

IPPS Japan Exchange, October 2011[©]

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Japan is like no other country I have visited before, and was not what I expected, though I really didn't know what to expect.

I flew in from Mumbai after biking through Bangladesh, Nepal, and India. I couldn't have travelled from much further extremes. With bike in hand I arrived at Osaka where Naoki was to be meeting me, but he thought I was arriving the following day. I thought to myself, as luck would have it I have my bike! not to worry, I was able to catch the high speed train to Okayama where I met Naoki.

For the first part of the exchange I was with the Ohuchi family (Fig. 1). They grow orchids, grapes, and dragon fruit. My work here included fertilizing orchids and the annual transportation of the orchids from the mountains back to the home property on the outskirts of Okayama. One of the days after I had finished fertilizing I had free time to go sightseeing on my bicycle. This was somewhat of a challenge, as Mr. and Mrs. Ohuchi did not speak much English nor did I speak much Japanese. With a printout from Google maps of the area in Japanese and the points of interest circled, I was off. This was a great way for me to see the local area and visit temples and gardens. In my brief stay it was evident that family is very important and the staff were also very much part of the family. The family house where I stayed was a traditional Japanese style house with traditional features like the low dinner table and paper walls with sliding panels.



Fig. 1. Tea break after unloading orchids.

IPPS CONFERENCE AT MATSUYAMA

With a lovely bunch of grapes in hand, courtesy of Johnny, Naoki and I were off to Matsuyama to the Japanese IPPS Conference. Approximately 70% of Japan is covered with forest and on this trip we passed through many tunnels, part of the extensive network of roading infrastructure the Japanese have developed. This included the massive bridges to the Island of Matsuyama.

The first day I was in Matsuyama I was fortunate enough to have two students show me around. One of the standout sights was Matsuyama Castle, plus we visited a number of gardens and temples. The conference was held over 2 days at the University. The first day was a series of lectures on IPPS related research-based topics, with a number of them from school students. I thought it was great to see that IPPS Japan was including school age students. Thankfully I had a copy of all the presentations in English. For my presentation I talked about Ardmore Nurseries' field grown crops, and the horticultural industry in New Zealand.

The second day was field trips (Fig. 2), I thought T-shirt, shorts, and jandals would be appropriate but everyone else was dressed in suits. The majority of the companies in the horticulture industry here were small scale and family based.

After the conference Akemi and I were off to Kyoto. On the way to Kyoto we visited Ritsurin Garden, a beautiful Japanese garden where we had "traditional" Japanese tea. The next major point of interest was the bridges back to Honshu Island. One of the bridges, Akashi-Kaikyō Bridge, has the longest central span of any suspension bridge in the world at 1,991 m.



Fig. 2. Field trip day at the conference.

Akemi and I had a wonderful day in Kyoto biking around many of the beautiful streets, temples, and gardens. I think a bicycle is the best way to see a city and it gives you the freedom to do as you choose.

Following on from Kyoto, Akemi and I travelled on to Toyohashi, Akemi's home town. Akemi is the President of Verde, a tissue culture company where they grow the plants

through to the growing-on line size before selling. Two of the company's major crops are sweet potato and *Mandevilla* (Fig. 3).

From Verde I biked to Suzuka to the Uchida family. This was a 120 km bike ride along Route 1, the original connecting road between Tokyo and Osaka. It was a great ride with countless traffic lights, and I think the trip would have only been about an hour shorter by car. I had a great time helping Mr. Uchida with landscaping. The job that we were working on was a small project, similar to an apartment in Auckland, with it measuring 9×2.5 m. The Japanese customer wanted low maintenance, as she did not have time to look after her garden. One of the days that we were on the job she asked for the whole front lawn to be removed and replaced with stones. Guess whose job that was to dig it out.



Fig. 3. Verde - everyone hard at work and one kiwi.

I was very fortunate that Mr. Uchida took me to Shorinji Kempo training and a competition, and also to traditional Japanese Samurai training. This was an amazing, once in a lifetime opportunity to see, as it is not for tourists and many Japanese would not have seen this before. I was delighted that Mr. Uchida took me to this training venue.

My next stop was Hamamatsu. Mr. Uchida took me part way and then I biked the remainder. Here I was looked after by Mr. Hayami. He showed me around the University where he lectured and several IPPS members' companies.

The last stop was Tokyo which I travelled to by high speed rail and meet up with Akemi. I had a whistle wind tour of Tokyo but did get to go to the Tokyo flower auctions which were great to see in action.

There are many stories that I have missed but I do still remember. I'm grateful for the time everyone took to show me around and the willingness to share their knowledge was much appreciated.

In summary, the knowledge I gained is:

- Family life is very important.
- Employees are treated as family.

- You are never too old to work (Age is of concern in the New Zealand horticultural industry but not to worry, I learnt that in Japan 61% of the current agricultural workforce is over the age of 65, therefore everyone in New Zealand has plenty of years left in them yet).
- The need to change with the times/demands (one grower previously grew ornamental plants but now produces food crops).
- Diversification to ensure a consistent income all year round.
- Adding value to your own produce.
- Turning homogenous goods into a higher value end product.

Finally, big thanks to IPPS Japan and to all who hosted me. I had a wonderful time and appreciated the wonderful hospitality. Also thank you to IPPS New Zealand for the opportunity to visit Japan and experience horticultural practices in different businesses.

I hope this exchange continues for many years between our countries, for it is not only an exchange in horticultural experiences but an exchange of friendship, and one that gives us greater understanding of each other's cultures.

With thanks to all of you that make this possible.