

IPPS Japan exchange 2014[©]

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Excited, amazed and lucky were just a few good descriptive terms I could have used to describe how I felt when I was informed I was the fortunate recipient of the IPPS exchange scholarship to visit Japan. So on Wednesday 17th September, I boarded my flight, leaving Nelson and my job at Waimea Nurseries behind, while I went off into the big wide world to a country I had no comprehension of.

After arriving in Miyazaki after a series of pleasant flights, I was greeted by Mr. Takuya Tetsumura who took me to my host family. Miyazaki is located in southern Japan in the island of Kyushu it has a warm wet climate and facilitates a diverse range of horticultural activities including mango growing, tea production, and market gardening. All of which are grown on a relatively small scale compared with New Zealand production.

My hosts were the Kusano family of Aya Engei, a nursery producing flowers. The nursery produces pot plants, bulbs, seeds, and cut flowers for the main market. The nursery is well set up with its own tissue culture lab, facilities to store and dry bulbs and seeds and many greenhouses. Various flowers are crossed and offspring that have flowers with favourable characteristics are then reproduced asexually through the tissue culture lab and flowers, seed, and bulbs are sold. This gives Aya Engei a competitive advantage and makes it one of the top flower nurseries in Japan.

As well as spending some time working in the business, I also got the opportunity to explore Miyazaki. Some key highlights included Aya Castle, the Aya biosphere reserve, and visiting the sacred shrines. Along the way we also called into several horticultural related organisations and firms. Aya town's organic centre, a local mango grower, and the Miyazaki Agricultural Research Institute were of notable interest. But without a doubt one of my favourite days in Miyazaki was the day we climbed Mt. Takachiho, about 1-h inland. The mountain is 1574 m high and to get to it, we had to sidle a volcano!

After a week it was time to move on. I travelled north via car and plane, witnessing a volcano eruption along the way near Kagoshima. After arriving at Nagoya city which is approximately a 5-h drive from Tokyo, my host, Mr. Uchida, took me out of the city to his nursery.

Tumugi (Mr. Uchida's nursery) focuses on producing high quality strawberries and figs for the local market. The operation pays careful attention to its environmental impact and hopes to become organic in the future. It produces around 2000 kgs of both strawberries and figs, seconds and excess are processed onsite into high quality value added products such as jams and cakes.

Again mixed with work, I was lucky enough to see some of the great attractions of the area. The 60-m-high Buddha at the Todai Ji Temple and Kinkaku (the golden temple) certainly highlighted the differences in culture between New Zealand and Japan and were a real eye opener.

After a week, I proceeded to my final destination for the trip, Kanagawa, which is close to Tokyo. Here the IPPS Japan region conference commenced, and I got the opportunity to meet some of the key people involved in plant propagation in Japan and therefore made some valuable contacts. I also got the opportunity to share with them an insight into my life in Nelson and the work I do at Waimea Nurseries.

I'd like to thank both New Zealand and Japan IPPS members for their generous contributions to my trip. It's been an opportunity of a lifetime and one I'll never forget.

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