

## Technos College International Week Report – Harrison Kaye

For as long as I can remember, Japan has been a staple in my life as the ultimate place to visit but it always felt like a pipe dream. That was until I heard of the opportunity to travel to Japan with Pembroke to visit Technos College for a two week cultural exchange trip in Tokyo. Any apprehensions about missing the last week of term were immediately overcome – I knew I needed to apply and was over the moon when I got a place.

But how would I find my way around Tokyo? What would I do there for two weeks? Where would I stay? This was all sorted, leaving me only to worry about what clothes to pack. But even that too was sorted, as Technos designed t-shirts for us to wear if we wanted to during the programme. They sorted all the logistics for us, from booking flights to giving us preloaded travel cards to get around, making the entire trip a breeze.

Technos were as excited to host us as we were to visit them. To say they laid out the red carpet for us would not be a metaphor – there was a literal red carpet for us at the opening ceremony. I was nominated among the Pembroke group to give the opening speech and it was the closest I'll ever feel to being a celebrity. Adoring fans, camera on my face, a slightly worried manager (Nancy Braithwaite) waiting in the wings for what I was about to say, it was the full experience.



Figure 1 Getting my wings

Technos is a vocational college, so we spent three of the days doing class visits and seeing what they study. It felt like being on *Technos College's Drag Race* most of the time, jumping between voice acting, singing, bento box designing, cocktail making, airline steward-ing, calligraphy and more in two hour stints. This was a great chance to learn more about Japanese culture and get to know both the Japanese students and the other students that were also on the programme with us. The participants came from universities over the world, namely the USA, Taiwan, New Zealand and then us from the UK. We were representing the whole of Europe which was a big task, especially with so many Americans, but I like to think that we held our own. I learnt a lot about fraternities, probably more than I needed to know, and even met the backing singer for Albania's 2019 Eurovision entry (big moment for me).



Figure 2 Scary stuff

Technos' programme for us wasn't limited to their classroom activities, they also took us out into Tokyo to show us the sights. One highlight was the scavenger hunt where we had to hop on the train between areas and take photos at different landmarks. These included



Figure 3 Me and my frat bros at the spa

horrifying photo booths which distorted our faces beyond belief, but produced some of the more unique photos from the trip. Similarly, on another occasion we went out to see the Imperial Palace Gardens in the centre of Tokyo.

We even managed to fit in a two night stay in a traditional onsen spa hotel. This was truly an experience, sleeping on tatamae floors with futon mattresses alongside four relatively new acquaintances. This was sandwiched (like I was on my futon) in between visits to Mount Fuji and Matsumoto Castle, two gorgeous

landmarks that were truly special. The amount of sightseeing the organisers managed to squeeze in was remarkable, and we really got a feel for Japan.

The most impressive part of the programme was that it was all organised by the students at Technos College. Coordinating schedules for 35 foreigners in Tokyo was no easy task, especially seeing as we were all coming from different places around the world and had different requirements and wishes. Everything was tightly organised, thought through and everyone always felt included. The Technos students accompanied us through everything, from pick up at the airport to drop off two weeks later, and we got very close to them as a result.

Of course, the itinerary also had ample free time, letting us explore Tokyo at our own pace and find what interested us. During some of the evenings, I visited a capybara cat café, explored different bars and did loads of thrift shopping (too much in fact, my suitcase ended up being overweight). There was also a weekend free in the middle of the trip which provided an opportunity to travel further afield, however most of us decided to stay in Tokyo. Calling Toyko one city is misleading, it's cities within cities within cities. You could spend a whole day exploring one area and not even make a dent, and similarly we spent two weeks exploring the city as a whole and only just scratched the surface.



Figure 4 Mount Fuji moments



*Figure 5 Capybara love*

If you have an interest in Japan you will not find a better opportunity to explore that interest than this trip. I feel extremely lucky to have been able to be a part of the 'Pembroke 5' (as we were known on the attendance register) and to explore a country that I have admired from afar for so long. The two weeks were a unique opportunity to interact with and learn from people all over the world with a shared interest in expanding their worldview, and I know that I will cherish the memories and friendships I made for a long time.