

Technos International Week 2023 Report- Ayeza Akhtar

Having always been fascinated by the rich history and traditions of Japan, I eagerly applied for this year's Technos International Week organised by Technos College. This exceptional two-week cultural exchange invited four Pembroke students, along with students from ten other sister schools, to Technos in Tokyo, providing a profound glimpse into Japanese life. The theme of this year's international week was 'Values,' fostering a deep understanding of one another's diverse values and promoting intercultural exchange. It was a true honour to have been selected to go on this remarkable trip, an opportunity that I am endlessly grateful for.



After a lengthy 14-hour journey, we were warmly welcomed by the Technos students upon our arrival at Haneda International airport. Their reception pleasantly surprised us as they guided us to our hotel located in Fuchu, a commercial yet charming area in Western Tokyo. The following day commenced with an extravagant Welcome Ceremony at Technos college, featuring introductory speeches from representatives of each sister school supported by rock-star music, red carpets and a crowd of Technos students cheering us in as if we were celebrities!

The rest of the day was spent playing ice-breaker games at the Welcome party, having a tour of Technos College and dining in mixed groups at various Tokyo restaurants. Great care was taken to ensure that each participant could enjoy the eclectic range of food Tokyo had to offer, whilst staying considerate of dietary requirements- this highlights the meticulous preparation underlying the trip.

The programme had a mixture of scheduled activities and free time. We fully embraced Japanese culture through workshops delivered by faculty members and students; some of the lessons I participated in included a Japanese calligraphy class, and a traditional tea ceremony which involved wearing yukatas (similar to the well-known kimono, but used more casually) . As we immersed ourselves in such an important ritual, we learnt that the purpose of this ceremony was to provide a moment of solace from our otherwise bustling lives. Other activities included animation workshops, an anime dubbing class, and a bento box making class, amongst other intriguing classes and discussions highlighting the differences in values across borders.



Clad in our bright pink t-shirts, we had field trips led by the English career students- the scavenger hunt and sightseeing trips. We visited countless tourist spots such as the Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architectural museum which serves to preserve historic buildings of cultural importance. A memorable mission on the scavenger hunt was to take photos in a purikura, a Japanese photo booth- contrary to a regular photo booth, these pictures are *highly* edited and cutesy (kawaii!). I was shocked to see that an entire arcade floor was dedicated to rows upon rows of these machines, and the place was crowded with schoolgirls taking the whole ordeal very seriously!



Outside the set schedule, we had free time to explore Tokyo ourselves. Equipped with our Suica cards (akin to an Oyster card) we navigated the overwhelming railway system to visit popular districts. The most unforgettable moment for me was walking out of Shinjuku station for the first time, the world's busiest station: it was an exhilarating assault on the senses with its bustling crowds and neon billboards engulfing you in the heart of Tokyo's urban landscape. We meandered along the countless rows of boutiques in Harajuku, the fashion district, and enjoyed the nightlife in Shibuya. Among the many remarkable places I visited, Asakusa, an Eastern district that retains the vibe of older Tokyo, stood out as we explored the Senso-ji temple and visited the Tokyo Skytree- the world's tallest tower which granted us an incredible view of the seemingly never ending landscape of Tokyo.

We also visited less ostentatious neighbourhoods such as Kōenji and Shimokitazawa, both known for their music scenes and quirky independent stores. Themed cafes are hugely popular in Japan, and I visited several cat cafes, a Studio Ghibli inspired cafe as well as other character cafes!



A highlight of the trip was the three-day getaway to Midori no Mura (Green Village), in the enchanting Nagano prefecture. Escaping the bustling city of Tokyo, we relished the serene coach ride, making a stop at the 5th station of Mt. Fuji on the way there and visiting Matsumoto Castle on the return journey- both of which we had received lectures on in the week prior from the Technos students. At the Green Village, we enjoyed the slow pace of life and partook in traditional Japanese activities such as crafting paper dolls and playing Japanese badminton. We also dressed in yukata and enjoyed the soothing hot springs (onsens). On our last night, we had a barbeque and played with sparklers at dusk.



During these two weeks, I delved deep into Japanese cuisine, indulging in familiar dishes like sushi and ramen, as well as new culinary delights such as yakitori (chicken skewers- literally “grilled bird”) and okonomiyaki (savory pancakes- “cooked as you like”). I also had the opportunity to try Wagyu beef and a variety of Japanese sweets, including mochi.



Overall, the Technos International Week trip to Japan in 2023 was an extraordinary journey that exceeded all my expectations. In my application I wrote: “I believe that this trip will provide me with an unforgettable opportunity to enrich myself in another culture, which will undoubtedly give me a new perspective to apply to my medical studies and future encounters with patients.” This belief has held true and I have deepest gratitude towards the staff and students at Technos college, for welcoming us to their country with such kindness and generosity. Their unwavering dedication to organising this trip has left me impressed beyond words, and I can only thank them for treating us to such hospitality. I extend my gratitude to the Tanaka Foundation for funding this incredible two-week experience, which provided us with an enriching insight into Japanese life and values.

Finally, I recall writing “What excites me most is the chance to foster international friendships, and to connect with people who share an affinity for learning, despite our differences.” This sentiment couldn’t be truer. The friendships I have made at IW23 are bound to endure far beyond the two-week trip, and I eagerly anticipate the opportunity to return to Japan and reunite with my newfound friends. Dr. Tanaka's legacy is deeply ingrained in this experience, and I am committed to continuing the spirit of cultural understanding and friendship that he championed.

