

2017 Re-inventing Japan Project (Long Term)

Internship Report

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1. INTRODUCTION

My name is Marisol Martínez Martínez, I am from Mexico, I am currently studying International Trade in the Chapingo Autonomus University (UACH, by its initials in Spanish), I had the opportunity to study for 5 months in Tokyo University of Agriculture (Tokyo NODAI) in Japan as part of the 2017 Re-Inventing Japan Project (Long-Term program).

This academic exchange was like a dream come true, the main reasons to participate in this program abroad were to know the Japanese market and the bilateral trade relationship with Mexico, as part of my thesis research, in which is about the creation of a company who develops products in the agri-food sector focused on the preservation of health; also because I have always admired this country, especially for the culture, education system, technology and the discipline of the population. I also like very much to learn other languages and I consider Japanese as my personal challenge.

2. ACTIVITIES

SEPTEMBER

I arrived to Japan on September 19th at 7 pm, when the adventure began, there I have the opportunity to meet two other Mexican girls of Food Science from my University,

we arrived to Nodai's dormitory for meeting my new roommates, from France, Peru and Brazil, that later we will become very close friends.

The next day, staffs from the CIP (Center for International Programs) took us to the university cafeteria and I tasted my first Japanese food, a traditional ramen, that was delicious, after that I met my host professor, **HARA Juri sensei**, Laboratory of Food and Agricultural culture and Policy from the International Food and Agricultural Science department, who researches about personal network of rural women and social capital in rural areas, with which I am very grateful for all the support, attention, patience and knowledge that she gave me, as well as her company during these 5 months.



A few days later, we have a Welcome Party in the cafeteria, there I met some really nice people from different parts of the world, specially some Japanese students interested in going to Mexico, Peru and Brazil, also our host professors attend to the event, so It was really nice to talk with all of them and tasting more Japanese food.

OCTOBER

During September we have the opportunity to try all courses that Tokyo NODAI offers, so we could take a better decision about which courses we'll be taken for the next 5 months, at the beginning of October I enrolled into Agricultural English for International Cooperation, Agricultural Trade and Food and Health 2.

Agricultural English for International Cooperation is a subject about the history and basic elements of Agriculture, is a really good opportunity to know more technical English, in this course most of the students where Japanese interested in improve their language skills, there I learned about the point of view of Japan in different Agricultural aspect in all over the world.

Agricultural Trade, where all the students were foreigners, we learnt about the theory, history, methods and problems of the Agricultural trade, as well of the different points of view from each of our countries. This might be one of the courses I enjoy the most, because is very related to my career, and discussing this kind of issues with people from different places increased my panorama of the world and enriched my professional training.

Food and Health 2, this course was also very interesting, it was mainly about nutritional science and food safety, focused on functional foods, taste of foods, and effects of nutrients and non-nutrients on health promotion and prevention of life style-related diseases.

During this month my host professor took to me to some short field trips, the first one was to MK Farm, which is a farm managed by a woman and it was really interesting and useful to know how she started her own business and also that she has become an important economic factor of that region.



My second visit was to Nodai's field and I really liked the activity, because I had the chance of knowing more about some fruits and Japanese methods of cultivation and harvest and also get involved in the process.

Also I could visit some amazing places around Tokyo such as Akihabara, Shibuya and Shinjuku with my new friends and a Japanese friend, Ayaka from the Bio-bussines department, that I had the chance to meet in Mexico, because she was an exchange student in my university the last year, so we took some classes together for a year, she was also one of the mainly reason I decided to come to Japan, during this period she convinced me of the quality of NODAI and the kindness of the population.

NOVEMBER

This month I had the opportunity of visit the Sake Brewing Company, with Maehashi sensei and my friends Yadira and Veronica from my home university (UACH), here



we learnt a lot of this traditional drink, from its preparation to the sale in the market, after that we visited Sawara Town which is a traditional town very beautiful and we could enjoy a quite delicious Japanese meal.

I also went to JA Tokyo chuo farmers market Futakotamagawa, with my host professor Hara sensei, which is a very important association where local farmers from Setagaya can sell their products in this market. Two important farmers of this region explained us how they started their business and also I met a different type of agriculture which involves agriculture and tourism, so it was very interesting. The same day, my professor took me to a traditional house, where we had a talk with an old lady that kindly received us and gave us some tea and a nice company.

I had the opportunity to visit the Tsukiji market, the biggest fish market in the world, the market manages the trade of more than 400 different types of marine products ranging from small sardines to tunas of 300 kg, and from cheap seaweed to the most expensive caviar.



Also my Japanese classes began during this month, that at first was a little difficult, but thanks to the sensei and my classmates I could improve a little more each week.

During this month I got involved into the Latin-American Café, which is an activity where Latin and Japanese students get to know each other, and learn more about Spanish, Portuguese and Japanese languages.

Also I met another amazing places, such as the center of Tokyo, the museum of Tokyo, Gynza, and the Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architectural Museum, Tokyo Tower, Tokyo Imperial Palace and others, that enrich my culture.

DECEMBER

This month was very special, we have a short time of winter vacations, so it was a good opportunity to seek for other places, because of this I travel to Kamakura, Kyoto and Osaka, with my Mexican friends, Yadira and Veronica.

We went to Kamakura at Kanagawa Prefecture with our friends from Forestry Department, we really enjoyed sightseeing and climbing together, we could see many amazing landscapes, such as the forest, the sea, and the Fuji mountain. We had the opportunity to go to Disneyland with our friend from Biobusiness Department, it was amazing and moving to see the parades, the lights and the castle while remembering our childhood.

Finally, we did a trip to Kyoto and Osaka, there, we had a very good time sightseeing and visiting many temples and famous places as well as trying delicious traditional food.



I was amazed by the Golden Temple in Kyoto, certainly one of my favorite places in Japan, as well as the bamboo park, in Osaka we visited the Osaka Castle, which is really beautiful, as everything in Japan it makes a wonderful contrast between the traditional and one of the most advanced cities in the world.

Back in Tokyo I was able to fulfill one of my biggest dreams, which was to see the countdown of the new year at the famous Shibuya crossing, during the whole month I enjoyed the Christmas spirit and the beautiful illuminations that Japan prepares for all of us.

JANUARY

In January, I did many activities, starting with evaluations and final presentations, in one of them (Agricultural Trade) I discussed the issue of the Re-negotiation of NAFTA and the options for my country, Mexico.



In the same way, I made several academic outings, starting with a visit with international students and CIP members to Saitama Mint, the Japanese coin factory, which I loved, seeing how a coin is created step by step, as well as the strict quality monitoring that they have; and the collection coins among other things that are made by hand! Following this we visited Nisshin Milling museum, where we learned about the products that this company has developed since its inception, as well as its production and marketing processes.

I was also invited to a very special event in Japan for turning 20, a very important event for the Japanese who are coming of age, which is celebrated on the first Monday of the year, which made me feel very honored; for this reason, my teacher Juri Hara organized a meal in a Mexican restaurant to celebrate my "Coming age party", and I could not be more grateful!

Later I met the snow for the first time! Since the snow came in Tokyo, which was beautiful, despite the strong cold.



In the following days I attended a plantation and factory of green tea to learn more about this crop and its production processes and also as part of the culture of this beautiful country. They taught me, among other things, a tea ceremony, in which I prepared my own Matcha tea, which was delicious! And I also tried some different sweets typical of the country. I learnt how to make a lip balm, which are activities that this factory also performs, in order to

not lose the Japanese traditions, as well as to let us know a little about them to foreigners.

I also had the opportunity to go to the factory of YAKULT in Ibaraki, which was very useful, there I learned about quality control, which was one of the main topics for which I wanted to come to Japan.

I attended the company Plenus, which is in charge of the production and distribution of "bentos", they also own the restaurant chain of set-menus "Yayoiken". There I learned about the history of rice, cultivation and the meaning for Japanese society. This visit appeared in an article in the newspaper Nis hi Nihon Shinbun, where a small interview was included that was done to me!

Finishing the month with a presentation of my Thesis project, the newly created company *Águila del Sol* and its products based on the xoconostle, to professors and students of the University of Agriculture in Tokyo, in which there was much interest in this fruit Typical of Mexican food, which motivated me to continue developing and improving this project.



FEBRUARY

During my last month in Japan, I had the opportunity of having an internship with ERECON, Institute of Environmental Rehabilitation and Conservation, which was established in 2000 to contribute to sustainable use of natural resources in Asian countries; mainly focus in the environmental rehabilitation and conservation as well as the environmental education for the harmony between the agricultural and urban development and the natural environment.

This Internship last two weeks, I share this experience with my classmates and friends from Peru and Brazil, during this internship we learned about the Satoyama and Satoumi which are Japanese traditions, associated with the sustainable use of resources, thus giving a historical model for environmental stewardship and resource management that contributes to human well-being, this being a lifestyle, which is not only good with the health of the human being, but also helps the full development of

the ecosystem, we also did several activities, such as making compost observe a Charcoal making and visited some farms and Onoji Satoyama, in which we could observe the harmony that exists between the human being and the natural environment.

Finishing this internship and our stay in Japan with a presentation of an initiative of project in our countries that contribute to the goals of this organization, in which I talk about a Program of Integral Management of Solid Residues for Mexico City, which focuses mainly on environmental education in my community, since there are several projects related to the care of the environment, however in Mexico there is still no culture of environmental care. My colleagues also talked about interesting things about their countries, each focused on relevant issues in agriculture or land erosion in countries like Peru and Brazil, knowing a bit about the problems and reality of each of these societies.



3. MEXICO VS JAPAN

Throughout my stay in Japan, I could observe some differences between this and my country, mainly punctuality, which in Mexico is not very customary, also that Mexicans are very restless, unlike the Japanese, that the streets are very quiet, also that Japanese workers always wear uniform, customer service is very important and the motto is "The customer is always right", the streets are always clean, this surprised me in the countdown of the new year, where the street was dirty due to the number of foreigners who attended the event, however half an hour after the end of the event the streets were completely clean, as the police and the population had collected all the trash in its path.

Another thing is that Mexicans always approach foreigners to offer help or talk, unlike the Japanese, who are mostly very shy to talk to foreigners and prefer not to approach,

they also seem very busy in their own activities that they do not take the time to take an interest in another person, however if you have the opportunity to meet them, they are very patient and friendly.

4. ADVICE FOR FUTURE RJP STUDENTS

This experience is very rewarding, however to be profitable it is important to have a good knowledge of the English language, since the subjects are taught in this language, it is also easier to relate with people from different countries, since each speaks its own language; French, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, among others, therefore speaking a common language like English is of great help. And also knowing the basis of Japanese language is very important, since all your daily life will be in this language.

Another thing that seems important to me is to know about the culture of your country and study, since when you go to a foreign country, you are representing an entire nation and there is nothing more rewarding than to leave your country's name with a good perception and feel proud of it, so you leave a good impression of you and your compatriots who will later join this program.

5. HOW TO IMPROVE THE PROGRAM

The program in general is very good, however, I think it is important that they support more in the learning of Japanese language, through interaction with more Japanese students.

Having a special program or a class that teach us about the lifestyle of Japanese people and the culture background.

Also give exact dates of granting the scholarship, this so that we have greater organization of money and our activities.

And finally that someone could guide us in everyday things such as internet access, food shopping, pharmacies and access to first aid kit, since in the dormitory I did not find.

6. CONCLUSION

This was a unique experience, I learnt a lot about Agriculture, trade, culture and History of Japan, as well of the other countries where my friends where from, I could not be more thankful for this opportunity with my university Universidad Autónoma Chapingo and with Tokyo University of Agriculture, and also all the wonderful persons I had the chance to meet during this academic exchange.

I take all this knowledge to Mexico, with the intention of contributing a little for the development and improvement of it, as well as the hope of returning one day to this magnificent country.