

City University of Hong Kong - Student Leaders Quality Enhancement Programme: Japan Study Tour

I am grateful to CityU Student Development Services for organizing a Japan Study Tour, which gave me the opportunity to visit Osaka and Kyoto. I have wonderful memories of this 5-day trip.

Kansai Airport

After a 3-hour journey, we arrived at Kansai Airport at around noon. The sky was blue and clear and the air was really fresh. Kansai Airport was constructed on reclaimed land. On the way to Osaka World Expo Memorial Park, the views from the window were beautiful; we saw numerous traditional Japanese houses. Compared with Hong Kong, a busy and bustling city, Kansai seemed to have a peaceful atmosphere.



Osaka World Expo Memorial Park

The first place we visited was Osaka World Expo Memorial Park. The park is home to a well-known building called Sun Tower. The tower is decorated with three suns representing the past, the present and the future.

We saw many primary-school students in the park. This is a popular place for them to explore nature as part of their cultural studies.



Dotonbori Shinsaibashi

Shinsaibashi is a famous shopping street in Osaka, with many restaurants, pharmacies and cosmetics shops frequented by numerous Korean and mainland Chinese travelers. In the pharmacy we visited, the staff spoke fluent Mandarin. I noticed that restaurant decorations in Osaka are far more exaggerated than those in Hong Kong. These decorations are intended to attract customers and thus increase the restaurants' profits. I tried the street snacks and bought some cleansing foam products, which were much cheaper than in Hong Kong.



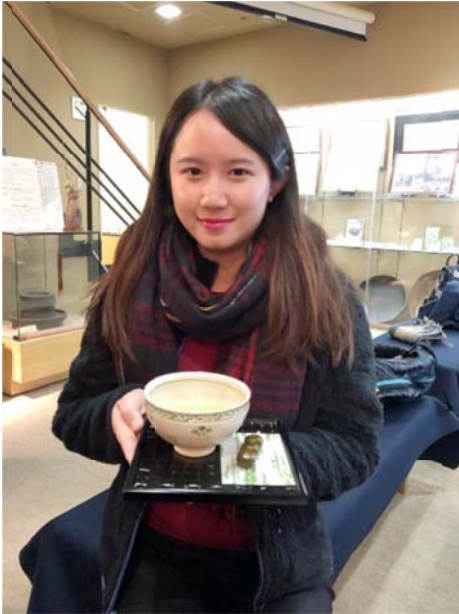
Ricoh Ltd. and its Open Office

Ricoh Ltd. was the first company we visited. The company has adopted the concept of an “open office”, which was eye-opening for me. The staff have no specified seats or rooms. They put their belongings into a locker near the entrance to the office and bring their own computers to work. There are no cabinets under the tables. Earthquakes occur frequently in Japan, and this design allows staff to hide under their tables immediately in the event of an earthquake. In addition, most of the company's documents are shared via computer hard drives to minimize the use of paper. The ultimate goal is to enable workers to work equally well in the office and at home, especially on project-based tasks.



Marukyu-Koyamaen Matcha

The next day, we visited Marukyu-Koyamaen Matcha, one of the Japan's most famous matcha production companies. On arriving at the company's offices, we first watched a video about the origin and production of matcha and the history of Marukyu-Koyamaen. Matcha is a well-known Japanese tea. Surprisingly, however, it originated in China. We then visited a room to enjoy some matcha. The room was decorated with meaningful calligraphy stating "to meet once in life" (一期一會). This represents the Japanese emphasis on treasuring every meeting with others and seeking to do one's best to respect and please others. This serves as an important lesson for Hong Kong people, some of whom behave with indifference toward others. The matcha is stirred and tasted using traditional methods, with sufficient bubbles pumped into the tea to make it smooth. I have wonderful memories of this visit.



Gekkeikan Sake Company

Another famous Japanese product is sake, an alcoholic drink made by fermenting rice. We visited Gekkeikan's sake museum on February 7. Gekkeikan is a prestigious sake production company founded in 1637. Companies rarely have such a long history. The museum was built in the former brewery courtyard. The museum displayed many original traditional tools from the sake brewery. The staff also explained how sake is produced and described the history of Gekkeikan in detail. In Japan, numerous competitions are held to evaluate the quality of sake. Gekkeikan has won these competitions for many years. During the visit, we also observed the care and thoughtfulness typical of the Japanese. Representatives of Gekkeikan gave us gifts when we left. Every student older than 20 received a bottle of high-quality sake, and every underage student received a postcard.



Panasonic Recycling Factory

On the last day of our journey, we visited one of Panasonic's recycling factories. This was a novel experience for us, as the recycling process in Hong Kong is substandard in comparison. The extraordinary modern factory decomposes and recycles electronic products, such as washing machines, refrigerators and televisions, using various methods according to the physical and chemical characteristics of the materials. For example, iron balls are separated from copper balls using a vibrating platform with a specified slope. Due to their different densities, the copper balls go to the top and the iron balls go to the bottom of the machine. We also observed that the workers showed a high degree of discipline in lining up at various workstations to process materials for recycling. Visiting this factory raised our awareness of the concept of environmentally friendly behavior and showed us how the Japanese treasure their resources.



In conclusion, the Japan Study tour is worth joining. The participating students not only gain experience of making company visits, but also have the chance to build networks with other distinguished CityU students. Besides, the food and accommodation organized by EGL Tours are great. The experienced tourist guide introduced us to Japanese culture during our coach trips. I am looking forward to visiting Japan again.