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Osaka Ibaraki, Japan

Seize the opportunity

To lose hope

Good morning, I'm Laura Pizzocheri, I'm 21 years old, and just about a year ago, maybe with a couple weeks of difference, I completed all the necessary tests to be able to participate to a study abroad program in Japan in collaboration with the University of Bergamo.

I feel the need to begin this sort-of-review of the project with some premises; first of all, I must admit my complete ignorance on the existence of the project itself: up until not even two weeks before the necessary tests, I wasn't even aware of the possibility to enroll in such activity as studying abroad. In complete honesty, I wouldn't be in Japan writing this letter in this exact moment if not for a conversation I had with a close friend of mine. I will never forget to thank her for giving me the necessary information to enroll.

Secondly, I must admit how little hope I held up until the fatidic call. I had passed the Japanese Language I exam just a few weeks before and, even though I had been very confident in my preparation, knowing the language skills of the colleagues that applied to the same program and their previous studies of the language, I couldn't really see a way out. Wrongly, I let resignation take the wheel.

To stay positive

I was on a bus in Paris, not far from the Louvre Museum, when the call arrived: I was chosen as one of the direct candidates for the project in collaboration with TNE Lego – Asia. I had to fly out in September, only five months after, and the confirmation had to be almost immediately. It was unexpected news, but very welcomed: a few minutes later I was officially enrolled into the program.

The few months before the departure were a pretty stressful period: documents to be filled out with barely any explanation, files to be delivered in a short time, various trips to fill those out and very few instructions. Insurance companies, banks, stationery stores, embassies, but most importantly, train stations. I must here thank my amazing colleagues that had already gone through the same wobbly road last year because, without them, truthfully, those trips would have been triple in number. The week before flying out was

absolute chaos: exams to take, luggage to prepare, friends to wave off. The day before departing was long, emotional, but hopeful, and ended about five hours before getting in the car towards the airport. On

Sunday morning I boarded the plane anxious but excited, with too much luggage, too many clothes and too little hours of sleep.

The landing felt like hell: nobody welcomed me and my three luggage, phone dead, no cash, in a country whose language I could speak with a little bit of difficulty. Getting lost in a foreign nation is very different to getting lost in your home country, I found out. You don't know what to do, how to get around, even if you know how to ask for help. Moreover, the extreme hot weather of Japan in the beginning of September, did not help with the deep exhaustion with which I reached the dormitory.

From the arrival up to now the time has flown by: another huge amount of documents, absolutely, but a huge amount of documents filled out in Japan, printed in whatever コンビニ, signed with Muji's ballpens, in cities yet to be explored. The stress did not disappear, the amount of studying and material to revise did not change, but it transposed itself to a completely different nation from my own, and took up a different meaning, in different places and times.

To learn while travelling

Studying abroad is, whether in Japan or in other countries in the world, an opportunity that I would recommend to whoever has the chance to do it; it gives you the opportunity to grow, learn, explore, travel places, meet people, cultures, habits, eat foods, ride on functioning and comfortable public transportation systems. However, I feel the need to give a shout out to this incredible country. Japan is not a nation to leave unexplored: it must be travelled, lived, photographed in every corner.

I want to thank the TNE Lego – Asia project for giving me the opportunity to study in Japan, and I want to thank the host university, 立命館大学・大阪茨木キャンパス, for taking me in and making me feel at home during this period. I want to thank every person that collaborated in order to make this project happen.

To whoever will partake in this program during the next years, I want to say: never stop. Studying is fundamental but travelling is what really makes the experience unforgettable. Keep in mind that new languages are learned through interaction more than by studying on books. As much as adapting, communicating, learning is hard, every second that's lived away from home represents a newly acquired notion. It's worth it.

Now, a brief comment in Japanese:

皆さん、おはようございます。ラウラです。素晴らしい機会を与えていただき、本当にありがとうございます。日本、またすぐ会いましょう!

With kindness,

Laura.