George Chalhoub - Technos International Week 2019 Report

When I expressed intent to join Technos International Week 2019 (TIW2019) and travel to Japan for two weeks, I expected it to be an ordinary tourism trip to Japan. At the end of the trip, I have come to realise that this journey was life-changing and one of the most exciting, thrilling and varied two weeks I’ve ever experienced.

TIW2019 is a cultural and educational exchange between students from Technos College and students from colleges in the UK, US and New Zealand. The event is run yearly and only select colleges (ten colleges) can send their representatives to the event. Pembroke College, Oxford is one of those colleges.

Shortly before our departure to Japan, we were sent a detailed schedule illustrating detailed day-to-day activities at different locations. As soon as we arrived at Narita International Airport in Tokyo, we were greeted by Technos students and staff who were waiting for us at the airport. We were overwhelmed by the hospitality and kindness of Technos staff and students. We departed to the hotel in two coaches where students kept us company during the ride.

The next day we had a welcome ceremony outdoors where we were greeted by all of the students and interviewed while being on a big screen. It was outstanding to experience such a warm welcome from Technos College. This was followed by a welcome party (with food and drinks) at the cafeteria with all the Technos students and sister school participants. We later toured Technos campus where we’ve had a brief overview of all the programmes that are currently run such as Airline, Wedding and Hotel. We later headed for dinner with Technos students and had sushi at a local restaurant. After dinner, we had a photo booth and played some nice video games.

The main theme of TIW2019 is ‘Roots’ and this was discussed frequently during this trip. The English language students had prepared lectures and presentations which
explained the roots of some aspects of Japanese culture. The lectures ‘Roots of Places / Roots Between Places’ and ‘Rice as the Roots of Japanese Culture’ were very informative and enabled us to understand more aspects of the Japanese culture. During this trip, a sister school fair was organized where all of the 10 colleges had a career-fair-style event where the students and professors had to introduce their college to Technos students. We had the pleasure to talk about Pembroke’s history and Oxford’s lifestyle in general.

Every year of TIW, a trip to Midori No Mura (or Green Village) is organized and is known to be the highlight of TIW2019. Throughout this trip, we went through the fifth-level stop in Mount Fuji and had a traditional Japanese lunch at Lake Kawaguchi. When we arrived at Midori No Mura, we were given demonstrations on how to wear a yukata (浴衣) and introduced the etiquette of using the onsen (温泉), a hot Japanese spring bath. The onsen was very relaxing and enjoyable. The next day, we’ve had lots of sports activities and enjoyed a Japanese-style barbecue dinner outdoors. We then enjoyed a variety of beautiful Japanese fireworks and concluded the day with a 2-hour karaoke session.

In the second week of TIW2019, we headed to Asakusa (浅草) with tourism course students and teachers. We explored a lot of temples and historical areas. Every sister school student had one assigned tourism student guide with the goal to help them make the most of their experience. During this week, we also assigned planned on-campus activities and programmes. I was assigned Café Moana, voiceover and airline classes. During Café Moana, we learned traditional facts on different types of fish (and tasted them). We also learned how to prepare and serve green tea. As for the
voiceover, we were given a 2minute clip of an anime show, its corresponding script and dubbed it in Japanese. A lot of Technos students were helping us throughout the process and helped make this activity really fun. As for the airline course, we entered into a simulated aeroplane and a flight was simulated by the Technos students. Other sister school students had other interesting classes as well such as calligraphy, tea ceremony and English conversation.

Another memorable day in TIW2019 was the Tokyo Scavenger Hunt where we split into separate groups with Technos students and assigned to go to an area in Tokyo and take different photos. We were given a scavenger hunt picture list and tasked to take as many pictures as possible with different things and beings (e.g. animal, work of art, police office, etc…). We were able to take the photos quite quickly and then had free time to enjoy some art museums. We ended up getting nice Japanese food at a local restaurant.

What you can easily notice is that months of hard work and preparation have been put for those two weeks for TIW2019. For example, one of the presentations about Rice made by the students took 2 months of preparation. Also, Technos students almost met daily at night to prepare for the upcoming days. More than 150 Technos students and staff members put their best efforts to ensure our comfort and give us the best hospitality imaginable. Technos staff and students also organized our accommodation and transportation.
All of the sister school and Technos students were friendly and enthusiastic. I would have never expected to make lifelong friendships and meet incredibly talented and enthusiastic students. I’d say the best part of TIW2019 is the people I’ve encountered. The friendships I made with Technos students and sister school students from the United States and New Zealand are priceless.

Outside the organized schedule and activities set, we were given free time almost every day. Tokyo is a gigantic and busy city. There is no time to explore every area and try every place but we tried to go to as many places as possible. Train stations are often packed and could be confusing. It is not uncommon for foreigners to get lost somewhere or miss one’s station. We got lost a couple of times or ended up in the wrong stations. We enjoyed figuring our way in train stations - it is all part of the experience!

We visited many districts, cities and city wards in Tokyo such as Shibuya (渋谷区 Shibuya-ku), Shinjuku (新宿) and Akihabara (秋葉原). We tried a lot of Japanese restaurants, I can fairly say I’ve had the best sushi and ramen in my life. We visited Tokyo’s oldest and most significant Buddhist temple Sensō-Ji (金龍山浅草寺). On Sunday, we had a free day so went to Tokyo DisneySea and enjoyed the amusement parks and shows there.

Time flew very quickly (faster than Oxford) and the two weeks ended without even noticing. During the farewell party at the cafeteria, we were given our certifications and took our final Pembroke group photo:

The hardest part of TIW2019 is saying goodbye to the friends made and concluding this journey. Students had prepared emotional speeches and a movie summarizing the two weeks was screened. Around 1 hour before departure on the last day, we were saying goodbye and were left in tears. We were saddened that the journey ended too quickly, and took our final group photo, below.
TIW2019 has exceeded every single expectation I’ve had and I can fairly say it had a significant impact on my life. It is a difficult task to describe this astonishing and outstanding journey, so I made a small YouTube video. You can view it [here](#). I will never forget the last words from Ren, my friend from Technos: “If you visit Japan again, please let me know; you will stay at my place”.

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[Image of group photo]