Technos International Week Report 2019 – Laura Shutler

I was fortunate enough to be chosen to participate in the Technos International Week at the end of Trinity term, a once in a lifetime opportunity that I will never forget. I had always been fascinated by Japan and its rich and unique culture and society that is rooted in ancient beliefs and history yet is also rapidly evolving and ultra-modern in many ways. Therefore, I was very grateful and overjoyed to be given the chance to explore Japan not as a tourist but as a guest of Technos College.

Apprehension (I had never before ventured outside of Europe) and excitement were the 2 strongest feelings that I experienced on the eve of our departure. After 13 hours of travelling, we finally arrived at Narita airport where we received a very warm welcome by a group of very enthusiastic Technos students. We were moved and overwhelmed by how eager the students were to meet us and talk to us. The welcoming ceremony the following morning at Technos college was equally if not more impressive; despite the description our accompanying professor (Brian Rogers) had given us prior to our departure to Japan of the red carpets, rock music and crowds of cheering students (all wanting to high-five, hug and greet us) that would await us. It was truly a surreal experience to be treated as such honoured guests or even celebrities!

The theme of the 2 weeks was ‘roots’ in which each participant was encouraged to explore the roots of their own cultures and traditions as well as the roots of the Technos International Week, that is Dr Tanaka’s experience of WWII that lead to his strong desire to design and fund a programme that would encourage mutual understanding and friendships amongst participants and help foster international exchange and world peace. With this in mind, all participants were encouraged to fully contribute and embrace all the opportunities
on offer to us (which we were all the better for doing!) and the 2 weeks were carefully scheduled to include activities that were both educational and fun and that encouraged all participating sister schools to integrate and interact with each other, as well as to include free time to allow us to explore the various parts of Tokyo and the various delicious regional cuisine.

Many of the activities were held at the college and included tours and interactive sessions with various classes. Technos College is a technical college that offers vocational courses such as wedding planning, air crew training, hotel management, manga, voice dubbing and animation, which were worlds away from the classes we are used to studying at Oxford! We got to try out voice dubbing on a short anime video that the students had animated themselves. After watching the students who were training to become professional voice actors perform, we were told it was time for us to voice the parts. I thought that I was being cunning by volunteering for a role that although involved many lines, did not involve any grunting noises for fight scenes or screams as some of the other parts did. However, what I didn’t realise was that we were going to perform the lines in Japanese!

After a few minutes of practising our lines with the Technos students it was our time to perform and although our delivery of lines was completely out of sync with the anime characters and our pronunciation of the Japanese words was almost certainly appalling, we had a lot of fun in the process and the teacher was very proud and complimentary of our performance (although she may just have been extremely polite!)
While the majority of events were held on campus, there were also off campus events such as organised dinners with a small group of Technos students, a scavenger hunt around Tokyo in small groups, a 2 day stay at Midori No Mura (‘green village’) and a coach trip to Kamakura, a coastal town that charmed us with its beautiful temples and shrines and impressed us with its giant Buddha statue and scenic views at almost every corner (I must have taken a 100 photos on that day alone!)

The 2-day trip to Midori No Mura was probably one of the highlights of the trip for me. On the coach ride to the village we stopped off at the 5th station of Mount Fuji where we took in and tried to capture some of the breath-taking views of the snow-capped peak (that is whenever the clouds decided to part and allow us to see!) and then for lunch where we ate a regional speciality that was beautifully presented to us, while enjoying scenic views over Lake Kawaguchi. During our stay at Midori No Mura we were spoiled with amazing resources (including a gymnasium and tennis courts) and an array of fun activities and entertainment (including dodgeball, basket-ball, large rope jumping, a water fight, a barbeque, sparklers, karaoke and traditional Japanese card games.) I also very much enjoyed two traditional Japanese experiences: sleeping on traditional futon in communal rooms and onsen baths (natural hot spring baths). On the journey back to Tokyo we made a pit stop at Shiraito Falls, one of the many natural beauties Japan has to offer.

During our free time, we ventured into several areas of Tokyo and tried many different delicacies. Some of the districts we discovered included Shibuya, with its huge, brightly lit billboards and bustling crossroads and streets; Shinjuku with its quaint, tiny, authentic backstreet restaurants; Harajuku with the Meiji Jingu Shrine, located in the tranquil depths of a forest; Asakusa, with its beautiful Senso-Ju shrine and Skytree tower which provided us with a stunning 360 degree bird’s eye view over the sprawling metropolis of Tokyo against the backdrop of the mountains; Maranouchi, whose main attraction includes the Imperial Palace and gardens juxtaposed by towering skyscrapers whose interesting architecture and immaculately clean windows (the reflection of the sky was crystal clear!) that gleamed in the sunshine impressed me enormously. We also enjoyed trying the colourful variety of Japanese food including sushi, ramen, udon and
okonomiyaki (a delicious savoury pancake in which you can choose your own toppings, hence the meaning of okonomi being "how you like" and yaki meaning "cooked").

Overall, we were all overwhelmed by the incredible amount of work, thought and months of meticulous planning and preparation that both the students and faculty at Technos College had undertaken to ensure that our visit was as enriching and enjoyable as possible. Their constant hospitality, warmth, enthusiasm, generosity and kindness was so very moving and the friendships we forged in such a short space of time with both the Technos and other sister school students were unforgettable. Of course we are also immensely grateful to the Tanaka Foundation for funding these incredible 2 weeks that gave us an insight into Japanese life and culture that very few tourists are lucky enough to experience and gave us the hope that international understanding and peace, as envisioned by Dr Tanaka, can be achieved.

*International and Technos student and professors in traditional yukatas, at Midori no Mura*