

1. Report

Please write a report on your study experience, addressing the matters listed below. Your report should be more than 500 words in English. Matters to include in your report: (a) Academic outcomes (how participation in this program affected your motivation, university study and international understanding, and what interests and plans you developed for further study in the future); (b) Your experiences in Kyoto University; (c) The content of the program; (d) The impact of the program on your career plans.

My fellow Yale-NUS College students and I had the opportunity of visiting Kyoto for a little over a week under a joint Yale-NUS College – Kyoto University partnership. In addition to being personally very enjoyable, there are a number of concrete outcomes I can definitely attest to.

(a)

I have been to Japan twice before, but only in a tourist/sightseeing capacity. This program was the first time I had come into contact with Japan in an academic context. Back in Singapore, I had been engaged in an independent research module in Zen Buddhism. I also had done some studies in Japanese history up to the end of the second world war. Furthermore, I am currently designing a course on contemporary Japanese visual narratives out of my own interest. Going to Kyoto and seeing the various historically significant temples and shrines was a great way to encounter the academic subject matter first-hand. I was also able to apply skills I had learnt in history courses to assess the material culture on show at many of these historical sites.

I am particularly interested in investigating notions of collective/social consciousness, specifically in the context of Japanese conceptions of war history and remembrance. I managed to gather some opinions from Japanese people on that subject. While any data I have at this point is merely anecdotal and largely gathered for my own personal interest, I believe it will be a research field which could yield valuable insights into collective psychology.

It was also a great opportunity to improve my grasp of the Japanese language, which I have been studying since 2012. Opportunities for conversational and listening skills that are typically rare in Singapore were plentiful in Kyoto.

(b)

While I did not get a chance to witness student life as a whole given the short duration, I am very grateful to the Kyoto University students who accompanied us during our time there. The Meiji-style architecture was also really distinct and appealing – such historical aesthetic is uncommon in Singapore.

Some of us had the opportunity of attending a speakers' series lecture by Professor Jay Garfield, attended by Kyoto University faculty and students. While pitched at a higher level than what we are learning in our current first-year, it was nonetheless enriching. Most of all, I wanted the experience of learning at Kyoto University, an academic environment of different character from Yale-NUS College. Needless to say, it was definitely most satisfactory.

(c)

Our program consisted of visits to sites of historical and architectural significance in and around Kyoto and Nara. Our principal focus was on Buddhist sites, and on that count we were able to gain a lot from Professor Garfield and our host Kyoto philosophy students' expert knowledge. We also visited some Shinto shrines. In addition to these historic religious sites, we also visited historically-politically significant places such as Nijo Castle and the Imperial Palace grounds. The unique Japanese aesthetic was another major theme to look out for and we learnt how Japanese aesthetics developed, particularly Buddhist influence on its development. The last few days were more 'free and easy' and I was able to experience the great culinary culture of Japan, as well as the more modern, urban side of Kyoto.

(d)

I came to this program with a strong interest in Japanese culture, history and philosophy, and this experience has definitely made me even surer that I would want to pursue a serious academic interest in Japan in some respect at some point in time. In particular, I have a very good impression of Kyoto University and would consider spending some time; perhaps a semester abroad, taking courses on subjects I feel would benefit most from being in Kyoto (i.e. languages, history and particularly material culture).

I feel that Japan is home to many unique cultural features that I would definitely want to study in depth. From a political science perspective, I am also very interested in East Asia as a region and I feel that understanding the region from Japan would yield valuable insights personally whether I choose an academic career or governmental job in the future. In summary, I would definitely wish to pursue further academic study in Japan and hopefully in Kyoto, both out of personal and academic interest.

*The information you provide may be included in Re-discovering Japan Project reports, or published in printed materials or on our website in pages dealing with the outcomes of programs offered by the Asian Studies Unit and/or Kyoto University. Please ensure that your report only includes content which is publishable in light of privacy considerations and the need to safeguard personal information. Also note that depending on the publication format, we may need to edit parts of your report.