

Impression Report on Interaction with Mr. Ken Sakamoto, Mitsui V-Net

I am deeply grateful to Mr. Ken Sakamoto, a dedicated volunteer associated with Mitsui V-Net, for his kind mentorship and continuous guidance during my stay in Japan while pursuing my M.Phil. in Infrastructure Management at Yokohama National University (YNU). This report reflects my impressions of our interactions, which were both academically enriching and personally transformative.

Throughout my two-year stay, I had the privilege of meeting Mr. Sakamoto on a weekly basis. Through regular weekly interactions facilitated under the Mitsui V-Net volunteer framework, I received not only Japanese language instruction but also deeper insights in culture, traditions, and social values. His extensive experience and thoughtful approach enabled me to gain insights that went far beyond textbooks, making my learning holistic and immersive.

One of the most valuable aspects of my interaction with Mr. Sakamoto was the experiential learning opportunities he provided. He thoughtfully organized and recommended visits to culturally and technologically significant places, which greatly enhanced my understanding of Japan.

Some of the most memorable experiences include:

- **Visit to the Oppama Plant of Nissan Motors (17th January, 2025):** This visit provided a rare opportunity to witness Japan's advanced automobile manufacturing systems firsthand. Observing the precision, automation, and efficiency of the production line helped me understand concepts such as lean manufacturing, quality control, and workplace discipline (5S principles) in a real-world setting. For students, especially those in infrastructure, engineering, or management fields, this experience bridges the gap between theory and industrial practice and offers valuable global exposure.
- **Nature Walk at Jogashima Island (9th December 2023):** The guided visit to Jogashima Island was not only scenic but also deeply reflective of Japan's harmony with nature. It allowed me to experience coastal ecosystems, local geography, and the cultural importance of preserving natural spaces. Such activities are particularly beneficial for international students as they provide mental relaxation while also offering insights into Japan's environmental consciousness and lifestyle.



- **Participation in a Traditional Tea Ceremony at Ooka (6th January 2024):** The tea ceremony was one of the most culturally enriching experiences. It introduced me to the principles of “wa, kei, sei, jaku” (harmony, respect, purity, and tranquility), which are central to Japanese culture. Understanding the etiquette, movements, and philosophy behind the ceremony helped me appreciate the depth of Japanese traditions and mindfulness in everyday life—something that cannot be fully grasped through books alone.

- **Visit to Kamakura:** The visit to Kamakura was a deeply enriching cultural experience, offering exposure to some of Japan’s most significant historical and spiritual sites. Exploring Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine provided insight into Shinto traditions, architectural grandeur, and the historical importance of Kamakura as a former political center. Additionally, the visit to Kenchoji Temple, one of the oldest Zen temples in Japan, offered a profound understanding of Zen Buddhism and its influence on Japanese culture. These experiences collectively enhanced my appreciation of Japan’s spiritual heritage and historical depth.

- **Dressing up in a Traditional Kimono (23rd November, 2024):** Wearing a kimono provided a hands-on cultural immersion into Japanese traditions. It allowed me to understand the significance of attire, seasonal aesthetics, and social customs associated with traditional clothing. This experience also deepened my appreciation for Japanese craftsmanship and cultural identity.

- **Attendance at the Kabuki Performance at Tiara Koto Theatre (October 2024):** The Kabuki performance introduced me to one of Japan’s most celebrated classical art forms. Through its elaborate costumes, stylized acting, and live music, I gained insight into Japan’s

historical storytelling traditions. Such exposure is invaluable for international students as it enhances cross-cultural understanding and appreciation of performing arts.

• **Experience of Zazen (Seated Meditation) at Kenchouji Temple, Kamakura (7th June, 2024):** Participating in Zazen meditation was a deeply introspective and calming experience. It helped me understand the role of Zen Buddhism in Japanese culture and offered practical techniques for mindfulness and mental clarity. For students dealing with academic and cultural adjustments, such experiences can be extremely beneficial for well-being.



• **Preparation for the National Civil Engineering Speech Contest “Yu Arima Cup” (JSCE):** Mr. Sakamoto played a crucial role in helping me prepare for the prestigious National Civil Engineering Speech Contest, the “Yu Arima Cup,” organized by the Japan Society of Civil Engineers (JSCE). His guidance went beyond language correction—he helped me refine the structure, clarity, and cultural appropriateness of my presentation. Through his feedback, I was able to communicate my ideas more effectively to a Japanese audience, improving both my confidence and delivery. His mentorship significantly contributed to my strong performance in the competition, making it one of the most rewarding academic experiences during my time in Japan.

Additionally, Mr. Sakamoto’s support extended beyond academics and cultural exposure. He provided crucial guidance before my homestay experience, ensuring that I could adapt comfortably to a Japanese household. His assistance during a medical situation when my wife was injured in Japan was particularly invaluable, reflecting his kindness and genuine concern.

He also thoughtfully informed me about local vegetable markets and vegetarian dining options, which was especially helpful when my parents visited Japan from India, considering our dietary preferences. Such gestures made my stay not only comfortable but also deeply meaningful.

What I found most helpful and pleasant was Mr. Sakamoto's personal involvement and dedication. He created an environment where I felt supported, encouraged, and confident in exploring a new culture. His teaching style was patient, engaging, and tailored to practical understanding, making learning both effective and enjoyable.

In conclusion, my interaction with Mr. Sakamoto has been one of the most enriching aspects of my academic journey in Japan. His mentorship not only helped me gain a deeper understanding of Japanese culture and society but also contributed significantly to my personal growth. I sincerely appreciate his dedication and feel fortunate to have had such a supportive and insightful guide during my time at YNU.

Programs and volunteers under Mitsui V-Net play a vital role in helping international students feel welcomed, supported, and culturally integrated into Japanese society. I would strongly encourage future international students to actively engage with initiatives such as Mitsui V-Net to fully benefit from their experience in Japan.

I hope this report contributes positively to encouraging prospective students to take part in such meaningful and enriching opportunities.

With sincere gratitude,

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