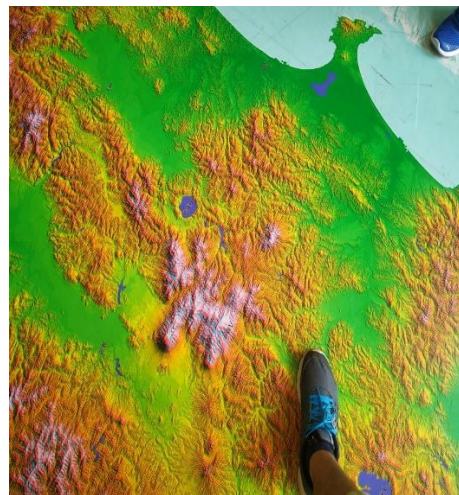
In the Planning and Design of Landscape Architecture 2 I was supposed to have gone in three trips, but because of my laboratory activity and my bad conditions in one of these trips, I could go in only one trip and it was wonderful!

The only trip I went was the JAXA (Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency or 宇宙航空研究開発機構 in Japanese) field trip in Tsukuba Prefecture. Tsukuba is the biggest city of Ibaraki prefecture (near to Tokyo) and we went by express train. JAXA is responsible for research, technology development and launch of satellites into orbit, and is involved in many more advanced missions such as asteroid exploration and possible manned exploration of the Moon.

We visited their space museum, saw their equipment, satellites and a replica of what it looks like inside the ISS. There was a real size rocket there and it impressed me a lot (It is a real rocket). We saw space food (you can buy it at vending machine or at the souvenir store) and it was hilarious. Moreover, we were in the Geographical Survey Centel (GSC) which gathers, compiles, and provides geological information and promotes its wider use. They create technologies and monitor seismic activities too as japan has so many earthquakes. In the GSC Science museum, you can see the topographic map of Japan in 3D with 3D glasses. I'm very sad to couldn't have gone on the other trips.



Picture 6 – GSC museum entrance



Picture 7 – Japan Topographic 3D map

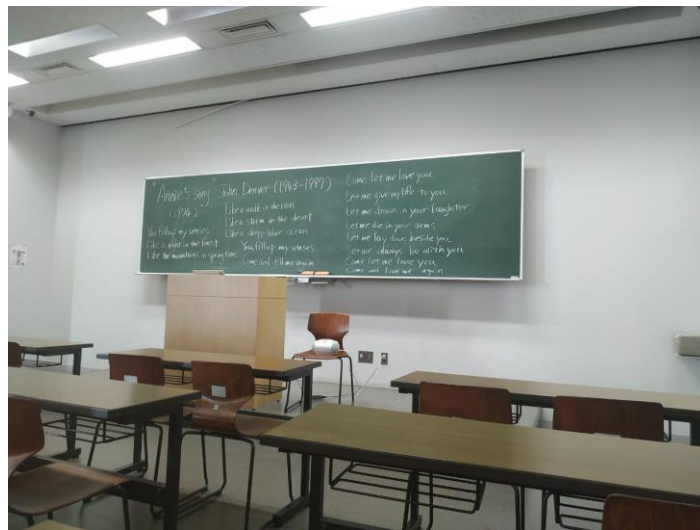


Picture 8 – Real rocket in JAXA



Picture 9 – Real engine motor

In Forest and Forestry class, the nodai schedule define it as: “A lot of functions of forest, such as production, conservation, aesthetics etc. are significant for our life. Recently, these functions have been recognized not only wood production and regional conservation, but also environment conservation on the earth, and/or bio-mass energy. The lecture focuses on basic knowledge concerned with forest and forestry. And the study extend to field trip for actual problem.”. I was and I am a Forest Engineering student so I had to take this class by my own decision since one of my reasons to go to Japan was to learn more about the forests of the country. For each week, we had different professors covering varied topics such as “Forest in Japan, Tropical Forest Management, Forest Ecoterapy and Agroforestry”. For me, the topic of Forest Ecoterapy was the most cool and peculiar, because it’s more spiritual and hamonious.



Picture 10 – Song’s Lyrics in Ecoterapy lesson

I left the Global Food Systems last because it was the most funny and cool (and professor had the best English among others) class. I learned about the food production, problems, characteristics, systems, importation and exportation rate of the most important foods and drinks in Japan. And we had to do a presentation about some traditional food or dish from our own country. I made about Açaí (amazon tropical fruit) and they liked it a lot.



Picture 11 – Students of Global Food System class

Other activities and Laboratoy

Thes first activity I want to talk about it's the Ryuugakusei Party (International Students Party). It was made for the interaction with all the International Students at Nodai and the Japanese students. We made a dance perfomance, dishes and bought brazilian candies for people to try. I tried so many candies, drinks and dishes from so many countries. It was the most "international" experience in Japan and I would like to experience again some day. I was really happy to show more about my country to foreigner students.



Picture 12 – RJP 2019 Long-term students at Ryuugakusei Party



Picture 13 – Me and the Mexican students

In the last month, we did internship at the non-governmental organization called ERECON – Institute of Environmental Rehabilitation and Conservation (in Japanese: 環境修復保全 機構) in Machida, Tokyo. We had a lesson about the problems in some developing places and Japan and how ERECON provides workshops and technical knowledge to improve their production and preserve the ecosystem using organic liquid fertilizer, organic biopesticide and organic compost.

We were in a typical area called “satoyama”, which system of production is organic and doesn’t use agrochemicals. Satoyama is an a forest plus production area placed near to the city. They work with donations and the money they earn with the production. All the money that returns is converted to new plantations or workshops. These workshops are also available for elementary school children, so they can better understand where the food comes from and acquire knowledge about organic agriculture. We also had a barbecue with them and it was really great to know more about NGO’s in Japan and organic agriculture.

In that intenship we also went to JICA office building and knew more about Timor-Leste country and its problems and how do develop a great assintance in it. We also saw how JICA develops activities around the world and what are they goals.



Picture 14 – BBQ at Satoyama with local farmers



Picture 15 – Learning more about Timor Leste

My experience with the Laboratory of Wood Science and Technology was probably the best part of interaction with Nodai students. They were so friendly and did a warm welcome for me. The professors Ohbayashi (my host professor in Nodai) and Momoi helped and supported me to know more about CLT (Cross Laminated Timber) by guiding me to a workshop and research institute which searches it.

The trip to Okutama (city in Tokyo with a lot of forests), to do a laboratory party was the best experience with them. We stayed for 2 days and did a fishing, drinking party, BBQ and fireworks. I made a lot of Japanese friends in this laboratory and I hope meet them again.



Picute 16 – Laboratory members at BBQ

Suggestions and thanks.

I'd like to suggest to maintain the program and improve the internship and field trip activities. I think that this RJP Long-term program will provide me some advantage in knowledge, experience in a developed country, different language and the most important: people. I've met so many people in Japan and it was the most wonderful and meaningful for me. They opened my eyes to many things that I wouldn't think or imagine if I hadn't met them. I will use all of my experience in the future, learning more and teaching thing i've learned in this RJP Long-term program.

I'd like to thank University of São Paulo (ESALQ/USP) and Tokyo University of Agriculture (Tokyo NODAI) for making this experience so wonderful and rich. Thank you very much CIP and Naomi and Azael (they helped me a lot before, during and after the program) and to all the people I met in Japan. I'm really grateful to my family which has supported me all the time. I hope I can get back there to make my Master degree!