

# My Japan Fellowship Programme

Navaporn Rittisook

Luckily, I was selected to join the JR East Fellowship Program 2009 for studies in signalling and telecommunications technologies. My visit allowed me to visit several tourist spots and to get in touch with Japanese culture. On my first day discipline, restaurants and convenience stores service from everyone in the airport, train station, built up my excitement to see the glories of Japan during the next 3 months. My first smile was for the neatness, which stems from discipline and role awareness of Japanese people. On top of the technical knowledge and related railway experience gained from the Training Program, the field trips allow me to discover beautiful places with red leaves in the autumn, especially historical and famous Kyoto, Hiroshima and Nikko. These memorable places demonstrate the long history of Japanese history, unique architecture, ancient customs and the cruelty of war. Of course, every country has a national history, but I strongly believe visiting historical places a better understanding of the real spirit more than just learning history at school. At the weekends, I often took a train to tourist attractions such

as the Imperial Palace, Shinjuku, Harajuku, Shibuya and Akihabara in Tokyo. Amazingly, an industrialized and high technological nation such as Japan, which has a hurried lifestyle and acceptance Western culture, still preserves much of its national culture, especially in dress and food. The Japanese kimono is delicate with beautiful traditional patterns and spiritual themes. In the fashionable areas of Harajuku, Shibuya and Akihabara, many younger people wear extreme fashion styles often copying manga comic characters—a trend called cosplay. Another cultural theme that I could not forget is Japanese cuisine, which is very healthy for health conscious people. I had the opportunity to eat 'Okonomiyaki' in Hiroshima and 'chanko nabe' after watching sumo. (It looks like Thai sukiyaki.) Japanese food used high quality raw materials, with attractive arrangement and packaging. It is always fresh and healthy with plenty of fish and soy bean curd (tofu). The packaging is well-known and attractive so people around the world instantly recognize Japanese products. I think the traditional and

unique art shows how modern and traditional art can merge and evolve to match consumer needs. During the short period that I lived in Japan, I learned a lot from conversation during meal times on how the food was made and how good the particular ingredients are for our body. For beverages, I believe that the sweet smell and taste of umeshu plum liquor and the astringent taste of green tea are very good for health. In addition, the celebrated tea ceremony deeply impressed me. I never had problems with Japanese food because I like it even though it is not as spicy as Thai food. Eating plenty of wasabi hot radish with meat was delicious too.



Level Crossing System Training

(Author)



Lunch time in Nikko

(Author)

While travelling, I found the Suica pre-paid cash card very handy for buying goods in stores at train stations and tickets. As a foreigner with no bank account and monthly allowance in cash, the card saved me carrying cash around increasing my security control helping living expenses. Payment by Suica card reflected the integration of the public transport system (automatic fare collection system). While travelling, there were vending machines for foods, drinks and snacks everywhere. They sold things I had never seen before so I tried to guess the products from other products that I knew the machine was selling. It was fun and helped me practice my Japanese reading and understanding.

I spent my first month studying Japanese at OVTA. There were not only JR East trainees included foreigners who had to train or work in Japan. I think this is good for foreigners in Japan and is also a strategy to expand Japanese worldwide. It is hard to live in Japan without knowing the language because it is quite difficult to find goods labelled in English. Japan seems like a country where people pay attention to detail and innovation. Examples are electronic buttons in

toilets, advertising TV and catalogues on trains etc. Looking around, most Japanese women wear cosmetics unlike in Thailand and Europe where only about 60% use cosmetics regularly. This observation might reflect personal attention to beauty and fashion styles in Japan.

Protecting the environment is another key theme that is being emphasized from the corporate to personal level. For examples, a lot of Japanese manufacturers make extra efforts and implement green environment campaigns through their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes by trying to reuse, recycle, reduce waste products and pollutants from production processes. At the individual I saw people washing out PET bottles and removing labels before putting them in the recycle garbage collection facilities provided by the local government.

I strongly believe Japan became a world leader based on discipline, spirit and seriousness which they foster in their children from generation to generation. Good examples are the orderliness of how people use escalators and how they react in a disaster, on escalators, people always stand on the left to allow people in a hurry to walk past quicker. On station platforms, people queue in an orderly manner allowing passengers to get off first. But despite the serious organized side of Japanese life, people still like to have boisterous fun at karaoke bars and onsen hot springs.

Despite experiencing the shock of an earthquake and two typhoons while in Japan, I left the country full of admiration and with a strong will to visit again and explore the seasons further, especially the cherry blossoms of spring. ■



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Ms Rittisook is one of four female engineers at SRT. She graduated with a bachelor of electrical engineering and a master of engineering management and visited Japan on a JR East Fellowship programme from September to November 2009.