

An experience that transcends time and distance

On April, 2018 I had the opportunity to visit Japan for the second time. A very good advantage of this situation is that I already had a better knowledge of the basic aspects of Japanese culture and traditions, as well as a better knowledge of the Japanese language. You could say that this time I was better prepared. All this made my experience much deeper and helped me feel more comfortable in a completely different society. It should be noted, however, that Japan is an extraordinary experience, even if you arrive without any clue of what awaits you.

The trip I made for approximately 11 months was for studies and research at the Faculty of Agriculture of Yamagata University in the city of Tsuruoka, Yamagata Prefecture. During this period, I was a member of the Phytopathology laboratory of the faculty, where I had the unique opportunity to learn about diseases that affect a crop not only important in Japan, but in the world: rice. As a student of Agronomy, it was very enriching to be able to observe the way of doing agriculture in places far away from the Equator, where factors such as climate and biodiversity are absolutely different from those we are used to in Peru.

The university system was something that impressed me too. Since I entered the University of Yamagata, the professor in charge of the laboratory, Dr. Hase, introduced me to the members of the group. In Japan, or at least in the Faculty of Agriculture of Yamagata, each student in his third year of university must be assigned to a laboratory in which they will specialize. The segmentation of students in laboratories seemed to me a very advantageous system, since each student has the support of their professors for their thesis work from very early in their careers, and also creates a much more family-like environment.



One thing that I would like to point out is the strong influence of Japanese culture on university life: teamwork, hierarchical relationships and very solemn protocols. However, when relaxing and having fun, it seems that the spirit of youth is universal in all cultures.

Part of my life in Japan also had to do with the challenge of learning Japanese. In my opinion, it is a language of sweet pronunciation and pleasant writing, but with a system of expressing respect and humbleness that transcends grammar. I am referring to Keigo (敬語), which means "honorific language", which represents an interesting challenge for those who decide to learn the language. The task of learning all the possible nuances of the Japanese language led me to participate in a speaking contest in this language. My participation was tense, but I trusted all the recommendations my teachers gave me and had the support of my classmates in the audience. Finally, my classmate and I could win. It was a very happy moment for my teachers and my friends, so we celebrated the Japanese way: Sushi and karaoke.

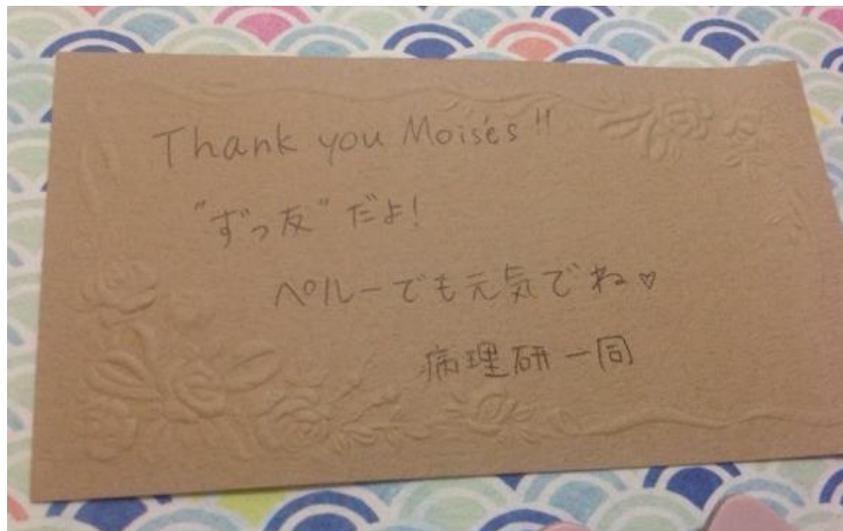
Living in Japan was much easier than many people can believe. Usually, it is believed that Japan is a country of a cold character that borders hostility, but this is very far from reality. In fact, compared

to our Latin American culture, the Japanese are not experts expressing their emotions, but they will always do their best to make you feel welcome. I can not find a better example than Dr. Hase, who was a tutor with the dedication of a father, and my laboratory partners, who were always aware of my well-being, of me understanding Japanese classes, and of my stay being an adventure.

The eleven months that I lived in Japan were, in a few words, the opportunity of a lifetime. I attended conferences specialized in agriculture, visited snow-capped mountains and imposing cities, toured the traditional streets of Kyoto, met people from a variety of countries, and, above all, I made friends and memories that will always remain with me.



As I said before, Japan is an enriching experience, it is a country that requires an open mind and capacity to embrace a very different culture and traditions. Once it is achieved, it is undoubtedly an experience that transcends time and distance.



"We're Friends forever! I wish you the best in Peru."
- From Phytopathology Laboratory members"