

Sunday, February 5th **Indianapolis - Orientation**

Japan here we come! As each second elapsed our anticipation grew. The day before our flight to Japan, we participated in a training and orientation session to achieve a better understanding of the Japanese culture. Tracy Mahoney was a great facilitator for our cultural learning experience. Mrs. Mahoney addressed fears ranging from the flight across the Pacific to the taste of Japanese cuisine. An incredibly interesting illustration showed that the population density of Japan could be achieved by crowding half of the United State's population into the state of Montana. Mrs. Mahoney shared her experiences in Japan and brought many cultural items. We also got our first taste of Japanese sweets. Perhaps one of the most beneficial aspects of Mrs. Mahoney's lesson was her tutorial in language. We learned the translation of our names, states, hobbies, and agricultural experiences. As national officers we memorize material very regularly, but we were all surprised by the difficulty of learning our short introductions in Japanese. After a quick review of Japanese restrooms and the cultural differences in bathing practices, we headed for dinner at a traditional Japanese restaurant.

At the fine dining institution we began our meal with a wide variety of sushi. Though our preference in sushi varied, we all agreed that uni, sea urchin in Japanese, probably is not the best choice in raw fish. After learning about Japanese food and etiquette, we moved back to the FFA Center for our final preparations before our trek across the Pacific. We finished all of the business that had to be completed, and crammed all the necessities needed for an eleven day trip into one suitcase each. As a part of our "Japanese Time Zone Adjustment Plan" we stayed up all night in hopes of sleeping on the plane.

Monday, February 6th **Departure from Indianapolis**

Still bright-eyed and bushy-tailed we headed to the airport at 4:30 am. The "Forever Gold" travel group – comprised of Mrs. Nancy Trivette (FFA Board of Directors member), Mr. Randy Trivette, Mr. Mark Wilburn (FFA staff), Ryan Peterson, Anita Estes, and Jessie Geib – made their connection to Tokyo Narita airport through New York City, while the "Forever Blue" crew made up of Mr. and Mrs. Doug Loudenslager (FFA COO), Erica Der, Stuart Joy, and Travis Jett, connected through Washington D.C. It turned out that our staying up all night didn't work quite as well as we had hoped. Though sleep did not completely take us, we did watch several movies along the way on our fourteen hour flight. We began to understand Japanese culture immediately by the outstanding service the flight attendants provided, and we were off on our great adventure to Japan!



Tuesday, February 7th **Arrival to Japan – Narita, Tokyo**



After fourteen hours of many movies and glasses of orange juice, we finally safely landed in the Tokyo Narita International Airport. We easily made it through immigration and customs, retrieved our luggage and then we met the person that would influence the rest of our stay in Japan – our great tour guide, Mrs. Chieko Tsuruta. Chieko took us to our shuttle bus and immediately introduced us to her great sense of humor as she showed us the different ways we could use to remember how to say her name. Along the way Chieko also pointed out some places of interest like Tokyo Disneyland, Tokyo Tower, and Rainbow Bridge while also giving us a brief history of Tokyo

and Japan. We learned that the city of Tokyo has a population of over 8 million and Tokyo prefecture (similar to a state) has over 12 million residents. We checked into our hotel and immediately started to get the feel of the tight Japan quarters. The national officers had three single beds in our room with very little walking space!

After getting settled, we headed down the street to find our first official Japanese meal. We were in the Ginza District which Chieko explained was comparable in look and feel to 5th Avenue in New York City. So it was a very well known shopping area with lots of people around. Along the walk we stopped to check out the menus at the different restaurants that served beef, and marveled at how they could charge over 6400 yen (approximately \$53!) for 7 ounces of meat. We found a little restaurant in the bottom of a shopping mall that specialized in using eggs. Some of us got to encounter our first experience with raw eggs, too. After dinner, we returned to the hotel and caught up on some much needed jet lag sleep.



Wednesday, February 8th Tokyo – U.S. Embassy and Mitsui & Co., Ltd.

Many of us began our day wide awake around 3:00 am due to the jet lag we were still getting over, but thankfully didn't have much trouble going back to sleep for another precious three or four hours. We then began our day for the second time as we awoke refreshed and ready to take on our first full day of experiencing the city of Tokyo. Promptly at 8:45 am we left the hotel to catch the subway. It is amazing at how many subway lines Tokyo has and how confusing it is, especially when all the directions are in Japanese, but we had our wonderful tour guide, Chieko, to guide us through the maze.



Our first stop of the day was at the U.S. Embassy. After clearing security, Mr. Clay Hamilton, Senior Agriculture Attaché, met us in the lobby and escorted our group to a conference room. Mr. Hamilton and several other Embassy representatives visited with us for two hours on topics such as the Japanese market and economy, agriculture, public affairs, politics, and the important issue of the ban on importing American beef. The discussion was led by experts in each area, and we were able to ask each of them questions following their remarks. Besides gaining a greater understanding of Japanese people and its agriculture industry, we were as able to gain insight on what life was like for a government employee in a foreign country. Most of the individuals we met had

lived in at least one or two other countries and were likely to live in many more. They also shared with us opportunities for current and former FFA members who are in college to apply for internships with American Embassies across the world. After our meeting we continued to visit over lunch with Mr. Hamilton about the issue of American beef being imported into Japan. As we left the Embassy we walked away with not only a greater understanding of the Japanese culture and the issues its agriculture industry is facing, but also with information that we couldn't wait to share with FFA members who are interested in agriculture foreign affairs.

After leaving the Embassy, we saw the Prime Minister's residence and offices as well as the Diet Building, which is akin to our Capitol Building. We had a few extra minutes before our next meeting so we were able to take a quick peek at the Imperial Palace, home to Japan's Imperial family. We then made the trek back through the Tokyo subway system to the offices of Mitsui & Company, Ltd. Mitsui is the company that sponsors the national officers' trip to Japan. Mr. Junzo Tanaka, our host at Mitsui, welcomed us the Japanese way with the greeting "Konichiwa" (good afternoon) and a bow. Mr. Tanaka escorted



us up to the office of Mr. Masayoshi Sato, Executive Managing Officer and Chief Operating Officer of the Mitsui Foods and Retail Business Unit. Our meeting with Mr. Sato included sharing a little about each of ourselves and our background in agriculture as well as thanking Mr. Sato and Mitsui for their sponsorship of our trip for the 28th consecutive year. After our meeting with Mr. Sato, several Mitsui junior employees gave presentations about each division of the Foods and Retail Business Unit of Mitsui. Each of these individuals had taken the time to not only present to us but also prepare their presentations in English. A characteristic of the Japanese people is that display of selflessness and true service. As part of their culture they are always thinking of the other person and how they can more readily accommodate them. We all were very impressed with their English and were very grateful for all the time and hard work they had put in to help us understand their company and its involvement in the global agriculture industry.

Our visit to Mitsui ended with a wonderful reception with Mitsui employees which included a welcome speech by Mr. Hiroki Ogawa, General Manager of the Strategic Planning Department. Mr. Doug Loudenslager, FFA Chief Operating Officer, brought remarks, and in addition, each of us gave extended introductions of ourselves. We learn the most through the relationships we build and the stories we share with one another. During the reception at Mitsui we were able to learn so much through one-on-one conversations about what a typical workday for Japanese businesspeople might look like, what their career goals are, and the types of hobbies and recreational activities that are popular outside of work life.

Following the reception the night was still young and the Mitsui employees took us out for some Tokyo entertainment. We had an absolute blast visiting and singing karaoke for two hours before we returned to the hotel and called it a night.

As we reflected on the day, we were amazed at how much we had learned and how much fun we had through it all. We couldn't have asked for a better way to start the trip. After a very busy day and the continued effects of jet lag, we quickly went to bed to reenergize for another extraordinary day in Japan.



Thursday, February 9th

Tokyo – Tsukiji Market, Toyota Motor Corporation, Tokyo Nogei H.S. and FFJ reception



We met bright and early in the hotel lobby at 5:40 am and made our way toward the shoreline so we could tour the Tsukiji Central Wholesale Market, one of the largest fish markets in the world, handling over 2000 tons of marine products per day. We walked through the market place where all sorts of items were on sale. Anything and everything a person in the restaurant or food retail business would need from a wholesale salesman could be found at this market. It was extremely crowded at six o'clock in the morning and the walkways between the market stands were just big enough for two single file lines of people walking let alone the motorized carts people were using to carry heavy loads of fish and other items to sell and deliver to their stands.

We finally seemed to reach the auction area through the maze of seafood market stands. There the fresh and frozen fish, mostly tuna, were unloaded from ships, weighed, graded, and sorted into groups to be auctioned. A Japanese fish auction is not much different from a livestock auction in America; lots of buyers quickly purchasing fish for restaurants and grocery stores. Surprisingly, the fish were all graded in a similar fashion to how livestock meat is graded. A slit is made in the back part of the fish's tail and the meat is examined and graded the same way a rib-eye or loin-eye would be. Everyone was moving so fast and carrying off fish to their stands once they were bought – it was quite the system to see in action. We were surprised to see very few

computers being used to calculate sales figures or for wholesalers to manage inventory; it seemed to be accomplished for the most part with pen and paper!

We then made our way out of the Tsukiji market, but not before stopping at a sushi restaurant to enjoy a breakfast snack. We tried several different kinds of sushi including shrimp, salmon, tuna, eel, sea urchin, and a California hand wrap. Ryan had a bit of “run-in” with some uni, or sea urchin. It was quite the breakfast!



Once back at the hotel we prepared our bags for shipment to our host families and got ready for our visit with Toyota Motor Corporation. We met with Mr. Fujio Cho, Vice Chairman of the Board and learned about his experience working for Toyota in America and how he came to his current position within the company. He had some terrific insights on leadership and how to be successful. He shared with us several things that have helped make him and the company successful. First, clearly understood goals and objectives must exist for the company and individuals. He provides his workers with big picture goals and then allows them to develop their own path and process for

reaching that big picture. Second, he always maintains an open-door policy for when those tasks become too big to handle and employees feel welcome to come to him for help. He believes leadership stems from your personal performance in the workplace and especially by how you develop relationships with the people in your life. He encouraged us to be receptive to advice by reading between the lines and trying to understand from where the person giving the advice might be coming.



Our next stop for the day was a visit to Tokyo Nogei High School. This agricultural school has an FFJ (Future Farmers of Japan) chapter and the principal, Mr. Junichiro Chidani, is the National FFJ Representative (Advisor). We met with the FFJ

officers from Tokyo Nogei and many other agricultural high schools in and around Tokyo. We also had the pleasure of meeting Ms. Kurumi Kurimoto, the National FFJ President. We were given a tour of the school and were able to see their greenhouse and horticultural program, the equine facilities, three food processing labs, and a chemistry lab. It was so neat to see that Japanese agricultural education students are studying many of the same types of subjects we do in our agriculture education programs. The reception we had following the tour was amazing as we all gave introductions of ourselves in Japanese, and we were honored with a traditional Japanese drum performance by a neighboring school. After the performance, we exchanged appreciation plaques between FFA and FFJ and exchanged gifts and business cards with all the students.

We said our good-byes and headed to the Roppongi area of Tokyo where we had dinner at the Tokyo Hard Rock Café with Mr. Chidani and Ms. Yurika Ohira, a teacher from Nogei High School who organized the school tour. During dinner, Mr. Chidani shared with us that FFJ has 100,000 members in over 400 schools. He also talked to us how about how national FFJ officers are selected. It is much different than the FFA as the different regions take turns having national officers, and they are selected on a rotational basis. It was amazing to think of all the work Mr. Chidani had put into not only our visit this year but also the national officers that have visited Japan in the past. He has been so instrumental in a successful trip we will never forget.



Our last night in Tokyo was spent thinking about the eye-opening things we had seen throughout the day. From a fast-paced gigantic fish market, to the automobile giant Toyota, and to our first exposure to FFJ, it had been a very educational and insightful day. Never would we have thought that we would experience so many parallels between Japan and America in our educational systems and beliefs on leadership.

Friday, February 10th

Nagoya Port and Atsumi Peninsula – ChitaFuto, Oji Corn Starch, Atsumi High School, Host Families

Today began rather early, leaving the hotel bright and early at 6:30 am, but all for good reason because the day was jam-packed full of excitement and learning! The day included visits to ChitaFuto grain handling facility, Oji Corn Starch, and Atsumi Agricultural High School. The day began with our first experience on a bullet train, or as they are called in Japan, the shinkansen. Bullet trains are so-called because not only are they shaped like one, but they also go very fast, reaching speeds of 180 mph. We recall two different times with Mr. Wilburn standing about 4-5 feet from the edge of the track when all of a sudden, a bullet train appeared, scaring the living daylights out of him. It was kind of fun to watch!



Chieko, our tour guide, did an awesome job making sure that we got on the right trains at the right time and got off when we were supposed to. Our two hours on the bullet train though were spent sleeping, eating chocolate covered almonds, and thinking about the next adventure for us to encounter...our host families! As we sped along the countryside in the bullet train, we saw an amazing view of Mt. Fuji, and captured some beautiful pictures through the window.

A bus picked us up at the train station and took us to ChitaFuto, a grain handling facility in the port of Nagoya. They import 14 million tons of grain, 60% of which comes from the U.S. While we were at ChitaFuto, Japan's gratefulness was expressed by the leaders communicating how glad they are that the U.S. sells high quality grain to them. They asked us to "keep attention" to food safety. We learned about how the Japanese culture appreciates appearance and quality, and as we would learn throughout the trip, those expectations stop with nothing.

Competition for U.S. grain at ChitaFuto comes from China mainly because of price, as grain from China was said to have stones and dirt in it, so they appreciate corn and beans from the Great Lakes and New Orleans ports, and wheat from the West Coast. We learned that Japan is currently not accepting BT corn, and at this particular port, the grain is processed into its final product, when trucks come from generally six miles away to pick up their product.



Oji Corn Starch was quite literally next door to ChitaFuto. Oji buys corn from ChitaFuto and processes the grain into gluten meal, gluten feed, corn germ, and starch. They utilize every part of the corn, including the water in which they soak it. They referred to it as 110% output.

Lunch was a wonderful meal with the executives from ChitaFuto and Oji. We had Japanese beef on a sizzling hot plate so that we could cook it to our desire. We also had potato wedges, cooked carrots, ice cream and coffee! The lunch occasion was special because Mr. Shogo Suzuki, the President of ChitaFuto, who ate with us was living in New York when 9-11 happened. His situation was unique because he saw people watching television in the office and wondered what was happening, but his secretary didn't even know. He only found out when his daughter, who was living in Tokyo, called him to talk about the planes crashing. We could all see the emotion in his eyes and hear it in his voice. He understood and expressed how bad of a situation it was. He told a story about a firefighter who was thought to be lost, but was actually helping to clean up the rubble and was

not properly registered. It was amazing that we traveled to Japan to hear the story of a firsthand experience from someone who was there in New York on September 11th.

After lunch, we all boarded a couple more trains, and eventually found ourselves at Atsumi Agricultural High School. These students had worked so hard to put together a wonderful reception for us, and we were welcomed by their principal, Mr. Hosoi Naoki. They showed us an impressive PowerPoint presentation about their school, and we thought maybe that would be a nice addition for us to make for future teams' trips to Japan. Each of their students is involved in an agricultural class, whether it's Food Science, Animal Science, or another of their choosing. Following the reception, we met our Japanese host families and departed to spend our first night in a Japanese home. By far, this was definitely a highlight of the trip. We learned to make the choice not to worry about what was to come, and rather to just absorb and take it all in; and there was a lot to take in!



This part of the journal ends differently for each person on the trip, as some of us went to teachers' homes, some to chrysanthemum, beef, or dairy farms, and others to the homes of local restaurant and business owners. Our day ended with each of us embracing Japanese home life.

Saturday, February 11th **Atsumi Peninsula – Host Families and Farm Tours**



After a warm and welcoming first night with our host families, it was time to tour the agriculture of the Atsumi Peninsula. The Atsumi area is known for its rich agricultural heritage and strong farm economy. We started our tour at Atsumi High School where our FFJ host members went to school. Agriculture teacher, Mr. Hidenori Shirai, provided an educational overview of the school's activities and coursework. We were able to see their tomato plants grown by hydroponics. They even let us taste some of the tomatoes and they were delicious! The use of chemicals to control pests is looked down upon in Japan, and hydroponics is viewed as a healthier way to produce food.

Next, we proceeded to the swine barn where they had approximately fifteen sows that were ready to give birth. Some of the sows had piglets on them at the time. The last thing we were able to see was their cattle herd which are a breed only found in Japan. They are smaller than the cattle in America, but they said they keep them smaller so that they can carry a calf easier. The weight of a calf will not be as hard on them if they aren't as fat. The school had a poultry barn but we were not allowed to go in because of the threat of avian influenza.

We loaded a school bus and traveled about an hour to the coast. The bus took us up a large hill where we could overlook the peninsula and it was quite a view. We could see hundreds of greenhouses dotting the landscape. We then grabbed a boxed lunch of egg salad and shrimp sandwiches (Yummy!) We were able to eat our lunch down by the coast near an old lighthouse. Of course Stuart, Ryan and Travis just couldn't stay away from the water and took some of the Pacific Ocean with them on their pants.





After leaving the coast the bus stopped at a local chrysanthemum farm owned by Mr. Hidehiro Yamauchi, and inside the greenhouses there were chrysanthemum plants as far as the eye could see. They were about three feet tall and were held up by square grids made of string. Mr. Yamauchi told us that each flower would sell for about seventy cents, and it took forty cents to grow. He only grows white chrysanthemums because in Japanese funerals it is tradition to use the white color. Therefore, because white is always in great demand, they don't need to grow other colors. Mr. Yamauchi also shared with us that he is a second generation grower and had been a FFJ member at Atsumi when he was in high school.

We finished the day at a place that felt like home to Jessie, the Yamaki Cattle Feedlot. The Kawai family raises cattle that are a cross between Holstein and Japanese Black. The first place that Mr. Kitsugi Kawai showed us was their calf barn where the calves were around two months old and would sell for two thousand dollars if taken to market! Once the animal reaches twenty-four months it can be sold at market for around seven thousand dollars. When we calculated the expenses, the profit wasn't much different than the U.S. Travis asked Mr. Kawai what he thought about the border being closed to American beef. He said he didn't want the border to open back up until the U.S. was willing to comply with the testing they believe is necessary to detect BSE. The mindset of many Japanese people concerning BSE seems to be due to a lack of understanding concerning the science behind BSE testing. It seems there is a long way to go before that mindset will change.

On the way back to the school we stopped by a children's agriculture museum. It was interesting to see the different exhibits that helped the public better understand the agriculture industry. After spending an hour viewing the exhibits, we headed back home with our host families for another night's stay.



Sunday, February 12th

Atsumi Peninsula and Miyajima Island – Host Families, Cultural Sightseeing, and Ryokan

We said good-bye to our gracious host families at the train station and readied ourselves for a day of traveling and sightseeing. We left the Atsumi Peninsula to head south to Hiroshima Prefecture and Miyajima Island. After several train rides and a brief ferry ride we set foot on Miyajima, a historic island of religious significance. We



were greeted by several hundred deer the size of sheep that were extremely tame, almost like pigeons in a park. We deposited our luggage at our traditional Japanese inn, a ryokan called Miya-rikyu, and began sightseeing on the island. Our guide, Chieko, talked to us about the famous "floating" torii gate in the water that leads the way to the shrine on the island and purifies those who pass through it. We learned about the Itsukushima Shrine and its history, activities and construction phases. We were told that the view of the shrine and torii gate is classified as one of the "Three Views of Japan," which are the three most famous places to see. We had the opportunity to see a family being blessed or purified by a Shinto priest as they asked for a prosperous family life. We also visited the five-story pagoda –

an amazing structure built with so much detail and art. Chieko shared with us during the tour that there are no maternity wards or cemeteries on the island, as no one is allowed to give birth or die on the island!



We strolled along the small shops on our way back to the hotel and saw a lot of the crafts, pottery, and wood carvings unique to the island. We checked into our hotel rooms, changed into our cotton kimonos called yukata, and prepared for our first Japanese public bath experience. It was a great immersion into the Japanese culture after spending time with our host families already. Our meal that night was a traditional Japanese banquet. Wearing our yukata, we each sat at our own table and dined on a menu of sixteen different items. From sushi appetizers to bream fish head and oysters served five different ways, it was a feast comparable to our Thanksgiving holiday it seemed. Everyone had fun trying new foods and enjoying some of the food we had grown accustomed to over the course of the trip.

Our after-dinner entertainment was a Japanese drum ceremony performed by some of the hotel staff in the lobby. Several of us participated during the volunteer portion of the evening and tried our best at staying in rhythm and beating out a tune with six people drumming at once. The best performance was when the drummers donned florescent masks and drummed and danced under a black light to give a very ritual-like feeling to the songs they played. After a great day, we returned to our rooms to experience a good night's sleep in traditional Japanese style – futons laid out on the tatami floor mats.

Our experience on Miyajima Island was definitely the most traditional Japanese experience we had had yet on the trip. Being immersed so deeply into the cultural and religious aspects of the island along with the traditional hotel setting and meal really set the tone for the rest of the trip as we still had so much more to see and experience. With a culture so rich that it has thousands of years in the making of it, we were trying to absorb as much as we could in the few days we were there.



Monday, February 13th **Hiroshima – Atomic Bomb Museum and Peace Park**

The day began as we said sayonara to the ryokan, our traditional Japanese inn on Miyajima Island. It was a great experience waking up on our futons laid out on the tatami floor. Chieko surprised us in the lobby before departing by teaching us how to fold paper cranes in the traditional Japanese art of origami. We wouldn't know the significance of this exercise until later in the day. With a traditional Japanese breakfast, we were off to Hiroshima. We boarded the ferry and took our final glances at the majestic island and beautiful Itsukushima Shrine.



Aboard the train we made the commute to Hiroshima. Hiroshima is a city of 1.1 million people; we saw much of its busy commerce as we rode the tram to the Peace Memorial Park. As we arrived one could instantly feel the mood change. A great testament to the park is its focus on peace rather than war.

The first monument we saw was the Atomic Dome, which remains today just a few hundred meters from the epicenter of the blast. It stood amongst the rubble as a stark reminder of what happened on August 8, 1945. Other notable stops through the park included the Peace Clock

donated by the Lions Club. It rings each day at 8:15 am, the time at which the atomic bomb exploded over the city of Hiroshima. We then made a stop at the Peace Bell, where our team joined together in ringing the very large bell. Another memorable stop was the Children's Memorial. One began to realize the devastation felt by the children of Hiroshima with the story of Sadako. She was two years old when the bomb exploded and grew to a healthy young girl until the age of twelve when she was diagnosed with leukemia. With the diagnosis she began folding paper cranes, as legend says folding 1000 cranes will allow one wish to come true. Though Sadako's wish did not come true, her cranes were the first of millions folded by school children across Japan and now the world remembering those who suffered and with hopes that such devastation of war will never occur again. It was here at Sadako's Children's Memorial that we dedicated and placed our string of paper cranes folded earlier in the day amongst the thousands already on display. It was a very touching moment to do this as a national officer team.



After taking lunch we moved to the museum on the memorial grounds. In the beginning we learned the history of Hiroshima and the events that led to World War in the Pacific. Through this exhibit we all attained a different view on the events leading to August 8, 1945. A great take away for all of us was how different history can be as the perspective shifts. Though wars are often fought for noble ideas that can affect the entire world, sometimes the suffering of individuals is most memorable. This point was displayed as we reached the section of the museum that told the stories of real people. From the burns on children to entire families that perished, the displays echoed the horrors of war. Some of the pictures and stories were difficult to take on, but they are important for us to see. These scenes may not affect the merit of wars; however, they are great reminders that war is horrible and of the suffering that occurs when military action cannot be avoided.

The last exhibit was a flower that had bloomed in the days following the bomb. It was believed that vegetation may not grow for 75 years where the atomic energy was released, but the resilient flower proved the theory wrong. It symbolized the hope that Hiroshima was rebuilt upon, and the desire that such a tragedy would never again be experienced.

We left Hiroshima each changed. It was a priceless experience that we will forever remember. We boarded the train and headed to our final stop for the tour, Kyoto. Dinner was shared at the hotel as we honored Mrs. Trivette who was celebrating a birthday. We ended a great day with quality socializing and a big slice of birthday cake.



Tuesday February 14th Kyoto – Cultural Sightseeing and Tea Ceremony

During our orientation prior to leaving the U.S., we were told that Valentines Day was handled a little differently in Japan than in America. Instead of the men giving women chocolate, the women do the giving. So, to embrace true Japanese culture, the girls on the team bought chocolates at the hotel and surprised the guys at breakfast!

Today was a full-blown tourist day! On the way to our first stop, Chieko presented a brief history on the Japan Imperial Family. She covered how it started, what families have been in power during the various eras and many other interesting facts related to Japanese history. Many of the temples and shrines we would visit later in the day were built in certain eras which helped in showing their significance to Japan's history. We began the day by first going to the Golden Pavilion, also known in Japan as Kinkakuji. This pavilion functions as a 'shariden,'



housing sacred relics of the Buddha and is covered in gold leaf. The present building dates from 1955 as the pavilion was burnt by a fanatic monk in 1950. A mirror pond surrounds it, and in the pond are little islands created from rocks and trees. The islands are shaped like turtles and cranes to symbolize the longevity of the temple. We saw many other points of interest including the grave of the white snake, a special throne for the highest ranked person, and the oldest pine tree in Japan shaped like a boat.

Next we visited Ryoanji, which is a Zen temple consisting of the most famous dry garden in Japan made from white gravel and fifteen larger rocks. The meaning of the garden's arrangement is unknown and up to each visitor's interpretation. The grounds

were beautiful, and Chieko shared her love for the grounds with us.

Since we had not had much time for souvenir shopping, we headed to the famous Kyoto tourist trap, the Kyoto Handicraft Center. We ate lunch here and after spending many Yen on gifts for friends and family, we departed for Nijo Castle which was amazingly beautiful! It was the residence of the last line of shogun, known as Tokugawa. In earlier times, the shogun served as the highest ranking military officer of the samurai class of warriors. The castle, built in 1603, has nightingale floors that actually sound like nightingale birds when you walk on them. This was used as a security system to warn the guards when an intruder entered. The paintings on the interior castle walls had a lot of symbolism as to how the room was used. For instance, the rooms where the feudal lords would offer gifts to the shogun were painted with pine trees to show the intimidation of the shogun to the lords. The ruling shogun always sat in an area that had a raised ceiling compared with the rest of the room. The detail and amazing woodwork of the castle, along with the rich Japanese history, made the visit one of our favorites of the trip.



The last stop of the day was the Kodaiji Temple. This is where we experienced our first official tea ceremony. It was a very memorable experience as Chieko explained everything about the process to us – how each movement has a certain meaning, how you hold the glass, how to drink properly, and even how to make the tea using a bamboo whisk. Afterwards, we were fortunate to have a Buddhist priest talk with us for awhile, and then he gave us a personal tour of the grounds. We learned the temple was constructed in 1605 in memory of

Toyotomi Hideyoshi by the great political leader's wife. This temple is very well known for its black lacquer artwork. Many of the buildings had a great deal of symbolism as one building was shaped like a dragon, and there were also many ancient artifacts to show the tea ceremony's history and how Buddhism came to be in Japan.



That evening we ventured out to Kyoto's Nishiki Market, which is a narrow, shopping street, lined by more than one hundred shops. Various kinds of fresh and processed foods including many Kyoto specialties, such as pickles, Japanese sweets, dried food, sushi, and fresh seafood and vegetables are sold here. We learned that the market is known as "Kyoto's Kitchen", has a history of several centuries, and many stores have been operated by the same

families for generations. We then moved to the Teramachi shopping district to do a little more souvenir buying and eat some tasty fried food. We then returned to the hotel where we debriefed our trip and reflected on the many lessons we had learned, wonderful people we had met, and how we can use this experience to better

understand ourselves and how we can more effectively serve FFA members and the agriculture industry. Later that night, the guys on the team surprised the girls with beautiful chrysanthemum flowers for Valentines Day.

Wednesday, February 15th

Maibara City and Kyoto – Yanmar Agricultural Machinery Manufacturing, Cultural Sightseeing



The first stop for our last full day in Japan was a visit to the Yanmar Ibuki plant. Mr. Nick Nagai from Yanmar Agricultural Equipment Co., Ltd. met us at the train station in Maibara City and then after introductions, we boarded the Yanmar bus that would take us to the plant. Yanmar is a very large company that manufactures tractors, marine engines, construction equipment, power generating equipment, all with its own diesel engines at the core. The Ibuki plant has assembly lines for small, medium, and large tractors as well as transmissions. Mr. Takehisa Bandou, Executive Officer for Yanmar Agricultural Machinery Manufacturing, gave a presentation about his company and operations at the plant. We then took a walking tour of the facilities. Much to our surprise we also saw some green and yellow. That's right; Yanmar also assembles small tractors for John Deere and ships them to the U.S. Another interesting dynamic in this plant is that during the busy season,

which is usually in the spring, they hire workers from Brazil. We all were very impressed with the technological advancements at Yanmar. For example, most of the machining of parts was made by an almost fully automated process with very few employees. They also assemble several models of a particular size of tractor on the same line at the same time. After our tour we were able to ask questions about the manufacturing process, and on our bus ride back to the train station, we were able to continue the conversation with Mr. Nagai as he shared with us what exactly he does for Yanmar and other aspects about his career.

By the time our train reached the Kyoto station, it was lunch time and so we found a restaurant in the station mall and enjoyed our first noodle experience. Mr. Wilburn had us remove our FFA jackets and ties because eating noodles had the potential of being a messy endeavor. After lunch we returned to the hotel to change out of official dress and into some casual clothes and then met Chieko in the lobby, prepared for some more sightseeing in Kyoto.

We first toured the Kiyomizu Temple. This temple sat on the side of a hill and had a large veranda that had a beautiful view of the city. Here, we visited a 'love shrine' where there are two large stones and if you are able to walk from one to another with your eyes closed then you will find love soon. It was fun and some of us had more trouble than others but all were successful with some help. Ryan, Anita, and Mr. Wilburn also drank from three free-flowing waterfalls that are said to grant beauty, intelligence, and health. Chieko, our guide, shared with us facts and stories about Japanese history throughout the tour and helped us gain a better understanding of the culture there in Kyoto.



The rest of the evening we took a walking tour through the Gion district which is very traditional and beautiful. Chieko also informed us that this is where many films are shot and many times during the summer months you can see a film crew on location. We also were fortunate to see a geisha walking down the street and the reaction she received from tourists and bystanders reminded us of American movie stars. Chieko taught us that geisha are professional female entertainers who perform traditional Japanese arts at banquets. Girls who wish to become a geisha have to go through a rigid apprenticeship during which they learn various traditional arts such as playing instruments, singing, dancing, but also conversation and other social skills. Geisha are dressed

in kimono, and their faces are made up very pale, almost white. We even saw the tea house made famous in the recent movie, "Memoirs of a Geisha."

Our evening ended with a wonderful meal at a Korean BBQ restaurant where we cooked our own food on a little grill on the table. Upon returning to the hotel, it was so hard to say good-bye to the person who had impacted us so much, but after some tears and hugs, we said "sayonara" to our guide and new friend, Mrs. Chieko Tsuruta, and promised to stay in touch.

Thursday, February 16th
Kyoto to Indianapolis – Return to the United States

4:30 a.m.: Rise and shine to our final moments in Japan!

Two nights ago, we had a reflective meeting about our journeys in Japan. One of the points that was stressed was that we did not want the past ten days to be "just a trip," or to "just stop here." But as we got off that final flight in Indianapolis, we knew that for our national officer team, it wasn't the end. We had ten short days that were jam-packed with a great deal of knowledge, discovery, and thrills. We learned from and about one another. We learned about ourselves, stepped outside a few boundaries, and grew in ways we didn't think we could. Every person put everything they could into the trip because we all left tired at the end of the game; no one ever let up on intensity and that resembles what we will be doing the rest of this year as we continue serving FFA members.

We learned about agriculture to broaden our knowledge on agricultural issues. We built relationships with people who are different from ourselves, but also so much the same. We saw dedicated educators model for us what it looks like to maintain mentor/mentee relationships with agriculture students.

The Japan trip is one that builds upon so many areas of our lives as national officers. It also provides many experiences to build upon later. It's unfortunate that not all students can travel internationally. However, this team is committed to sharing the experiences that the six of us had with as many members as we possibly can so that more students will be influenced by the National Officer International Experience in Japan.

Thanks again to Mitsui and the National FFA Foundation for our international experience—none of these opportunities could have happened without your support!

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