2006 Japan Study Tour to Muroran Institute of Technology (MIT)
17/11/06-3/12/06

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Date: Saturday 25 November 2006
Today started as any other day, but just more early. The MIT students gave up their free day for us which were very nice of them. Everyone apart from the MIT students was dozing off on the bus on our way to Sapporo.
The few moments that we were awake were unforgettable. It had snowed in the night, and that really showed on the surrounding environment.
The trees, shrubs, roads were all frozen in time under a cover of snow. It was just beautiful.
The sky was clear and blue, the wind was cool and the temperature low. Today was guaranteed to be a great day.
Sapporo was a city like any other, but perhaps, just smaller than others in that the buildings did not reach out as high as Melbourne.
There was something about Sapporo however, something that made it seem like a quiet city.
If there is such a thing as a quiet city, Sapporo had turned out to be more than expected, with a quick ride on the train, we had suddenly been taken to a Sapporo unlike the one before. This one was busy, it was full of people and there was much to see and do.
Sapporo was now larger than before, and seeing even half of what the city had to offer seemed impossible to fit into the span of one day.
Under the guidance of the MIT students, we went many to many places including the famous Sapporo tower and the old clock building, as well as many shops and restaurants.
We were fortunate enough to arrive at the base of the tower for the German Christmas festival that was being held at the time.
Before long, day had turned into evening and we had to leave this vast city of lights and displays and make our way back to Muroran.
Back at the hotel, the excitement of going to Sapporo and spending a full day with the MIT students at leisure kept most of us awake. As tomorrow was Sunday, there was another full day that we would spend with our new friends.

**Date: Sunday 26 November 2006**

Today we awoke at a more comfortable time and met the MIT students at the university. Two of the students voluntarily opted to show us what life for a Japanese student was like. Our class divided into groups of two and each group visited a student’s residence. For some time we had expected the rooms to be small, but we could not believe just how small exactly they were. There was enough space for a bed, a desk, a small television set and a chair. The kitchen was in the main hallway and everything was made to fit into that little area. There was another room as big as a wardrobe. That was the bathroom and had a small one person sized bathtub. Students live according to school life, so only what is necessary is emphasized in the housing. The students were happy to be able to find a nice home to rent and did not mind the small space at all.

After the insight of student lives the MIT students once again took it upon themselves to take us out and show us a good time. Today we went to the shops around Muroran city. We got on the bus and rode it for about twenty minutes until we reached a few stores. We went to game stores, discount stores and bookstores. There was not one of us students who did not buy anything that day.

After we had had our fill of shopping, the MIT students took us to one last place. They took us to karaoke. After the wait, a room had been prepared and we entered. Everyone was embarrassed to start singing, but after the first song, we all began to ease up and joined in the fun. A few of us tried our hand at singing Japanese songs, but we could not keep up with the rate of the song or could not read the kanji lyrics. So we stuck to our English songs, and the MIT students stuck to their favourite songs. Everyone was enjoying themselves, throwing their embarrassment out the window. After two hours of laughs and performances, it was time to head back to MIT.

Later that night there was a dinner held in our honour. All the MIT students we had met, all the teachers we had met had been present there for us. After a very touching toast to us, we began to enjoy the dinner and each others company. There was drinking, laughing and chatting all night long. At eleven p.m. we
decided to leave. The teachers left early, but we decided on one more round of karaoke at a closer venue. We sang many songs, and performed duets with the MIT students as best we could. By two a.m., many of us had decided to call it a night and went home.

Date: Monday 27 November 2006

Today was the last day that we would spend with the MIT students and teachers as our time in Muroran was drawing to a close. Today we gave our final presentations; a summary of everything we thought, felt and experienced about Muroran back to the families and teachers and students who went out of their way to make our visit so enjoyable. The students had given us so much of their time, and we were all very grateful as it was also exam time in Japan. After the presentation we had nothing but free time. So spent that time talking to the students, teachers and our host families who had been nothing but kind to us.

After the students went to their classes and exams, we RMIT students went to Nakajima, where we had been on Sunday to do more shopping and looking around. We all met at six p.m. for one last dinner with the MIT students at a steak house. After dinner, we headed to a Japanese bar and drank, all the while chatting, laughing and enjoying the last few hours with our friends.

Date: Tuesday 28 November 2006

Today was the last day that we had in Hokkaido. It was a very big surprise to us because when we got down to the lobby of our hotel, all our MIT friends and teachers had come to see us off one last time. Once again the students had gone out of their way for us.

After an hour of goodbyes, hugs and the occasional teary eye, the end of our time in Muroran drew closer by the second. Even as we were moving away from them on the bus, there was not one student that did not want to stay longer.

When the hotel and our new friends vanished over the horizon, there was a silence that filled the bus, a tear in everyone’s eyes. We had grown so close to each and every person
from Muroran that it was hard to say goodbye to them. Looking around on the bus, everyone’s faces gave away that they were thinking about someone from Muroran. I was no different.

We arrived at the Chitose airport under the guise of a happy face and two hours later we were on our flight to Kansai. Muroran had seemed like a memory to me in the instant that the wheels left the tarmac. ‘Had it really been nine days that we were in Muroran?’ was what kept repeating in our minds. We had left Muroran physically, but we were always there in the hearts and minds of the students, teachers and our host families. As they were always in ours.

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