

October 2012 IPPS Japan – New Zealand Exchange[©]

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My trip to Japan began by car from Taupo to Auckland, a flight to Narita airport and then a very quick transfer to a domestic flight from Narita to Osaka. I was met there by Akimi and Naoki, who had both travelled some distance to collect me. I then spent two nights at Shin Osaka with Akimi, doing a bit of sightseeing around Kyoto and Osaka.

A highlight of those 2 days was seeing the Golden Temple just as the sun was setting. Absolutely beautiful. We also visited the Kyoto Botanical Gardens.

We then caught the Shinkansen to Toyohashi and I spent another two nights there. Akimi showed me around her business, Verde, and we also visited some other members of the IPPS and a large garden centre.

On Day 5, after some more sightseeing and visiting members, Akimi drove me to the home of the Uchida family in Suzuka. I stayed with them and worked in the nursery for the next 4 days. I mainly worked with the strawberry crops but also helped to pack some figs and take them to the farmers market. They had suffered some damage in the nursery from a recent typhoon. Uchida san also took me for a drive around the local area to look at nurseries. There were many small family run businesses growing everything from large grade bonsai style landscape trees to vegetable crops. It seemed that the market for the large Japanese style garden trees was dwindling as modern families did not have the time to maintain traditional style gardens. Another observation was the lack of lawns in suburban areas, it seems food crops take priority over everything, and every possible area of soil is utilised for various food or green tea crops.

I enjoyed my stay with the Uchida family very much, they were wonderfully warm hosts, and Miuki is a great cook!! I think I gained a few pounds during my stay with them.

On Day 9 we travelled to Nagoya to meet with Ackimi, who again had travelled a long distance to collect me. Ackimi and I then travelled on the Shinkansen to Narita where I was to meet up with the international tour group. On the journey we passed through a large citrus and green tea growing area.

INTERNATIONAL TOUR AND CONFERENCE

On my exchange I was lucky enough to be included in the international tour party and to meet other members from around the world. I then spent the next 10 days with the international tour visiting nurseries and sightseeing with a whole bus load of like-minded plant enthusiasts from across the globe. What a great way to see a country and learn something every day. I was immersed in a wealth of knowledge spanning many years in the industry. This was a real treat for a comparatively new member.

Highlights of the tour included a visit to the plant factory at Chiba University, a fascinating insight into the future of global food production. We also caught a glimpse of Mount Fuji before the cloud rolled in, a 360° view of Tokyo from 250 m in the air, and there was Keske's great barbeque. Then off to the conference in Hamamatsu where I was again the lucky one. I got to experience a real traditional Japanese tea ceremony and see how green tea was made in the tea factory at the college.

I gave a talk at the conference on New Zealand native plants. I also was able to catch up with other exchange members from Japan who I had met in New Zealand, which was a great experience. I think the exchange programme is a very valuable way to connect members of an international society like the IPPS and to forge lifelong associations and friendships with other members. The conference ended with some karaoke...I hope there is not a YouTube video of me out there!!!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In summary I would like to especially thank Ackimi, Nioki, and the Uchida family for looking after me so well, and both the Japan and New Zealand IPPS for the awesome opportunity. My general impression and observations of Japan are one of immense warmth and hospitality, cleanliness, organisation, and a beautiful culture that is being strongly influenced, good or bad, by Western society. The history and depth of culture is mind boggling to a girl from New Zealand and I was both impressed and awed by it.

Thank you again and long may the exchange programme continue.