

Japan-Denmark People to People Programme Cultural Study Tour in Tokyo 2012
Evaluation report by Camilla Nellemann Jensen, MSc Business, Language and Culture

This report is an evaluation of the Cultural Study Tour in Tokyo taking place in mid-February 2012. As a whole, the trip exceeds my expectations in every regard. The program reflecting a wide range of activities deepened my understanding of traditional, modern and corporate Japan. It was a pleasure to getting to know my fellow candidates Laerke Steinmann and Lars Stroeback. The warm welcome by Mrs. Kusunose and her assistant Yuuki in Tokyo strongly contributed to a successful study tour. We experienced things that I would never have thought that I would experience in my whole life e.g. meeting Prince and Princess Hitachi, participating live in a Japanese TV show and listening to Shinto priests praying for our journey home.



The three candidates and Mrs. Kusunose on the train from the airport

My observations generated several ideas for how to strengthen the Japanese-Danish ties (see my essay on Japan-Denmark relations), which I am now eager to execute. Furthermore, the study tour made me decide to terminate my contract with Danish Defence (having served and been available for 11 years now) to put all my efforts into developing a PhD research proposal and apply for the Monbukagakusho scholarship for research students in Japan. The study trip fostered a project idea as well as a network of people who may assist in accessing empirical data in Japan. I also feel encouraged to study Japanese intensely and try to become as fluent in Japanese as in English. Mrs. Kusunose informed us that the goal of this programme is to inspire the candidates to visit Japan again in the future in some way or another, possibly bringing along more Danes. I will do my best to meet this expectation.

It was clearly an advantage to travel three candidates together. The fact that we were able to reflect on the experiences from different perspectives due to our diverse backgrounds led us to gain a deeper understanding and greater output from the study tour. I strongly recommend to maintain the number of candidates. Traveling four or more people together may lead to the formation of groups. Furthermore, it would be too exhaustive to attend such an intensive program for just one person. The timing for the study tour was ideal because it took place during my winter break so I needed only to take one day off from work. If you consider changing the timing for the following study tours, I recommend the Easter break which all Danes (students and workers) have at the same time as opposed to the winter break which may vary. In the following sections I will evaluate on the individual events.

Saturday, 11 February

The 10 hour flight was a good beginning. We were able to getting to know each other and I picked up on some Japanese while watching a synchronized movie. It was nice that our first day in Tokyo involved fairly relaxing activities like visiting the Edo-Tokyo Museum and doing a bit of shopping in Akihabara after having traveled for so many hours. I was glad to see a rakugo performance, which is a part of Japanese culture that I had not seen before. We were accommodated at a very nice hotel just across a super market and close to several restaurants and convenience shops. This made dining and shopping for breakfast very easy.

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Beautiful decoration at the Edo-Tokyo Museum



Supermarket dinner in the hotel room

Sunday, 12 February

We started the day quite early with a train ride to Higashi-Matsushima where we had a guided tour of the flooded area and heard about the course of events triggered by the Tohoku Earthquake in 2011. We had brought lots of candy because we were supposed to meet children there. Even though we did not meet any children, it is my impression that the three of us benefited greatly from this experience. In my view, the visit to Higashi-Matsushima is one of the highlights of the study tour.



A devastated residential neighborhood in Higashi Matsushima

Due to my military background and having studied Japan Self Defence Forces (JSDF) as an undergraduate exchange student at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, I was eager to visit the JSDF air base in Higashi Matsushima. I was happy to see it from the outside and luckily we managed to take a couple of pictures before we were asked to leave the area :-)



JSDF air base in Higashi Matsushima

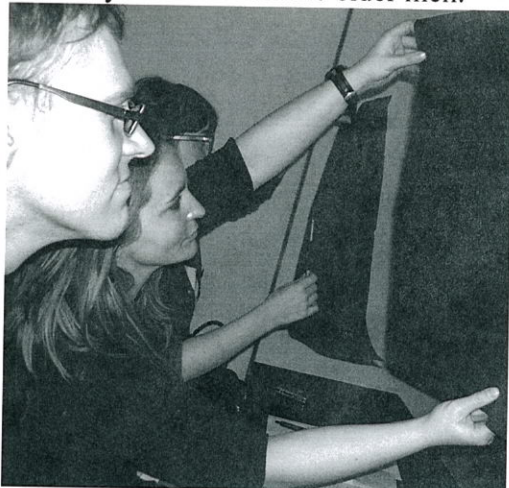
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Upon return to Tokyo, I spent the rest of the day together with Lars and his friend Axi from Copenhagen University who currently lives in Tokyo. Firstly, we went to Yasukuni Jinja. Due to Lars' extensive knowledge of Shintoism, it was an entirely different experience compared to when I visited Yasukuni Jinja on my own in 2005. Then, Axi showed us the good places to buy souvenirs. As I listened to Axi's story, I felt that I would like to live in Tokyo for an extended period of time as well. It was very nice with a bit of time on our own during the program.

Monday, 13 February

We started the day in Meguro Gajoen where we had a couple of hours to prepare for our speeches at the Japan-Denmark Association and the TV performance scheduled for the next day. At lunch time we enjoyed a luxurious Japanese meal together with a master student and an assistant professor from Keio University. This was indeed another highlight with interesting conversations about Danish and Japanese politics. We have stayed in touch after the trip via Facebook and e-mail.

The program continued with a workshop for dying textiles. Fantastic to see the small factory driven by two enthusiastic elder men.



Inspecting the patterns used for dying



Inspecting the equipment

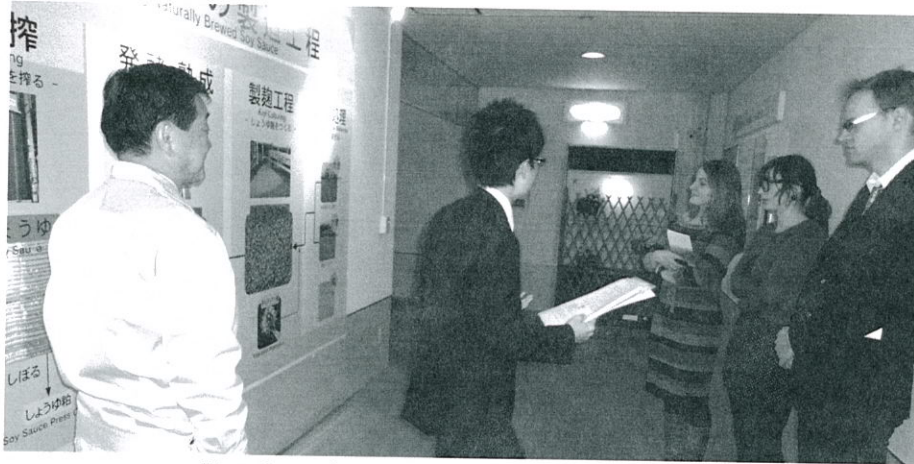
At the following dinner and roundtable discussion about earthquakes and water sanitation in Japan, I enjoyed meeting the Rotary Peace Fellowship students. Again, listening to their stories made me want to try to live in Tokyo. We have connected on LinkedIn and I have been emailing with the girl, Alli, about her volunteering as a photographer for Fujifilm. Mr. Hideaki Oda gave an interesting lecture which inspired me to look into Japan's energy policy and commitments under the Kyoto Protocol. The seminar was held at the hotel where we stayed that night. It was slightly inconvenient to having to pack our things and carry our bags during the whole day but I would not have missed the opportunity to stay at this beautiful hotel so it was definitely worthwhile.



Enjoying breakfast with a stunning view at the new hotel

Tuesday, 14 February

Tuesday was indeed a busy day. Having studied corporate life in Japan at Copenhagen Business School I particularly enjoyed seeing the production at the Kikkoman factory as well as hearing about the outsourcing to China and Kikkoman's corporate social responsibility projects in Japan.



Listening to how miso and soy sauce are produced

Next, we received an exclusive tour of the Court Music Section of the Imperial Household Agency and learned about the relation of the music instruments to Shintoism. It was great to receive this explanation before the Shinto ceremony scheduled for the following day where we saw the instruments put into practice. We received a beautiful calendar with an explanation of gagaku on the back. Written materials are very nice because it is difficult at times to understand, comprehend and remember everything which is said.



Demonstration of an instrument used during Shinto ceremonies but influenced by Christianity



Standing in front of the stage in the Court Music Section

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The following workshop started by teaching us proper behavior during tea ceremony including how to drink matcha tea. When I was a high school exchange student in Fukui, my host mother taught me sencha tea ceremony so I was pleased to learn about matcha this time. Afterwards we practiced calligraphy on paper and on a fan – nice souvenirs to bring back home.



'Love' on paper and fan

Before heading off for the annual meeting of the Japan-Denmark Association, we had some time to practice our speeches. We felt a certain pressure to deliver good speeches and Mrs. Kusunose was kind to proof read them. The members were very interested in talking with us. We were surprised and overwhelmed that Prince and Princess Hitachi wanted to speak with us after we had held our speeches. Furthermore, it was interesting to talk with the Danish ambassador to Japan as his former mission was Afghanistan and I recently returned from a deployment to Afghanistan. I also had the opportunity to speak a bit of Russian with a former Japanese diplomat to Russia before we rushed to the final event of the day's program. The buffet looked very nice but we were too busy to have dinner :-)

A major highlight of the study tour was the participation in a live show by Tokyo MX TV. I was rather exhausted after a long day and happened to say some really odd things during the rehearsal such as 'I am 17 years old'... but luckily, I managed to speak properly when the cameras were rolling.

Wednesday, 15 february

We started the day with a rich cultural experience at the ancient shrine Ookunitama Jinja.



Handwashing at the temizuya to purify body and mind

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We took part in a beautiful Shinto ceremony followed by a special session to pray for our journey home. The chief priest showed us a lot of interest and gave each of us a bag with sacred sake, sweets and rice and a gorgeous fan. We received a tour around the museum in relation to the shrine. Among other things, we saw the sacred body armor of Lord Tokugawa and the chief priest's son demonstrated authentic samurai swords. A stunning experience.



A samurai sword is seen to the left

During the following meeting with the mayor of Fuchu we were informed about the city e.g. the fact that many tourists go to see shrines in Kyoto despite that some of the most important ones are situated in Tokyo. The next meeting took place at Tokyo Race Course. I did not realize that horse racing was that popular in Japan so this event was yet another eyeopener for me.



Tokyo Race Course

We had a very informative tour of the Suntory factory led by the general manager. It was interesting to hear him explain about the competitive situation and we enjoyed a freshly brewed Suntory beer before going for lunch at Tokyo Fuchu Rotary Club. We listened to a presentation by an exchange student which he performed without a manuscript in fluent Japanese. I was very impressed! Being at the meeting brought back good memories from when I was a Rotary exchange student. The format of the meeting was the same, the members sang the same Rotary song and the lunch was similar. Mrs. Kusunose spoke about the Japan-Denmark People to People Programme. In a way, the Rotary exchange programme is comparable to this programme in terms of building bridges across cultures.

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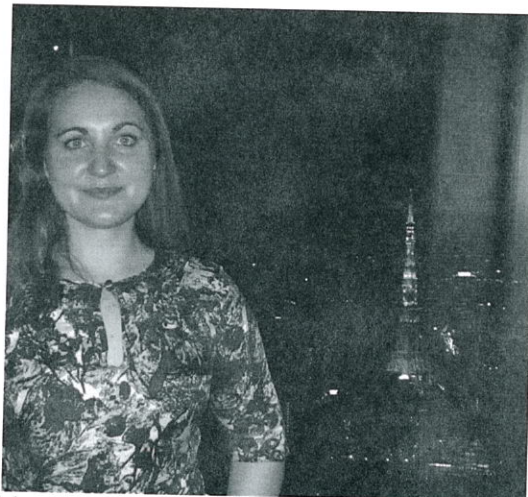
'Star Wars'-ish architecture at Suntory



To the left: Suntory General Manager. To the right: Chief Priest

At the Fuchu Native Province Museum we went for a stroll in the park and a tea break. According to the schedule we were supposed to visit the museum but it was fine that we did not enter. At that point we had already gained so many impressions and it was nice to merely enjoy the beautiful surroundings. During the following visit to the Association of Shinto Shrines we were able to ask questions about Shintoism. Upon return to Denmark, I enjoyed reading the informative book which we received and I have come to think very positively about Shintoism.

The very last event was a dinner with Mr. Karita and Mrs. Uchikawa from the Japan-Denmark Association at the exclusive Roppongi Hills Club on 52nd floor with a fabulous view of the city. According to Mrs. Uchikawa, the members of the Japan-Denmark Association had enjoyed our speeches and wished that we had spoken for a bit longer time because what we said had been so interesting. I was extremely pleased to hear that because we had wanted to make a good impression and express our gratitude.



Tokyo Tower seen from the top floor of Roppongi Hills

From my point of view, the cultural study tour in Tokyo 2012 was well planned and executed thanks to the tremendous efforts by the Embassy of Japan, Kuniburi International and the Japan-Denmark Association. I am also grateful to my former teacher for recommending me as a candidate. I tend to think that I need at least three weeks when visiting Japan because of the long journey and jet lag. Now I know that one week is also possible if only the trip is well prepared beforehand.