

## Memories of our Narita tour

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### Tour Schedule:

**Day one:** Sakura City (Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art, National Museum of Japanese History)  
Shibayama Town (Shibayama Nioson Temple, Museum of Aeronautical Science)

**Day two:** Narita City (Narita-san Shinshoji temple, Monzenmachi sando)  
Sakae Town (Boso no mura)

Narita is not only the name of Japan's International Airport, but also a city where tourists can partake in various activities and visit local areas. The following report is a summarized account of the 2-day trip around the Narita area, enjoyed by five people originating from 5 different countries.

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First we visited the Kawamura Memorial Museum of Art (KMMA). We arrived in Sakura City at around 10:00am, and although it was raining, our enthusiasm for the activities to follow, were not dampened. We were introduced to the staff, and to our guide Ms. Sumi Hayashi, who then proceeded to take us through the museum. KMMA is a private museum owned by the chemical company, Dainippon Ink & Chemicals, co.ltd. The museum houses two kinds of exhibitions; one permanent and one temporary. We were impressed to be able to see a great number of oil paintings by famous artists such as Picasso and Chagall.

The Museum had many beautiful and exotic Japanese paintings and other pieces of art, located on the first floor. On the second floor we saw the special exhibition of conceptual art duo, Komar and Melamid One of their projects is "People's choice". Komar and Melamid did the survey in many countries around the world – France, Russia, Ireland, Holland, Denmark, Germany, Austria, Finland, Kenya, Africa, China, Ukraine, Turkey, Italy, Portugal and Japan, to ask the people what they want for a painting, and make a "Most Wanted" and a "Most Unwanted" paintings for each country.

The other project of Komar and Melamid is "Elephant Art". They teach Asian elephants how

to paint and sell these elephant paintings. Our guide informed us that the profits of sales of the elephant art this time would also go towards fundraising efforts for the declining population of elephants in Thailand, Cambodia, India and Indonesia.

At the end of our visit to the museum, we were lucky enough to experience a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. Drinking green tea in the beautiful surrounds of the museum, gave us a chance to really take in the local nature of Sakura City, as well as to appreciate the artwork we had just seen.

We then went to the National Museum of Japanese History. We were thoroughly impressed by the diverse nature of exhibits this museum displayed. The museum itself was built on the former grounds of an old castle, and so the scenery is quite beautiful. On one side of the museum we found a large dry ditch, apparently the remains of an old moat, which surrounded and protected the castle during the medieval period.

The museum itself is divided into five separate galleries, with each one displaying exhibits from different eras in time; beginning with the Paleolithic Era. The exhibition was of a very high standard, and the artifacts were surprisingly authentic in appearance. There was also a video available for us to watch, which acted as a supplement to information in the five different galleries. We were very relieved to have access to the headphones, which provided us with an English translation. The video made understanding the galleries much easier and far more interesting.

The National Museum of Japanese History is not only a place for ordinary citizens to come and learn about Japanese history and culture, but it also acts as an inter-university research institute, promoting the advancement of academic research within Universities in the fields of history, archaeology and folklore. Just the scale and quality of the materials displayed at the museum, were enough for us to realize just why it is a focal point of research and study. It's a shame that we could only spend a few hours at the history, because there was too little time to really understand and study the Japanese way of life.

This museum also had a video about the contents of the displays. We watched this video with a translation earpiece, before we explored the exhibitions in the museum. During the tour of the galleries, we were given a receiver in the form of a portable electronic device, which gave us descriptions of the general displays in the museum. There were many photos, with a couple of particularly eye-catching ones showing



The National Museum of Japanese History

some gravestones and iron Buddha's from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the 'Hell and Paradise' exhibition from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Gallery three. We were also able to see how boats were utilized in the Kashima Nagashi Ceremony, to stop the passage of evil spirits to the spirit world.

The tour of the museum concluded at 1:25pm, and we were then taken in the bus to a Japanese-style restaurant in Sakura City, for lunch. We were treated to grilled eel, called 'unagi' in Japanese, which has been a staple of the Japanese diet since ancient times, and is commonly known as a high source of energy. Not only was the eel delicious, but we were glad to have been able to try it, seeing as it's a famous local product of Narita City.

After lunch, we went to the nearby Shibayama Town to visit the Shibayama Nioson Temple. Its history dates back to 781AD, and is one of two, 3-story wooden pagodas in Chiba Prefecture, the other being in Naritasan's Shinshoji Temple. It was very impressive to discover that the wooden pagoda was built with not even one nail! In the gate to the temple, named the Nioh-mon gate, was a wooden statue of Nioson-mon, who is worshipped as a God who wards off fires and thieves. There was also a god within the temple with 11 faces, which we found very beautiful, and the clay figures of Haniwa were also very impressive as we were not previously aware of the existence of Haniwa.

Our next stop was to the Museum of Aeronautical Science. Situated close to Narita airport, there were many interesting displays of various models of airplanes. It was great to be able to see such things as the tire of a plane which is four times bigger than that of a car's, as well as the inner mechanics of a Boeing 747 – the very plane some of us flew on our journey to Japan.

Being close to Narita airport also gave us a chance to go up to the observation deck and overlook the runnings of the airport. It was a beautiful sight to see the planes coming in and out of the night sky. Seeing the airport made us think about a rumor that we had recently heard, that Chiba Prefecture is home to another airport built on the ocean. The guide then proceeded to tell us about the experimental Mega Float on the Tokyo Bay Aqua Line, as well as the airport in the Kansai region, thus satisfying our curiosity about the floating airports.



The Museum of Aeronautical Science

After our day of visiting museums, we were taken to the Wakamatsu Ryokan Japanese-style Inn. It was the first time for us to experience a traditional style Japanese Inn, and we were very surprised at the size of the rooms and about having to sleep on the floor, all together, on our own futons. The Inn is located right in front of Naritasan's Shinshoji Temple, and we were able to partake in typical Japanese activities like having a hot bath, dressing in yukata and eating a delicious Japanese-style dinner.

After a very refreshing and relaxing time at the Inn, we checked out the next morning for another full day of eventful activities. Boso no Mura was next on our schedule, and Mr. Osaki was to be our guide. Mr. Osaki took us to the museum, and then down the street, which was a recreation of a typical street in the Meiji period during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The street was quite a sight, containing various shops and typical housing of the times. We were able to see former methods of farming, art and craft, the preparation of food, papermaking, pottery and manufacturing. We also learnt how to make 'soba' buckwheat noodles, which we then ate as our lunch. What an experience!

Also at Boso no Mura, is an old samurai residence where visitors can take the opportunity to look at, touch and even try on the old armour of the warrior class. The suit was heavier than we thought, and we were very surprised to find that it weighed 13kg. After visiting the Samurai's residence, we looked at a typical farmhouse from the Kazusa region, and then a kabuki stage where we were lucky enough to go below the stage and see stage shaft. The stage shaft is traditionally moved manually, and required 8 of us to move it.

We were so impressed with Boso no Mura because of the efforts gone to making it look and feel as authentic as possible. Not only was it most enjoyable to experience some of the traditional Japanese culture, but we were also able to learn much more about a different way of life for Japanese people, from a historical viewpoint.

Our last stop on the tour was to the famous Naritasan Shinshoji Temple. The temple is a very popular tourist attraction, and rates as one of three most attractive places in Chiba Prefecture, along with Narita International Airport, and Tokyo Disneyland.

The temple itself was built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and lies on historical grounds. We first came upon the water basin outside the front of the temple, where we followed our guide's lead and used the water to purify our mind and bodies before we entered the temple. It was also interesting to note that the gate to the temple – the Niomon Gate – had four deities enshrined in it, acting as guardians of the temple by warding off evil spirits. We then walked to the great main hall, the site where the daily Goma prayer service takes

place daily. Passing through the incense burning alter which is used as a place to cleanse the soul and protect people from illness and other evils, we made our way to the three-storied Pagoda of Peace. Our guide told us that underneath the Pagoda lies a time capsule written in 1985 by the world leaders of that time, containing prayers of eternal world peace and messages to future generations. The capsule is to be opened 500 years from its burial.



**Naritasan Shinshoji Temple**

After the visit to the spectacular temple, we went for a walk around Narita City and nibbled on traditional Japanese snacks such as 'senbei' (flavored rice crackers) and 'youkan' (a sweet made of rice and jelly). We were very impressed at the tasteful balance of eating the sweet 'youkan' and drinking the bitter green tea.

These two days were a perfect chance to get to know Japanese culture and to learn about its history, its traditions and the Japanese way of life. In our daily lives we haven't had much chance to experience the Japanese culture, but now we have a new view of Japan and understand just how different it is to our own respective Asian countries. We are very grateful for this experience, and to have learnt so much about the country we are currently living in. We are sure that when we go home to our own countries, that we will always remember the deep culture and special time we had with our friends in the Narita region.

Thank you very much to the Chiba Prefectural Government, for allowing us to participate in this valuable event. We are most appreciative.