

*The following is the travel journal of Anthropology major, Akhil Choudary's recent trip to Japan as part of an independent study entitled "Creating New Opportunities for Interdisciplinary International Research in Disaster Science." Akhil was accompanied by two other UConn undergrads, as well as faculty members Eleanor Shoreman-Ouimet (Anthropology), Will Ouimet (Geography and Geoscience), and Rich Christenson (Engineering). Read on to learn how the team fared on this journey into interdisciplinary disaster research and stayed tuned for more information on their collaborative research efforts next semester!

Get up at 3 am, leave by 3:45, and walk half a mile to get a ride to the airport. Not an ideal way to start a 6-day trip to Japan, but it worked. The trip was an Interdisciplinary Research Trip, comprised of 3 departments:

Anthropology, Geoscience, and Civil Engineering. The faculty on the trip were Eleanor Ouimet, William Ouimet, and Richard Christenson. The undergraduate students were myself, Cheyenne Haverfield, and Sam Turek. The goal of this trip was to acquaint ourselves with the Tohoku Region of Japan and the damages caused to various areas by the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami as well as visit the IRIDeS Institute of Tohoku University. The following is a day by day summary of our trip.



10/7/16-10/8/16

After almost 24 hours of traveling by car, plane, and train we arrived in Tokyo and eventually arriving at the Grand Prince Hotel New Takanawa, we met with Dr. Makoto Kanda of Nihon University. Dr. Kanda helped us find a small ramen restaurant to eat at. Afterwards, the group took a night trip to Shinagawa, a district in Tokyo, just to explore. We observed a variety of things, ranging from a street performer/magician to a not-so-child-friendly side street. By the time we got on the train to head back to the hotel, pretty much everyone was falling asleep. Upon returning to the hotel, this was the view from everyone's balcony.



10/9/16

Today, we left the hotel around 8 in the morning to just explore various aspects of Tokyo, trying to absorb as much of the city's culture as possible. It was raining as we headed to a Buddhist Temple. When we arrived, we observed a street full of vendors, selling everything from desserts to trinkets, leading up to the temple. Once inside, the Temple, we saw the temple monks conducting some ceremony and certain sections had been blocked off, only accessible to temple members. While exploring the other smaller shrines and statues surrounding the temple, there

seemed to be a mixture of Buddhist iconography and representations of the more nature based faith. After leaving the temple and exploring some side streets, the group took the subway to Akihabara, a district known for anime and technology. Here, we walked around the streets, occasionally ducking into smaller shops just to quickly glance at objects and signs that peaked our interest. A major highlight of this district was when we walked around an electronics store that spanned several floors. This store stocked everything from computers to televisions to even a robot. Between leaving this electronics store and walking over to Tokyo University, we happened to end up in the middle of a marathon. The marathon had medical staff on bikes and coordinators guiding groups of people throughout the city since none of the streets were blocked off for the runners. A



few blocks before Tokyo University, we stopped for lunch, eating at a small hole in the wall. Once at the university, we walked around, observing various aspects, like the architecture and layout of the campus. At one point we ended up at a fairly large pond with various fish and other aquatic life. Honestly, I thought one of us, probably me, would've fallen in. We also observed, what appeared to be archery practice and a soccer tournament. The next stop for us was the Tokyo Imperial Palace, where we toured the gardens available to the public. Besides the large amount of spiders we saw, the gardens mostly consisted of walking paths that eventually



led to where an old tower had been, centuries ago. When the tower once stood, you could see the Tokyo Bay. An interesting note about these gardens is that many of the signs do not say exactly what caused the various destruction of buildings and structures that once stood in the garden. The language was always slightly vague, saying things like "a fire in the Edo period", instead of giving dates or events that could have caused the fire.

After wandering the gardens, we headed to the Ginza district, which was a major shopping district lined with major brand name stores. One of the main streets was shut down, allowing us to walk in the middle of the street and in the middle of the crowd. After the Ginza district, we headed back to the hotel, grabbed our bags, and headed for Tokyo Station to catch a bullet train to Sendai. While at Tokyo Station, we grabbed a sushi dinner and some snacks for the ride. However, most of the group, well at least the undergrads, fell asleep within 20 minutes of leaving and didn't wake up until we arrived at Sendai Station. From here, we managed to get 2 taxis and made our way to the Dormy Inn, where we called it a night.

10/10/16

*A quick note about Starbucks in Japan versus the US. In Japan, you get mugs and plates regardless of whether or not you're eating in the establishment. If you need a paper cup to drink on the go, you can ask for one, but you still get a plate and silverware for your food. It was extremely rare to see someone drinking or eating while walking on the street. Trash cans and recycling bins were basically nonexistent. Moving on.



At around 7:30 in the morning, we met Dr. Ikago, a professor at Tohoku University, and 3 of his students for a day long trip exploring some areas that were affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. We hopped on a bus and headed to Matsushima Bay. Once we arrived, we visited a small shrine before taking a boat tour around the area. The boat tour also gave an explanation of some of the islands and sights in English. One of the employees also wrote some cards explaining the evacuation of one island during the tsunami in order to help our group better understand the situation. After the boat tour, the undergrads bolted over to an island off of the mainland, to get a quick tour. While on the island, we ended up at a shrine and got an interesting perspective of the bay. Afterwards, we rejoined the group for a bento lunch and then the group headed back on the bus. Our next stop was Nobiru Station, a train stop that the tsunami had destroyed. The station has been left as a relic from the tsunami and serves a reminder of what happened. The new store, that opened right in front of the station, also serves as a small museum for the 2011 earthquake. Inside, we watched part of a documentary about Higashimatsushima City and the lessons we could learn from the disaster. A common theme was that people have to learn from this disaster and that we should not forget what happened, which



is different than the reactions from other disasters in Japan's past. As an anthropology student, this was an interesting shift in tone to hear. Our next stop was Hiyoriyama Park, which served as a place that many people evacuated to during the tsunami. Half of the park served as a memorial to the earthquake and tsunami while the other half seemed to be a pre-existing park for families. While here, we stopped in a small bakery, where Professor Ikago bought what seemed like cream puffs for the entire group. Our next stop was the Minami-Sannriku Disaster Management Center, a structure that stands as a reminder of the tsunami and as a memorial of a group of people that

stayed to keep broadcasting a warning. Due to construction, we could only have a few minutes here. The next stop was the Tsuyama Roadside Rest Area, a rest area located in the mountains. After some really nice pictures, we departed back for Sendai, where we all ate dinner at the Ginza Lion. During dinner, the undergrads may or may not have understood how exactly to drink sake, but that's not horribly important. After dinner, we bid farewell to Professor Ikago and his students. The Uconn faculty headed back to the hotel to work on a presentation while the undergrads went exploring in the city. The culture of nightlife in Sendai vastly differed from the nightlife of cities like New York or Boston. Bars and restaurants were tucked away into corners and side streets and no one walking the streets was belligerent or terribly loud. A few hours later, we returned to the hotel to get some rest for tomorrow.

10/11/16

Today we departed from the hotel around 9 am to take the subway to Tohoku University, for our day at IRIDeS, or the International Research Institute of Disaster Science. We were greeted by Professor Ikago and he introduced us to other faculty members and researches of IRIDeS. Around 10 am, the UConn faculty members gave a presentation generally explaining who we were and why were at IRIDeS. Following that, some members of IRIDeS gave short presentations about some of their research, which ranged from law and economics to coastal erosion to drones. Following this series of short presentations, we gathered for lunch to continue discussions about the research at IRIDeS. After some very interesting discussions, we went to what seemed like a faculty meeting. Here, the UConn faculty gave a very similar presentation to more members of IRIDeS and took some questions afterwards. After some very welcoming comments and questions as well as some not so nice ones, we, the faculty and undergrads, explored the IRIDeS building a bit more, before heading back on the subway to our hotel. After a quick rest, we all got back on the



subway and headed out to Arahama, an area along the coast of Japan. Here we walked around the seawall and the ruins of some houses that have been relatively untouched since the tsunami in 2011. After exploring this region, we headed back into Sendai, where the group went out to dinner and explored the area near our hotel. 2 key events from this time stand out: One, eating beef tongue and, two, the (Insert colorful language) SHRIMP.

10/12/15

This morning, everyone went off and did their own thing. After a morning coffee, I hopped on the subway and rode it to a random district of Sendai. I ended up in Rembo. This was a more residential area of Sendai. Most of the buildings seemed to be for housing and I came across more locally run stores instead of bigger names like 7-11. While in Rembo, I came across a place



called Aramachi Park. This park turned out to be a shrine, large cemetery, and small park all rolled into one area. After walking around here for a little bit, I managed to get myself lost and started wandering back in what I thought was the direction of the subway. After some help from a nice lady who was running a local pharmacy, I managed to get back to the subway. On my way back, I passed a group of very young school children who all stared at me (some may have pointed). I assume they had never seen anyone who looked like me. When I reached the subway station, the platform was entirely empty, which was a big change from downtown Sendai and Tokyo. After returning to the hotel, the group packed up and left for the airport. At the Sendai Airport, there were several things to serve as reminders of the tsunami, such as a line indicating the height of the water and a series of bells to play music meant to commemorate the tsunami. From Sendai, we headed to Tokyo airport where a lot of gift shopping was done during the layover. We then boarded a plane headed to Chicago and our trip was coming to an end.