

My experience in Japan

Federal Rural University of Amazon, Department of Forest Engineering, 3rd year,
Beatriz Cordeiro Costa
Tokyo NODAI Department: International Agriculture Development

This is a little report about my experience in Japan. After this program, I became a better person and I only have to thank everyone who made my dream come true. I cannot believe that my big dream finally was real. I am really happy because I could meet very special people of all this big world.

This year I was really happy because I received the big chance of studying in Tokyo Nodai University, Japan, because of the program Re-inventing Japan. An incredible program allows the meeting between many nations in the world and the knowledge sharing. I remember exactly the feeling of the first day in Japan. I was overwhelmed with the university dynamic and with the wonderful Japanese culture, food, religion and many other things. In addition, people there are very helpful, kind-hearted and efficient. Everything is beautiful and works. I realized that Japanese worry about all the minimal details and it is very nice. I know that this opportunity will change my life forever and I only want to say thanks for everyone who made this dream a real thing in my life.

The main reason for participating in this study program is to have a new experience in a different country from mine. I think every person has to know about the world around. It can happen when we taste different food, when we meet new people, when we know about other cultures, religions etc. In this way, we can comprehend the others around and we can understand the difference between people and live in peace without judgment. Unfortunately, many people close the eyes to the big diversity that we have in the world and cannot live in harmony with different thoughts and cultures.

In the first month, in April, I had the opportunity to know more about Japan, about Tokyo Nodai and about my laboratory where I passed all the semester. My department is International Agriculture Development. I had a very kind and warm reception in my laboratory, with my new friends and with Brazilian senpais. In addition, my dear Naomi and Azael, from CIP, my sensei and the sensei of the other Brazilian guests received us with other kind welcome party. The other Brazilian that come to study in this semester are Caio and Mariana from USP and Kettle from UFRA too.



Picture 1 – Exchange students in the welcome party

I started with five courses: Planning and Design of Landscape Architecture; Life history and Applications of Landscape Plants; Comparative Nature Study from Cultural Perspective; Forest and Forestry and Vegetable Production Technologies for International Cooperation. In addition, I was taking classes with people of my laboratory, all the classes in Japanese with my sensei (Mr. Tanaka). As well, me and other exchange people could participate in Japanese classes. Azael and Naomi were our senseis. Everything was new and I just knew the places that I would study all the semester.

More than ever, even I was in the beginning of the study program, I could feel I was closer and closer to the Japanese culture. I was able to plant rice by hand with people of my laboratory and with a beautiful family and with a funny old woman. I could see the solidarity, friendship and care about the other. Japanese people are very kind and helpful. I was able to exchange some phrases with a cute baby and it was really magical when the communication was established, and... Wow, it is very beautiful, the power of communication! As well, now I can understand the different ways to teach and to learn. I can look around and see things that I couldn't see before. I'm in love with this country and all this experience.

In this same month I got another welcome party from my laboratory friends. We made okonomiyaki (typical food) by ourselves and it was amazing, we could talk and know more about each other. I went to tea museum and Ueno zoo with a dear friend and I would like to say thanks to the person who gave us the tickets that I received as a gift. Inside we could know more and more about the Japanese history and we could see many animals. In the same week, I went to Mont Fuji (station number 5) with laboratory and we could see the different kind of forests around and Mont Fuji from different angles, including from my window. I will never forget this picture in my mind. This month I made new friends too. They are very cool girls from many parts of Tokyo, with a good quality in common: the kindness. We could stay together in traditional hotel with onsen and with barbecue. I loved this kind of bath, it is very different from everything I know.



Picture 2 – Laboratory people in Mont Fuji

Moreover, I went to Ghibli museum with my roommates to be near Chihiro, Tororo and Mononoke Princess. It was wonderful like in Enoshima island and Isehara Farm. These were other fantastic field trips, the first one with Brazilian people and the second with my sensei, all to be near nature and agricultural systems. In Isehara Farm I could learn more and more about Japanese agricultural facilities, I could see different trees, plants, fruits and flowers and I could stay closer to my two senseis, Tanaka and Mami Irie. Every day I can discover new things and learn more. I just have to be thankful a lot.

My first field trip with my friend from exchange program was for Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden with Kojiro sensei. The first thing I notice was the sakuras trees. It was incredible to see a lot of them with flowers. It is hard to explain the feeling. Because we (exchange students) arrived in Japan in the end of sakuras period, in spring. Therefore, I was sad but, when I saw many trees with flowers, it was amazing. It was my first impression, everything were new and wonderful. In this day, I was comparing this kind of class with my classes with my classes in Brazil. Just the fact that we could go out to learn was amazing, because in Brazil we have many room`s classes and here is different. I could learn more and appreciate the beautiful landscape.

In the Garden, Kojiro sensei explained about Japanese traditional garden and its importance to Japanese people. He explained that behind these gardens we could find history, philosophy and religious subjects. He talked about Edo era and the origin and construction of big gardens and about feudal lords that we call Daimyo. One of the examples that he gave us was the Tokugawa Shogunate, the biggest Daimyo in Japan.

He told us about others gardens too, like Koishikawa Korakuen, Meiji Shrine (Furukawa garden), Hamarikyu and Kiyosumi. These gardens are symbols of feudal period, and it was used just for social or political important moments. Just in Edo era, they could be opened for people. He said to us about other cities, like Nara, Kyoto and Osaka, where we can find more Japanese History and beautiful gardens of Edo era.



Picture 3 – Life history class in Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden

After many information about Japan and its gardens and histories, he talked about deforestation too. In Japan, in old time, people usually cut many trees indiscriminately, but today, there is other way to think and Japanese people preserve the green spaces they have. People usually pray facing the same way of Mont Fuji, and they ask it the protection of forests and other green spaces.

After that, we walked in the park, visiting the trees, like Japanese elm, Japanese Zelkova, Metasequoia, Katsura trees, Yulan magnolia and others. We visited other spaces too, like teahouses, Taiwan pavilion, rest houses and ponds like Middle Pond, Tamamo Pond and Lower Pond.

In addition, we went to Shinjuku Gyoen Greenhouse that was constructed in 1875. Inside we could see tropical lowland plants, plants from Okinawa, from mountain areas, from dry land, from Ogasawara Island, tropical ponds and many varieties of orchids, like Cattleya Shinjuku.

My second field trip was for Santomeshinden (Japanese traditional agriculture) with Kojiro Suzuki sensei. At there we could see agricultural Japanese way. I could see the piper house, the protection of cultivation using bamboos and others trees. We could see the steps of composting and many agricultural species in practice way of cultivation. After that, we went to visit Takabashi nouen, an interesting agroforestry system with traditional Japanese gardens and old houses in Saitama.

At this class we could relax, breath a good air because of good environment, we could listen the birds singing and enjoy the nature wonderful place. That is way I loved these classes. We always learned so much and relax with the air and weather.

Other opportunity that I had to learn and relax was one day that me and two dear friends (Mariana and Jonnhy) went to the middle of the big megalopolis, in the center of high tech country. We could find a natural place to walk and relax. We were simply walking after take the train, and then, we came across with a beautiful park. The weather changed quickly once inside the park. The air was very good and soft to breath. All things contributed to a good environment. For a moment, I forgot I was in the middle of the big Tokyo.

The question is: How this magic place remains alive inside the crazy rhythm of a big city with huge buildings, high tech things, smarts robots and rapid vehicles?

Well, do you know when you come back of your job, very tired, asking for a good sleep or something like this? Yes, this is a feeling very common in big cities like Tokyo. People need to relax because of hard working or just to relax. If people work a lot, the organism does not work. That is why in Tokyo there are many parks, trees, good weather and very good sounds that comes from the rivers, the birds and insects.

Can you imagine? After your difficult day, you can go near your job place or your house and stay in contact with nature. Therefore, you can sit in a bench, stay for long hours, relaxing, thinking about life, hearing delicious sounds and feeling the smell of humidity and grass. It can be amazing if you know the way of enjoy. You can just close your eyes and feel everything around. The sound of water, the river running, the insects making noises, and if you concentrate better, maybe the sounds of cars and bus can disappeared.

I think it must be one good way to relax in the city. Moreover, with a place like that around, people can see the importance of nature, does not matter where you are. In this case, next to the park there is a primary school that is why we saw many children.

The teachers bring the children to the park for practicing studies, that involves not only the environment, but also biology, physical education (like sports), philosophy, history, religion (like budism) once a time that exist many temples inside the park. It is a good way to teach, mainly because of good weather.

Furthermore, old people can walk too. They can practice excises, talk with friends or just feel the weather and relax. In addition, if you are in love, you can walk with your love around de park and enjoy so much, like we saw a lot of couples. Another reason is because the houses in Tokyo are very small and most of all do not have gardens because of the space. In this way, without green spaces, people search for it to not become so stressful.



Picture 4 – Jonnhy, Mari and me in the park

In addition, another reason to nature remains in the middle of city is because of the temples. People can go to the temples to pray and think about God. It is very important in a crazy place like Tokyo because, unfortunately, the moment that we have with God or gods (depends on the religion) is not so strong nowadays. Therefore, the place with temples is always good.

In that way, the park can be useful to all people of city for many things, but I think the main thing is to relax in contact with nature. People do not want to lose it that is why the place remains strong. It was for Comparative Nature classes, as well some presentations. Each person from the exchange program has to prepare something to say about thing that we really like, but natural things. The class was composed by me, Thomas, Wibuti, Lucy, Nozomi, Dafna, Johnny, Mariana, Yuyang, Clemónt, Yann, Rei, Radityo, Kettle, Bibek and Ko, in this order.

The first presentation was from Thomas and he talked about a very interesting topic: plants and child memories. He brings us many memories about snowberry, cleavers and horse-chestnut tree. It was amazing because after that we could talk about our experiences with nature while child and we could compare with his study.

Wibuti talked about flowers of Bali, her hometown. However, she focused on Frangipani flower. This plant can be used as material for spa, fragrant candles, cosmetic products, incense, oils, perfumes and repellants. It was amazing because she brings the powder made with the Bali flower with delicious smell, and we could feel it and take a little. It was a cute presentation.

Lucy talked about mushroom and it was amazing because we could eat some and we could know more about this kind of fungus. She showed the structure of mushroom and many kinds of them. She talked how she likes it. After that, we could discuss about our favorite mushroom and the way it is common in Japan.

Nozomi talked about elephants and its relationship with human. It was interesting because she do not talked about only elephants but the problem of species that disappear because of human activity. It was good for reflect and think about sustainability and future.

Dafna talked about tomato and her relationship with this fruit (yes! It is a fruit, as she said). It was amazing because she brings jam and other food made with tomato. It was good because I do not like so much tomato, but the way that she brings was very good!

Johnny talked about bamboos and his close relationship with it. He explain how we can cultivate the palm and show us interesting thing about bamboos, including the fact that he planted many bamboos near Tokyo.

Mariana brings us the topic about her favorite trees. She talked about Brazil and the popular kind of trees at there. It was fantastic because there is strange trees that do not have in my hometown, even in the same country. With this information, I could percept that Brazil is huge and it has big diversity.

Yuyang show as curiosities about lotus and about the raindrops in the lotus leaf. It was interesting to understand what happen to lotus leaf, once it is always clean even it is in dust places.

The next was Clément presentation. He brings us the topic about seasons. It was wonderful because I have never see all seasons, just spring, here in Japan, so, his presentation was so interesting for me. Is messed with my feelings and with my nature spirit and after we could compare his presentation with seasons in other parts of the world.

Rei presents about the carnivorous plant and the way she likes this one. She talked about many curiosities. She showed us a little video with a carnivorous plant eating an insect. It is very curious because this plant not only make photosynthesis, but it can take nutrients by insects too.

Another presentation was from Radityo, he talked about music, I love music so much, and his dynamic was amazing. We had to close the eyes and feel the moment. It was good because I could compare with my presentation that was about sounds too. Some weeks before, he presents one more time, but it was about plants and the way we can make it as a health food.

Ketle talked about indigenous people in Amazon and the relationship between them and the nature. She showed the reality of people that live in the middle of forest and in her hometown, Macapa, in Brazil.

The last presentation was from Bibek. It was about Yarsagumba (*Cordeyceps sinensis*) that is half insect, half plant. This creature in Tibetan language has the name that means “summer grass winter room”. It was very interesting because this is a different creature and it lives in Nepal. It is funny too because we never know the way to call it.

Ko and Ian present about Japanese gardens and wolf, respectively. Unfortunately, I was not able to watch because of laboratory field trip. However, I am sure that it was wonderful presentations like the others. I will miss this excellent class so much.

One presentation that I like so much was from Clément. He talked about the four seasons and his favorite season that is autumn. I choose this presentation to compare with mine because I talked about rain. I live in Ecuador line, so there is no seasons in my place. We usually say that we have only two seasons: one season that rains every day and other season that rains all day, every day.



Picture 5 – Comparative Nature class in the last class

In this way, his presentation fascinates me just because I never had the opportunity to see the four seasons and he brings a little of them. I just saw the spring here, in Japan and it was really fascinated, but unfortunately it has already finish.

Moreover, I liked his presentation because he was talking about something not so solid like plants or animals that we can feel with hands or body. It is more abstract, more sentimental and poetic like the sounds of rain. It is something to close the eyes and imagine how the nature is perfect. It is something to feel, like the topic of my presentation. Furthermore, to happen the seasons the cycle of water is necessary. Because the cycle of water is life and without this, the trees would not exist, consequently, the beauty of seasons would not exist too.

Other presentation that I think it was incredible was from Radityo. I liked his topic because he talked about music and music for me is everything, it mess with my feelings. It has many things in common with my presentation once he talked about

sounds, like me. However, it was different because I talked about nature sounds and he talked about man made sounds.

In this way, in his presentation we had to close the eyes and feel the music, in mine we had to feel the music too. It was really amazing the way he approached the topic. I think everybody liked so much. In addition, like mine presentation and Clémont presentation, it was an abstract topic, not something to touch. It was something to feel.

Other interesting thing was the kind of music that he bring. One calm and relaxing music and other strong and noise music. The first one I had the same feeling that I have when I listen the rain. It is so relaxing and good to listen. Both the relaxing music and rain sound brings me peace and happiness. Delicious feelings.

Well, we had Ryogkusei party. This happens in Nodai every year and occurs to show the other students a little of other cultures, like dance, food and songs. The Brazilian presentation show our typical dances and songs. We could dance with our senpais. It was really funny.

I could go out more and more with my laboratory. I went to Fukushima, to visit a place that people make composting and produce energy. Moreover, I could live for more than 24 hours with only Japanese people and understand more about their culture. We made Miso soup, caree and rice. We could sleep in typical beds, the futons. In addition, I could practice my little japanese, but mainly my English. We made experiences with land too. It was a very good time that I spent with them. I could take a bath in onsen again and talk more with my two senseis.

I went to Mt. Tsukuba with my sensei and the laboratory. Inside the forests of the mount, we could feel the nature and identify some plants. This is oldest mountain in Japan and it is incredible! I could not believe when I walked inside. The environment was very relaxing. It was hard work, but very rewarding. The forests, the birds, everything was nice. I went to some matsuri too. It was the season of festivals. In this time everyone can use yukata and dance in Japanese way. In addition, I went to planetarium and to Atami with great friends. I could know more about Japanese culture. I went to some clubs in the university too: dance, kendo, ikebana, manga and sumo. It was remarkable and beautiful!

I made internship with Kettle in Mercado Nodai. It was very nice because we could know better how an enterprise works in the university. Everything is very organized and very nice. They are very good people. I could learn so much.

I went to Iriya Asagao (morning glory) market and Ueno Park with Kojiro Suzuki sensei and Mizuniwa Chizuko sensei. We walked in the street market and we could see flowers that we can call morning glories. I could percept the importance of horticultural plants for Japanese people. The Iriya Morning glories Festival become famous in Edo era and the species were cultivated in Samurai first time. Just in Meiji Era the market of the plants were open.

Nevertheless, the weather was too much hot and we come back and prepare to go to Ueno Park to walk and know more about Japanese history and nature. Ueno Park is one of the first parks in Japan, and it was open in 1873 with others parks, like Asakusa. We walked in all park. I could percept how big it was. Each place we could stop to listen sensei explanation about subjects. It was an amazing class, like all the classes outside. We could enjoy the Taiwanese festival inside the park and the typical food of this region.

After, we walked more around the park and we visited some places like, the Statue of Dr. Bauduin, lotus plants at Shinobazu pond, the cherry trees, Hanazono Inari Shrine, Gojo shrine, Toshogu Shrine and Shin-uguisu Tei shrine. Each place we stoped we could learn more about Japan and it was really good.

I really loved know more about the history of Japan, with the experience of going to all these places. Not only because of that, but also in this program, with these classes, I could live with people of the entire whole world and feel the world with their eyes and feelings too. I have to thank a lot all of senseis that explained us a piece of Japan History. I will never forget this amazing experience and these dedicated senseis.

At the same time, I began to say goodbye to classes, professors and great friends that exchange gives me. I had my last classes and tests and I just started to miss everyone. It was sad because I would like to bring each one with me. However, I am happy because I could meet amazing people of all world. They let me to comprehend more and more the importance of friendship and the exchange learning.

I really recommend this program for the future exchange students because I think this program made me a better person, not only in professional aspects, but also in human aspects. In this program we can learn more about respect and helpful. Japanese people are real example to the world. They work very hard and worry about the others around, and to make a better world for our sons and grandsons, we have to think more about people near us and far away from us, as well we have to think about nature and environment. I think that, in the future, I would be a better professional, because I had the best experience of my life.



Picture 6 - Exchange students with Azael and Naomi, from CIP