

Hokkaido Study Tour: Final Report

What We Learned: Regional Background & Fieldwork

This Hokkaido Study Tour's fieldwork experience consisted of visits to six towns and cities: Chitose, Tomakomai, Shiraoi, Date, Toyako, and Muroran.

We arrived in Hokkaido on a chilly Wednesday night at New Chitose Airport, where Dr. Ono, from Muroran Institute of Technology, welcomed us and briefly toured the airport grounds, teaching us about its history and the ongoing stamp rally program and tourism programs as we prepared for departure southwest.

Tomakomai hosted our group for that first evening, and after we planned the course of the tour into the night, we woke up to a chilly morning and a family of deer. That morning, we visited Upopoi, the National Ainu Museum, to learn about Ainu art, craft, and culture, which included live demonstrations of impressive dancing and instrument playing. Next, we visited Date's Museum of History and Culture, where we enjoyed dying cloth in personal designs with local indigo knotweed, and witnessed the swordcraft of Korehira Watanabe, at work on his mission to revive the metallurgic tradition as one of the last remaining swordmakers in Hokkaido and all of Japan. To finish the day, we traveled to Toyako to visit the Windsor Hotel, the location of the 34th G8 Summit, and rested at the Toya Kanko Hotel to the sight of a fireworks display in Toya Lake.

On the last day, we began our return east, stopping by the Toyako Visitor's Center and Toya-Usu Geopark to learn about Usu Volcano, and visited Mr. Watanabe again before arriving at Muroran IT, where we engaged in *monodzukuri* with the creation of our own country-sign paperweights with faculty and students in the Crema center, studied the counting system complexities of the Ainu language with Dr. Sangyub Baek, and joined Ono-sensei's International Exchange class to share laughs and experiences with his undergrad and graduate students. That Friday evening, the visit ended with the departure of Ono-sensei, and we realized just how quickly time had passed.

On this study tour, we were able to appreciate Ainu culture, interact with Mr. Ono as an experienced guide, interact with people from Muroran Institute of Technology, and experience manufacturing such as casting and indigo dyeing. We learned that it is necessary to create value to make tourism resources attractive. Hakucho Bridge is a symbol of Muroran, the Iron Town. We also learned that they support transportation for local residents. Not only is Mt. Usu is a dangerous volcano, but it also exists as a volcano that provides economic benefits by creating hot springs and rich soil. We learned that they have an important role to play in deepening our understanding of coexistence with volcanoes.

In order to further revitalize infrastructure tourism, we felt that it is important to have people come and experience it. Through this experience, we were able to experience the "extraordinary" that we don't experience in everyday life, such as the charm of infrastructure tourism, the threat of disasters, and the splendor of people's lives coexisting with volcanoes.

Main Ideas of PowerPoint Presentation

In our group presentation, we focused on geographical tourism and infrastructure tourism. Also, we presented that having experience and communicating with local people is important to make our trip more attractive.

Firstly, we discussed infratourism, which is a new kind of tourism that utilizes man-made infrastructure such as dams, bridges, and tunnels. For example, Hakucho Bridge in Muroran City—we learned that this bridge not only has an important role in transportation for Muroran citizens but also tourists, as they can join the tour and enjoy the scenery from the top of the bridge.

In addition, we talked about geotourism, which uses the natural character of an environment's geography. The Toya-Usu Geopark has had several volcano disasters from thousands of years ago until recently, yet the townspeople have remained—why? While volcanoes can cause serious humanitarian disasters with eruptions, the people have used their hidden blessings to create a dynamic scenery, rich land for farming, and hot springs for themselves and visitors, which holds unique economic potential.

We presented that the current infra- and geo-tourism are unable to harness the economic potential of Hokkaido's landmarks due to lack of recognition. One of our methods for increasing recognition was employing virtual reality (VR) for tourists who cannot visit them in person, as done in Okinawa with including virtual shrine visits, and Tokyo Skytree with virtual bungee-jumping activities. For the on-the-ground infrastructure, we suggested ways of working more closely with local restaurants and accommodation facilities.

Finally, we talked about the importance of experience and interaction with the local people to make travel more attractive and memorable. On our trip, we had many conversations

with Muroran locals, including MuIT students and faculty like Ono-sensei, who gave us an expert tour with deep, personal insight into the history of the island—a value that locals can uniquely add to the place.

Understanding the history and culture of the places we live in and delivering it to people who visit is a fantastic way to make them more attractive, and we were glad to explore Hokkaido and give our recommendations.

Course Improvement Recommendations

We suppose that this course should include pre-study before we have a field trip in order to better understand the purposes, problems, and goals before we arrive to make the field work more effective for our presentation. It is also good for us to have confusion and we can focus on things that we want to know about. In addition to pre-study, the course could allocate free time each day for full meetings with instructors, individual group meetings, and at least eight hours of rest.

Thanks again to Ono, Marc, and Lloyd-sensei for making this trip possible.

We really enjoyed it, and hope others can enjoy it as we did.