



# **JATCAFA JAPAN VISIT**

*4-12 July, 2009*

## **REPORT**

*by*

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# 1. Introduction

Dear reader,

This report is written with the aim of informing you about one of the most outstanding experiences of my past years: ***“JATCAFA Scholars Japan Visit”***.

Being a scholar of JATCAFA Foundation, I have always wanted to be one of the few lucky scholars who are chosen for this trip that is to happen every year, only once. With the announcement on our mailing list; I have marked the deadline of the application submission on my agenda and applied for this very appealing experience.

When they called us for the interview, I was really excited about the visit already; as if I was chosen to go there. I must have reflected this excitement somehow that later during the visit, I was told that I had looked very enthusiastic about this visit and that was one of the reasons why I was selected. The interview for me was more like getting to know what kind of visit this is going to be.

One month later, all scholars were gathered in Abant for the traditional spring meeting. We had a visitor/speaker from Japan, Matsuzaki San, whose name you will hear a lot, later on in this report. After the lecture, the moment came and the announcements for the chosen scholars were made. And, I was really happy, then, to hear my name among the ones mentioned.

The preparations started slowly, getting the documents for the visa; applying for the visa, buying the ticket, etc. With a little change in my agenda, I had to come back from abroad on 28<sup>th</sup> June, instead of 3<sup>rd</sup> of July which was the day before the departure to Japan. Luckily, I got few more days to prepare for the trip, though there was not much to prepare than just resting, since I knew the upcoming week would be really intense.

Arriving from Ankara to Istanbul by plane, I met the other scholars, Kyokosan and Murat Abi at the airport. We just learned on spot that one of the scholars had last moment cancellation two days ago, therefore unfortunately there was no chance to replace her with someone else. Then the longest plane trip of mine had started. Having the comfort of flying with Turkish Airlines, I didn't feel like traveling 12 hours.

While flying above many countries, I was just thinking about how amazing the next week was going to be. I had traveled a lot throughout Europe, not have never gone that far away. The cultures I have met before was quite close to each other; however now I was going to see a completely different culture in a very distant place. I then started to feel even more excited about the whole trip and decided to write down my experiences on my Logbook.

Before the Logbook starts telling the whole story, I would like to thank to a few people who made this trip become a wonderful experience for me;

***Mr. Sasakawa and Mr. Ogata, in the name of all TNF Staff;*** for being very friendly and providing us this opportunity to explore their beautiful country.

***Anar, Dilafruz and Aygerim;*** for being such nice trip-mates and becoming my new great friends.

***Matsuzaki San:*** for spending so much time with us; enlightening us with his experience, knowledge and his humorous character.

***Honda San:*** for always being with us and being a color for our visit. Without her, the visit would definitely have not been even half as entertaining as it was now.

***Murat Abi:*** for being our big brother and always facilitating the “having fun” process.

***Kyoko San:*** for all her efforts to make this trip happen, for not just being the boss looking from top; but always being with us and having fun together with us, as well.

## 2. Logbook of the Japan Visit

☑ 5<sup>th</sup> July, Sunday

### *Arrival to Apavilla – first impressions:*

After a long trip and totally losing the sense of time; we all were so tired that all of us were desperately looking for a bed just to pass out. However, as the airport bus (called Limousine :) approached to the city center, we all were awoken by being amazed with the beauty of the Tokyo from the first sight. Some of us realized once again, while driving with the taxi towards our hotel, that in Japan unlike Turkey or most of other countries cars use the left-hand side of the road; not the right. Finally arriving to our nice, but a little bit zipped(!) hotel Apavilla in one of the most central neighborhood of Tokyo, Akasaka, we made our way to our rooms. Being warned by Kyokosan and Muratsan; we already expected really small rooms; which was the case due to the lack of land in Tokyo.

### *First dinner:*

After a little rest, despite some of us falling asleep, we all managed to wake up for the very nice dinner awaiting for us. Very near to Apavilla Hotel, there was a nice Japanese restaurant which would later on be a legend among us for the whole week, due to the very nice food and especially “Sawa” they have served us. Eating a lot during our first day; we have made sure that food-wise, the trip is going to be very fruitful for us.

### *Karaoke:*

With the hesitation of not knowing each other very well; and due to lack of sleep, nobody was courage enough to propose a social event for the event, at first. But later, when Muratsan and Kyokosan suggested us to go for a Karaoke place where we can both drink something and have fun, we were first not so willing, since we thought of the usual karaoke places that exist in Turkey with a huge crowd, etc. However, seeing the place with a lot of small rooms for groups to have fun only among themselves, our motivation to sing songs got really high despite our awful voices. Until we were amazed by the Japanese song sang by Kyokosan, it was one of the worst Karaoke party – in terms of musical effect – ever; but later and especially after hearing the amazing voice of Muratsan, we all got in the mood and didn't realize how the time passes until it was almost midnight. Having a very nice team-building event, I was very optimistic and eager about the upcoming days.

☑ 6<sup>th</sup> July, Monday

### *Visit to TNF and presentations:*

I don't know if it was because we were warned about the punctuality many times, or due to jet-lock; but I was already awake and feeling very fit at 5 am. After everyone woke up, we met in the lobby for breakfast and departure. The Nippon Foundation being located near Akasaka; we decided to walk along the road. We were met by Vicky Hondasan who would be our guide for the upcoming week. We also got the chance to meet David whom I met 2 years ago in a Jatcafa Ceremony in Ankara and got to talk a little.

Presentations started on time as it was supposed to be, and after a general introduction of Nippon Foundation and getting to know the incredible simple but outstanding base of functioning – Kyotei Races, being the only source of income; and even with this being the 3<sup>rd</sup> biggest Foundation, in

terms of budget, in the world - ; we were introduced to many different branches of the Nippon Foundation and the activities that are conducted within or helped/financed by the Nippon Foundation. Having lunch with the staff of TNF, and taking many pictures in front of the TNF Logo, it was time to leave for the training center of Japan Guide Dog Association.

### ***Japan Guide Dog Association Training Center:***

For many of you it might sound strange, “Guide Dog Association”. It did sound strange to me as well in the beginning. However, after seeing the facilities and the efforts put in it and the mission that those organisations have, I have completely been convinced about the necessity and functionality of Guide Dog Association. Those associations are the ones where the guide dogs for blind people are being trained and then delivered to the people that have requested so. After having a little tour around the facility; we had the chance to get to talk with a beneficiary of this facility, a blind man. He told us his experiences with his dog and explained us the process more from the eyes of a beneficiary. Having a little informal talk with him, I once again appreciated the faith that this man had: Losing his sight day by day, and knowing that one day he would be completely blind, he didn't lose his faith; but on the contrary he bonded himself to the life more and more; he tried to get the most out of the life; and when I looked at his eyes, even though they were not able to see anymore, I realized the happiness of having seen a lot already.

### ***Dinner with Mr. Ogata:***

After the first visit of the trip; we came back to TNF Headquarters. We were scheduled to have a dinner with the chairman of the TNF, Mr. Ogatasan. We went a traditional Japanese restaurant near TNF, which apparently was the favorite place of Ogatasan, and tasted a very special food called “Sabu Sabu”: very thin slices of row meat being put in a boiling water that is in the middle of the table and mixed with the Soya sauce. Not being used to the taste, I couldn't eat as much as others did; but I enjoyed very much the style of making it and the very first taste it leaves on your mouth.

Apart from the food, I enjoyed very much to talk with Mr. Ogata. His way of communicating was ideal for me, since he was not setting any level between us, and was very open to communication in any way. We've discussed around many topics and found out many interesting facts about our cultures and countries. It was a little pity that Mr.Ogata was having a toothache, so he couldn't join us drinking traditional Japanese drinks; but after mentioning about traditional Turkish drink tables, he got so eager that he promised us that next time he comes to Ankara/Istanbul'; he would be having that kind of dinner with us, again.

### **7<sup>th</sup> July, Tuesday**

#### ***Visit to Nissan Factory:***

In the morning of the second day, we had two visitors waiting for us outside the hotel. They were the scholar of TNF through another programme which provides scholarship for the Japanese students who lives in another country, but comes to Japan for studying. Since we had a lot in common, from the first moment we met, we got quite well along with each other and our communication lasted well during the whole day while they were accompanying us.

We first visited the automobile factory of Nissan called Oppama plant, near Yokohoma. Besides having a presentation about work-flow of Nissan in general; and Oppama plant in particular; we got chance to have a guided tour within the factory and got to know how the whole process of building a car goes on from the beginning till the end. We also got chance to get in the newest cars of Nissan and take a few photos while sitting on the driver sit, which would probably not be possible for

another 10-20 years for us :)

### ***Lunch at Yokohama (Hawaiian Hamburger):***

After a nice trip to Nissan, and a long ride back to Yokohama, we all got tired and hungry, so decided to stop nearby the Yokohama Harbor. When we saw the ads on the front-door of a cafe with “the best Hamburger of the world”, we were laughing without knowing that we would be ashamed after we taste the hamburger. It really was the best hamburger I have ever tasted; and I guess was the same for all of us. With the boost of a nice lunch we were ready for another trip.

### ***Visit to KAO Logistics Center:***

After the lunch we headed to another center nearby Yokohama which belonged to KAO company. The center we were visiting was a Logistics Center for the company, where all the packing and delivery to the customers was done. After a nice presentation, we were allowed to ask questions. What was really interesting for me is that, KAO is delivering different products in the same pack to different customers (small shops). Meaning, even if they have more than 1000 products, according to the query of the customer, they prepare the boxes with specific content requested. Although first I was a little confused about why this complexity is needed for this work; after listening to presentations and getting my answers, I was ensured that this way is almost the perfect approach from a company side. After presentations we had the chance to have a tour around the factory and see the whole working process with was quite enlightening for me.

### ***Dinner Party in Hawaiian Restourant :***

After a tiring day, it was time for us to have some fun. Having our beloved quests with us (the TNF Scholars), we decided to go to a Hawaiian Restaurant, again near our hotel. Having a few more quest from the same scholarship programme, we had a bigger and more fun group. After we started our delicious food, the Hawaiian dance show had started. With the richness of conversation accompanied by the beautiful dances, we didn't feel the time passing. When the dancers invited me to dance on the stage, I was already in mood that I couldn't refuse the offer. Not only me had the fun, but also the others watching me having a really funny dance. Unfortunately, as every nice evening, this also had to end with “goodbye”s and “see you”s.

## **☑ 8<sup>th</sup> July, Wednesday**

### ***Arrival to Tokyo station & bullet train:***

Waking up very early in the morning we headed to the Tokyo train station to make our way to Hiroshima. There is no need to describe the complexity of the train station in Tokyo, with many passages and platforms unlike the ones we have in Turkey. When we heard that it is almost 500 km between Tokyo and Hiroshima we were happy to have some sleep for around 6-7 hours. However, this was not the case with the bullet trains. We arrived Hiroshima within 2 – 2.5 hours which was not at all enough of sleep :)

### ***Visit to shipbuilding factory (Tsuneishi):***

It was scheduled that before arriving to the hotel we'd do our activities planned for Hiroshima. That's why we directly headed to shipbuilding factory of the company called Tsuneishi. It was something completely new for me; and I have been always wondering to get information about: “How are the ships built?”. Finally I could get the answer. A very advance technology and vast amount of workforce is being invested on this shipbuilding factories; but the results are worth to be

seen. We've had the chance to have a guided tour around the whole facility and get to know how the things work. It felt so funny, at the same time a little hot, to be in the special clothes and helmet for protection. Before rain caught us on the open air, we were able to get back to our bus and ready to head to our next destination.

### ***Visit to welfare facility for people with mental and/or physical disabilities:***

Our next destination was the welfare facility for the people with mental and physical disabilities. Being a person that had the chance to work with disabled people in the past, despite being for a very short time, it was so amazing for me to see a facility like that. Everything within the facility was designed to let those people contribute and be involved in the social life; rather than making them just feel comfortable. They are trained, sometimes forced, and always guided on their path to contribute and be involved in their own society in a way. I felt totally ashamed with the fact that I had even a little doubt on "how a person with mental disability can contribute or be involved in a society". I saw true examples of this, and the way it should be implemented. I think Japan is one of the sample countries in this field, and all other countries should be referring to them for the best practices. The very active role that The Nippon Foundation is taking place in these initiatives had made me proud once again to be a member of this foundation. The talks we got to have with the manager of the facility was another beautiful thing about this visit. Knowing that he was not a specialist on this area, but had chosen to work with people with mental disabilities; I got more encouraged to take active part in this part of the life for my future involvements.

### ***Arrival to Hiroshima Granvia Hotel & Dinner at Hiroshima station:***

After two visits during the day, we all got tired and needed a bit of rest and of course some food. Therefore, we headed back to the hotel. This time, unlike the one in Tokyo, there was a really huge, 5 star hotel awaiting for us. After a little rest, we agreed on going for a dinner nearby the hotel. The place like we had the first dinner (which was the legend for the whole week :) was waiting for us with very nice food and of course "Sawa" :) The place was again a traditional place with a table 20 cm above the ground. We enjoyed the chilling atmosphere of the place with the very interesting talks we had among ourselves. We, then, headed back to our hotel before it got too late.

### ***Kimono party / silent movie:***

Being youngsters and having already gotten to know each other really well; we decided not to sleep so early this night. Some of us went to buy some English-Lipton tea for the evening and have some room party. We gathered all four of us and Hondasan in my room to have some fun. My guests seeing me in Kimono got also eager to do so; and therefore, the room party had turned into a "kimono party". Playing silent movie and having interesting talks about Japanese culture with Hondasan, the night turned out to be one of the most entertaining nights of the trip.

## **☑ 9<sup>th</sup> July, Thursday**

### ***Visit to Hiroshima Peace Park and Museum:***

Waking up early in the morning we departed to the Hiroshima Peace Park. This visit was one of the most touching parts of the whole Japan trip. Going back to 1945, and remembering how awful events were happening just 65 years ago; I found myself worried about the future of the human-beings. After seeing so many Japanese people and visiting Hiroshima, though, I got a positive feeling that no matter how bad people behave to each other, we should still be the one looking for the peace. Unfortunately this is the only way we can ensure the future of our children. Seeing the

only building that is left from before II. World War, and all other new buildings; I got once again very enchanted by Japanese culture. Only 65 years ago, a city being completely destroyed and having the shape as it has now, it seems to me as a miracle but anything else.

Apart from visiting the Peace museum, we also got a unique chance to have a presentation by a lady who personally lived the bombing during the II World War. It was so emotional for me to listen the history from a person who lived it at the place, who suffered from it throughout her life; and most importantly who still doesn't have any hate or anger towards other people which would be satisfied with another battle in the world. Only thing she is looking for is "no more children, no more people suffering from the bad behavior of the human-beings".

After those very special moments, we had to head to Kyoto, the cultural center of Japan. It

was very interesting for me to learn that "To-Kyo" and "Kyo-To" actually means the same thing; which is the "Capital City". Kyoto being the capital city in the past still preserved the same name and still deserves to preserve it with all the cultural pattern she has.

### ***Visit to Kyoto Lighthouse – welfare facility for blind and visually impaired people:***

Since we'd arrive Kyoto at noon time, it was decided to have the visit to Kyoto Lighthouse before settling in the hotel. At the center we were met and guided by a blind person who professionally works in the center. It was again so challenging for me to accept the fact that he can actually guide us perfectly. However, my thoughts got beaten by the reality. His way of guiding us was one of the most impressive guiding I have ever seen. We were introduced to all the facilities that the center has.

After the Lighthouse we headed to our hotel, which was completely different than the previous two hotel we had stayed. It was in the shape of a traditional Japanese house. One room, without any bad, any table. Only the matresses to be laid down on the floor. It sounded really strange to me, especially after hearing the price for this :) But; seeing the whole pattern of the city, I realized it is something really special for this city and was worth it.

### ***Dinner at Japanese restaurant & Maiko San Show***

After a little rest, we went to a Japanese restaurant where we knew would be a show performed by Maikosan, we can call as the apprentice level before being a Geisha. Right upon our arrival to the restaurant the show had started, so we started watching the show. After a few very Japanese minutes, the show had ended and Maiko San started getting the questions. Later, we got to learn that it was also another level of test for her to become a Geisha, to be able to answer the questions in a proper way. During this dinner, we got to talk a lot about the Geisha culture and how much it is misunderstood/misinterpreted by foreigners.

After the dinner, we headed back to our hotel and while the ladies went to sleep, we decided to have a "Turkish Style Hamam Party" with only the males, which was a lot of fun in the end,

## **☑ 10<sup>th</sup> July, Friday**

In the morning, we've made our way to the Kyoto train station and took the train directly to Tokyo; which would take around 3.5 hours. Though we were a little sleepy; we got enough time to sleep on the train. And when we arrived Tokyo station, Matsuzaki San was already waiting for us at the train station.

## ***Visit to Kyotei Race Arena:***

We directly headed to the Kyotei Racing Arena in Tokyo. Very shortly explaining, Kyotei Racings are the main income source of The Nippon Foundation; and is the race of water boats. For further information, you can google “Kyotei Races in Japan”. After a general introduction, we got to walk around the whole complex and get more insight about the races. After a little more while; our guides had led us to the VIP room and suggested us betting for a few rounds. Since we didn't have much time, we decided to bet only for once. Everybody played, as well as I did. But, I must have had the most logical approach that I was the only one who won the bet, which allowed me buy a round of drinks for that evening :)

Afterwards we came back to our initial otel, Apavilla. However, we weren't feeling really tired and approaching to the end of our trip we wanted to get the most out of this visit. Thanks to Matsuzaki San, we were able to have a tour around one of the centers of the city: Shibuya and Haraciku. Not only those places we have gone, but also the walk till getting there was quite entertaining thanks to nice company of Matsuzaki San.

## ***Dinner with Matsuzaki San:***

After the short tour, it was scheduled to have a dinner around our hotel. Although we decided to go to our legendary place, it was full and we decided to go a place like that. During the night we realized that it is not the places but the people what makes them legendary. For me, this night was the most beautiful night of the whole trip; with a lot of laugh, jokes, fun, singing, talking, eating and drinking. Maybe it was because we were approaching to the end, but I felt completely happy with the setting and people I was having around. Everyone of them had become my close friends. After 2 hours of delay from the planned “ending time of the dinner” we got back to the hotel; and insisted very much to Matsuzaki San and Honda San to join us for the last day that would come the day after; and they accepted our offer.

## **☑ 11<sup>th</sup> July, Saturday**

### ***Shopping and temple visit:***

The last day was reserved for the sightseeing in Tokyo; and we were entitled to determine the content of the sightseeing. During the whole week, we got some suggestions and finally decided on our path to follow for the last day; of which the first element was the Shopping Market and Temple visit. A very traditional Japanese market place, where we could find everything that we were looking for as souvenirs: kimonos, chop sticks, origami papers, swords, and what not. Right next to the shopping place, there was a very beautiful Buddhist temple. We visited the temple very briefly and later headed to the Golden Shrine (For those, who don't know what Shrine means, it is some kind of temple for the Shinto religion).

### ***Golden Shrine:***

Little bit outside of the city, the Shrine and its beautiful environment had amazed all of us. Settled in a very big, green area; the Shrine was very tempting. We started our tour with a lot of photos and this continued like that till the end; since there were many interesting sights to take the photo. In the end of the tour we decided to sit down for a Japanese style Green tea. For many of us the taste was totally different than our teas, so we didn't like it :( but; all the customs and the traditional way of serving it made it so beautiful and unforgettable.

### ***Amusement center:***

We had no so much time left until the dinner which was planned to be held with Matsuzaki San and Honda San before leaving to the Amusement center at another edge of the city. The amusement center was something like a shopping mall but with a lot of 3D amusement devices of Sega. Unfortunately we didn't get chance to play any of those, coz there was a very huge line and we didn't have time. However, only getting the know this part of the city was enough itself. This part of the city was under Ocean till a few years ago. They filling the ocean with the land and made another small city out of it; and now this part is one of the amusement centers of the Tokyo. Learning this fact had got me amazed once again about the creativity and hard-work of the Japanese people.

### ***Karaoke Party & Kyokosan`s Birthday:***

The last night of us in Tokyo was planned to be held in a Karaoke place arranged by Matsuzaki San. Until we got to know that Matsuzaki San and Honda San are just perfect singers, we were still eager to sing some songs :) However, once they started singing a song, the rest of the night was all set for them: "Sing" :) It was a very nice coincidence that the night between 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> was the birthday of Kyoko San, thanks to whom not only our Japan trip has happened, but also the whole JATCAFA is running very well (of course together with our almighty Murat Abi :) We ate nice food; drink our last "Sawa"s and celebrated Kyoko San`s birthday. And then it was time to say the first goodbye to Honda San; since she was leaving a little earlier. After a few more songs, we all had to go back to the hotel. And we said goodbye to Matsuzaki San; and thanked him for being with us every moment he had the chance to; and we headed back to our rooms.

### **12<sup>th</sup> July, Sunday**

Waking up early in the morning we had our fast breakfast in Tokyo and headed to Airport. Since Kyoko San was not coming back to Istanbul with us but staying for another while in Japan, we had to say goodbye to her in front of the hotel. It was mostly thanks to her to make this visit happen. Her efforts on making this happen is really valuable for us.

Finally we took our plane and had another 13 hours of flight back to Istanbul. On the way back it seemed much easier to me to travel this long. Might be because I was on the aisle side; or because I was sitting next to Murat Abi :) Anyways, we arrived to Istanbul and said goodbye to each other with a big gratitude to each other for making the whole week very joyful for ourselves.

### 3. Conclusion and Suggestions

With a lot of nice memories I have completed my Logbook. This amazing trip will definitely going to stay as one of the best trips I have ever had. Not only because of the beauty of the place, but because of the wonderful people accompanying me during this visit.

A few things that have passed from my filter and I can share as the most significant impressions of mine are the followings:

- *A completely different culture than ours*

The way of living of people, the food, the music, the architecture, the dances, the driving style, etc. Almost every aspect of the culture I have looked at had at least a bit of difference, mostly complete difference from ours. It was so interesting to see all this differences and it made me realize that no matter what culture you are coming from, and how hard it is to adapt to a new one; it is always good to experience the others.

- *People totally peace oriented*

Having experienced an awful incident during the Second World War, almost everybody in Japan had admitted the wrong decisions made during the war, and it seemed to me that there is no one in the country who is in favor of another war any longer. This way of living is also projected to the daily life and one can feel it in streets, at work places, at public transportation, etc. The way of showing respect to each other by bending down a little, looks very plausible for me.

- *Very high value for hard work*

Japanese people are the most hardworking people I have seen among other cultures. People really are eager to work and dedicate themselves to their work. There is no doubt that this perception of people towards the work was one of the underlying reasons for the “Japanese Miracle”.

In the end, I would like to shortly mention a few of my suggestions for the next year; both for organizing staff and the scholars:

- Scholars for the next year should definitely show a bigger interest in applying for this great opportunity because this is once-in-a-life experience that you would probably face.
- The schedule of the visit can be arranged more according to the wishes and expectations of the scholars as well.
- Being the cultural visit to Japan, there should be more elements of Japanese culture being introduced or seen during the schedule of the trip.
- The interaction with the Nippon Foundation staff should be in a higher level; not only for one day, but for a few days, maybe not in a formal place but during the dinners etc.
- Last but not the least, taking example from this year, the interaction between Japanese descendants – the scholars of TNF – and our scholars should definitely be increased, not only during the visit; but for later as well.

In the end, I express my deepest gratitude to all people who had contributed somehow to make this event happen and be an unforgettable memory of my life...