

Re-Inventing Japan Project (Long Term)

Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina. Department of Agronomy. 4th year.
Sabrina Kihara

Tokyo NODAI department: International Agricultural Development

One of the most gratifying and nourishing experience so far has been living in Japan for five months. It took me almost no time to take courage and apply for the Re-Inventing Japan Project in Tokyo NODAI. It was a one of a kind opportunity to travel to the land of the rising sun. I searched the university and found out that NODAI is very committed to the development of agriculture worldwide, the courses offered by the international program were guided towards a critical and analytical view of agriculture and its importance in the fast growing world. Since my course of study in the Agronomy faculty in Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina (UNALM) has been sustainability, this was a big opportunity to learn and expand my knowledge.

I arrived to Japan on September 19, 2016. It was a relief that an RJP coordinator from Tokyo NODAI was waiting for my arrival and later took me to the facilities. It was the first time I would be living alone, and it was at first very scary to spend five months alone in a country I could barely communicate with anyone. I was glad I met another Peruvian living in the dormitory that helped me with my settlement in the dormitory, she taught me the way to the supermarket and train station which was very necessary to move around Tokyo.

Tokyo NODAI

A new semester has started at Tokyo NODAI, Setagaya Campus. It is a very good university with a lot of laboratories with the best technology for research. Before I enrolled to any class, I was able to take one week of classes to get to know each course and what the professors would be teaching for the whole semester. It was a very good way to get to know the classes before they started. The classes I enrolled were: Agricultural Scientific English for International Cooperation, Farmers and Consumers in Japan, Agricultural Trade, Comparative Developing Agriculture, Ecology and Food Production, Food Production Technologies and Edo Aesthetics and Environmental Resiliency. All of these classes helped me learn the Japanese point of view of agriculture and agricultural activities and its role in society.

Agricultural English for International Cooperation is a course where students – in most cases from other countries – would learn about basic Japanese agriculture. Hence, its schedule was filled with the main agricultural products in Japan, Japanese culture

derived from these products, and history of agriculture in the country. Farmers and Consumers in Japan intended to give an approach to the present status of Japanese agriculture, the problems and their solutions regarding the people involved in agricultural practices. The subject of Agricultural Trade gives global information about agricultural trade processes, conflict resolution and critical thinking about trade issues. Comparative Developing Agriculture gives a technological and analytical view of agricultural development and agricultural extension in Japan and works done in South-East Asia and Africa. Comparative Food Production Technologies shows the recent research made for the development of agricultural production; these researches were done and explained by the lecturers. Ecology and Food Production gives theoretical and practical knowledge about agroecology and sustainable agriculture. Edo Aesthetics and Environmental Resiliency helped students both Japanese and from other countries to learn about each culture and contrast with the local culture.

All these lectures and classes were shared with NODAI students and other international students. This practice enriched the classes while giving different opinions and insights from each country's cases. I was happy to share all my classes with people from Netherlands, France and Canada, among other students from Japan, Brazil, Paraguay, Philippines, Mongolia, China, Taiwan, Tanzania and Mexico.

Apart from the studies in Japanese agriculture, I was also very committed to learn the language. It was a big obstacle for me, among other international students, to start Japanese classes in NODAI because the start of beginner levels is scheduled to April – the first semester of the year – while we enrolled in September. Nevertheless, I was eager to learn the language and the textbook for learning the language was available at the library and store. Moreover, the RJP coordinators assigned me a tutor who was another NODAI student with the same native language – Spanish – and a high score in the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. They helped me with basic Japanese situations and how to communicate using the textbook I was doing self-studying before, along these classes there were conversation drills, vocabulary and grammar check.

Tokyo NODAI has proper facilities to ensure that the students are provided the right and best tools for their research and learning. It was very delightful to have a big library with five floors occupied by the best and most updated material for investigation, such as books, journals and electronic database. In addition, since the first day of enrolling in Tokyo NODAI, I was assigned a supervisor professor, Dr. Nakanishi. He would give me the guidelines of his research and an opportunity to be part of his laboratory. The laboratories are filled with high technology, and the best machinery for research in biochemical compounds of agricultural matter.

TOKYO/KYOTO/NAGANO

Even though my professional development was my top priority, getting to know Japan and its culture were a big deal for my personal growth. The main reasons were that my family comes from Japan, Tokyo is one of the biggest cities in the world and very famous and its culture is very rich and the traditions remain through time. During my

stay in Tokyo I was able to get to know each corner of the city and I realized each district is different from the other and known for different reasons. The first week I arrived, a friend from NODAI gave me a “tour guide” around Shibuya and Shinjuku. In Shibuya I got to know the famous scramble, with lots of people crossing the street. In Shinjuku I was able to get to know, as she called it, the district of “lights”. The night view is filled with signs and lights in the streets. After that day I started realizing that each district has something special, so I researched about places to go in Tokyo during my free time.

I was very interested in museums and shrines around Tokyo. I visited the museums in Roppongi – The National Art Center, Mori Art Museum -, Ueno – Tokyo National Museum, Detroit Institute of Arts Exhibition – and Odaiba – Miraikan, and I enjoyed going to Fukagawa Edo Museum with my classmates from Edo Aesthetics and environmental resiliency, where I could experience the life of a person in Edo period. The main shrines and temples I visited were in Asakusa in Tokyo and the temples in Kyoto. I also enjoyed hiking and in most of my hikes I found a shrine, it is very difficult to number the amount of shrines I have visited.



Left: Yayoi Kusama exhibition at National Art Center. Top right: Fukagawa Edo Museum. Bottom right: Salvador Dalí exhibition at National Art Center.

I traveled to Kyoto at the beginning of November. It was a very pleasant time to visit for one weekend. I also took this opportunity to book a travel by myself on a bullet train or shinkansen, make hotel reservations to spend the night and plan my visit to make the most of my time. The places I visited were Fushimi-Inari, Kinkaku-ji, Kiyomizu-dera, Nijo castle, Arashiyama, Tenryu-ji, and also went to Nara park by recommendation of a friend.



Top left: Fushimi inari-taisha. Right: Kinkaku-ji. Bottom left: Nara park.

Another activity I enjoyed was hiking and traveling outdoors, I also liked to go to parks in my free time. I went to Mount Takao, Hakone, Kamakura, and also visited Saitama with my class of Comparative Developing Agriculture, where we could see organic farmers and were explained the Teikei system in the production of soy. In winter, before New Year's Celebration, a group of friends from NODAI and I went to Ryuoo Ski Park, where I learned how to snowboard with the help of my friend. It was the first time I saw snow and practiced this sport.



From left to right: Mount Takao, Kamakura, Ryuoo ski park, Hakone.

THE PEOPLE

While the places I have visited during my stay in Japan brought to me breathtaking views, an opportunity to learn about myself and a chance to grow both personally as professionally, the people that surrounded me day to day were the ones who built warm memories.

From the second I arrived to Japan, I felt the hospitality of the people around me. Most students were always caring about my safety and that I am doing well in class and being apart from my family. My colleagues from laboratory made a very nice welcome party

for me and another international researcher at the campus. I was able to enjoy their company and get to know their interests, so in the future we would get together and go out and have fun.

The professors in NODAI also were very kind to the international students, since the first week of class, they were very eager to know what our interests were in the country, what brought us to Japan and gave a lot of information about the country, the culture and the people.

The availability of a student's dormitory at Tokyo NODAI gave me a chance to meet new people from different countries. My friends were mostly from Latin America, but they lived in Japan for several years, so they helped me settle in Japan while helping me learn the language and contrast the cultural difference between the country and mine. The first months were very difficult to make new friends and being away from my family so long were a big obstacle, but my friends from NODAI helped a lot to cope with my struggles.

If I could highlight something from Japan that I liked the most is the companionship and the way people care about your well-being. It is something that my other foreign friends learned, and that my Japanese friends taught me, and I am very grateful for those life lessons they brought to me.



ON-FIELD APPROACH TO AGRICULTURE

Re-Inventing Japan Project has a focus on agricultural internships in order to give practical learning to the participants.

During my RJP program I went to ERECON (Institute of Environmental Rehabilitation and Conservation) in Machida, along with short-term students from Perú, México and Brazil. During this internship we learned about the Satoyama – Satoumi Initiative and we did several activities, such as making compost in pellet shape, we planted flowers in the installations and visited some farms.

After the semester ended, the RJP participants – 2 from Mexico, 2 from Brazil, and me – did an internship at Mercado. A company from Tokyo NODAI that processes and sells products from Peru and Brazil. The main products were the camu camu drinks,

which are fruits from the Amazon with high content of vitamin C. We went to Yokohama with other NODAI students to sell at a market Osanbashi. It was a great opportunity to learn the language and communicate with other students with as much knowledge in English as we had in Japanese, so we learned how to communicate in different ways. We also learned about the products and most of them are made by NODAI students and processed in the facilities.

In addition, as Tokyo NODAI students, we visited the Atsugi Campus of Tokyo NODAI and visited the Isehara Farm. During our visit at Isehara Farm, we learned about the activities done by students inside the farm, such as the processing of rice, the care and growth of different fruit and vegetables, and the management they have in their greenhouses. At Atsugi Campus we got to see the main facilities of the campus, also learned about the careers imparted mainly in the Faculty of Agriculture.

We also visited Chiba University for a visit to a Plant Factory. It was an indoor facility that grows vegetables with artificial light. During the visit, we had a small lecture to learn about the requirements, the advantages and disadvantages of the plant factory and the way this activity could be a tool for sustainable agriculture and help increase the production in a fast growing population. Moreover, we saw how the production was made in the greenhouses of the campus and the main research on tomato farming.



Left: Internship at ERECON. Right: Visit to Plant Factory at Chiba University

THE FUTURE

The Re-Inventing Japan Project, made me accomplish several goals in my personal life and professional aspects. Living by myself helped me learn how to manage my own money, my incomes from the scholarship and my expenditures, also it made me more responsible taking care of my studies and also prepare my own food, clean the dormitory and organize my time for research, studying and leisure.

The program helped me grow as a professional giving me new knowledge about sustainable practices in agriculture in Japan, and new alternatives that could be used to maintain and recover ecosystems and development of rural population in my country. The classes of Ecology and Food Production, Comparative Developing Agriculture, and

Comparative Food Production Technologies helped me learn new perspectives about the development, usage and extension of new agricultural technologies. On the other hand, Agricultural Trade and Agricultural English for International Cooperation gave me more knowledge about trade barriers for exportation and new products and market of the country that could help strengthen commercial relations between Peru and Japan. Meanwhile, Edo Aesthetics and Environmental Resiliency, gave me knowledge about international cultures, not only Japanese, but from other countries that my classmates belong, also it helped me grow as a person, learning about interculturality, tolerance, growth and social manners in the country.

During my research in this program I realized there is a big potential of using Japanese practices into the Peruvian agriculture. Hence, I was very excited to search about graduate programs at Tokyo NODAI, in order to get more information about the Japanese agriculture and contrast using scientific methods to develop the agricultural sector of my country.

ANY ADVICE?

If anyone who is trying to apply to the Re-Inventing Japan Project is reading this, I would recommend this:

- Japanese language is not required, but it would be very useful to learn beforehand a little of grammar (hiragana and katakana), or some expressions that you could use day to day. English is very important for classes, mainly because classes are very participative and it requires to make presentations, active participation in class.
- Learn about your home country. It is a little confusing to ask someone to learn about their country, but for other international students, they will like to know about famous places of your country, your main food, staple crops, and how the agriculture sector is developed.
- Manage your money. If you have a scholarship, you will get your money monthly and you have to learn how to spend it wisely. Divide your money in weeks and if you have extra money you can go out and treat yourself.
- Manage your time. When I first arrived to Japan, a friend told me that if I wanted to go somewhere, I should not wait. This is true. The time spent in Japan goes really fast, and you should make the most of it.
- Stay in touch with your friends and family back home. Talking to friends and family helps you feel less lonely if it's the first time you travel alone, or that you live alone.
- Get involved with students activities. Such as the Harvest Festival from Tokyo NODAI, or laboratory meetings, it is a good way to make new relationships and learn the language.

Even though this program was new, I had a great time during my stay. The RJP coordinators made sure that my stay in Japan was going well, and they also helped me

with any other activity I would not know. But maybe this could make the program improve:

- Spread the word to the University about the project. Even though there are a few people that get involved from Japan to visit other countries, the amount of assistants to presentations of the RJP program were very little. It is good that the students know about the advantages of doing an exchange program to another university, and that full information is provided.
- More Japanese classes or better tutors. We were assigned students as tutors. Even though it was a great opportunity to learn the language, it would be better if there were more sessions of study and that the tutor has academic background of education or teaching Japanese.
- It is good that the coordinators are aware of tools that can make international student's life better, such as getting internet or cellphones without contract, or the main places to go for grocery shopping, how to use the health insurance if needed.

To conclude, I would like to thank the Re-Inventing Japan Project for the opportunity of a lifetime, that helped me find myself, grow and learn in this five months. The people I met, the friends I made and the knowledge I learned will always be in my life. The RJP program helped me shape my career as an agronomist to turn to a more sustainable practice that I learned in my stay in Japan. Not only for yield and production growth, but also in a socio-economical way that helps the development of all people involved in agriculture, which is every human on Earth that needs and participates in agriculture. Agriculture is not only production, it involves the farmers, consumers and the environment around us.