

TOKYO

Y O T O

Observation
Journal

Tokyo

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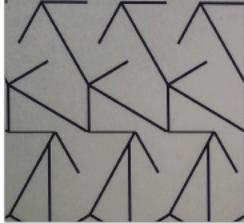
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The bustling city of Tokyo is a perfect balance of a working lifestyle and a tranquil mindset. With top notch technology and transportation Tokyo is a functional and fast paced city based on the respectful and peaceful teachings of Buddhism.

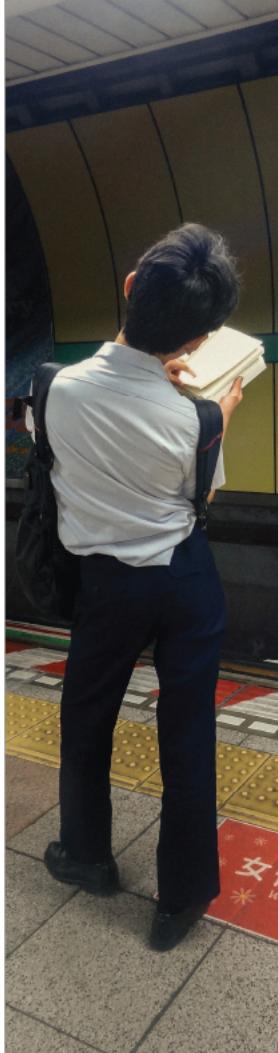
Looking at the map of Tokyo's subway system is like looking at a confusing endless loop of paths. It is easy to be brushed away by the confident crowd of people that are trying to get to their own destinations. It seems like the station is there to serve the locals on their way to their daily life obligations.

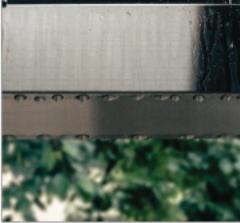
Space is valuable here in Tokyo and if you are taking it up without a purpose then you are not being conscious of your surroundings.

Every inch of the inside of the trains are often covered with some sort of sign, screen, or advertisement. Every inch of space is utilized to the best of its ability.

This man struck this peculiar pose adjusting his weight on to his right leg with his hip locked in place. He seems unbothered by the noise around him as he read his novel in peace. I found this simple action so interesting because his presence is still at the forefront of the platform to get on the train but he is totally immersed in the teachings of the book he holds.

This blend of two contrasting mindsets is what makes Japan unique. Regardless of how busy or rushed people are they are still calm and grounded in their beliefs and traditions. This is something I can personally learn from. I let the stress of mundane tasks frustrate me and I am not at peace with myself or the space around me.





Today I awoke to the sound of wind and the drip drops of rain on our balcony. I got up, stretched, and shivered as the cold breeze that had crept in to the room at night tickled my bare legs. I got ready and went down to greet the monsoon rain that poured down without mercy on the town of Nippori.

With a light wind breaker and small and flimsy umbrella that just barely kept me dry I ventured out to get breakfast and started our walk to the calligraphy museum. As I walked to the museum I began to notice the lush green plants, blooming flowers, and tall smooth trees that lived throughout the streets of Nippori.

In my time here I have observed the neatness and meticulous nature of people in Tokyo. Space is utilized in a smart and resourceful manner. However nature here grows freely and there seems to be an appreciation for plant life because urban life molds itself around the nature. Moss grows freely around the sidewalks and plants emerge from every free crevice.

Even at the calligraphy museum there was a garden that connected the exhibits and it was well kept and lush with green plants and dark trees. The rain was not a convenience for the people but the leaves and moss looked especially vibrant and dewy and the tree trunks looked slick and shiny. The rain did not seem to bother the locals as I noticed that everyone had either an umbrella, protective visor, or waterproof shoes to keep them dry in the rain.

The locals of Tokyo are truly one with nature.



One With Nature





Hayashi Michio, a faculty member of Sophia University in Tokyo, talked to us about the lack of full freedom of expression in terms of contemporary art in Japan.

He focused on the vagueness of the obscenity laws in Japan and supported the work of daring artists in Japan that despite these laws followed their passions. This was very inspiring to me because we don't realize how much oppression there is in the world and we are lucky we get to share our voice without worry of punishment.

After class I ventured out in to Shibuya a very busy and beautiful area of Tokyo. Instantly I was overwhelmed by the amount of variety in shops, foods, sounds, smells, and people. I noticed the graffiti that covered the tunnels and building walls.

I was so used to Japan being meticulous that this was a pleasant surprise. I have an appreciation for street art because it belongs to the public and is a powerful form of expression.

Shibuya is truly full of life and walking around the area put me in a jittery and excited mood. This area of Tokyo is a melting pot of all different types of food.

From Thai, Indian, Persian, to Italian cuisines there is something for everyone. Despite the large population of tourists I still observed a lot of locals coming and going in work clothes or with their families and or pets.

As evening came around the streets were filled with music from the open shops that crowded every street. There was a lively and energetic vibe in the air.



Full of Life



Today we went to a calligraphy workshop where I learned about the origin of Japanese characters and the blend of influence that created present day Japanese.

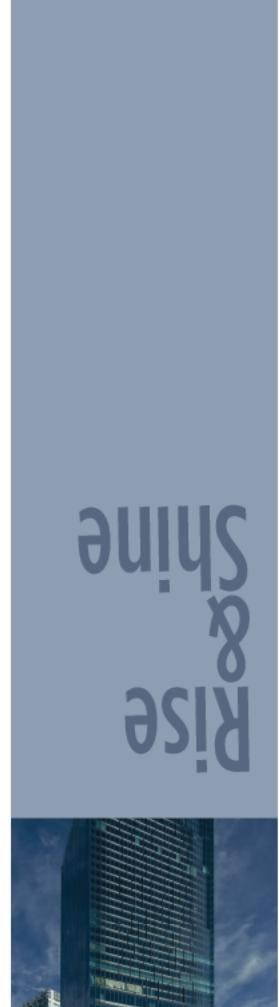
We learned the detailed step by step process of calligraphy writing. You begin by creating the ink using an ink stick and mixing water and rubbing the stick in to a small container. Everything was very meticulous and fluid for the experts and it was truly mesmerizing to watch.

The brush can only be soaked a certain amount with a quarter of the brush left with no ink on it. We learned the specific and correct way to make the different types of strokes in calligraphy.

There are dots, faded lines, strong ending lines, and hooked lines. We practiced this before writing a final word on a special paper. I chose the word peace and after getting a block stamp in red ink I wrote my name in Japanese on the bottom left corner.

Calligraphy is a form of art and can be mastered with diligence and practice.

The city of Tokyo is so rich with culture and traditions the streets are always bursting with life and people making a living using their special skills and crafts. It is very interesting to observe the daily routines of people.





Today we took a walking toward through Takeshita Street which was filled with an assortment of shops and restaurants.

The street was crowded with a mixture of people all looking from left to right in to all of the stores, carrying shopping bags, chatting with friends and family, and eating and drinking along the way.

I instantly noticed the high fashion in Tokyo and this area in particular was filled with stylish people strutting their cool looks.

We then visited the Festa Design Gallery which showcases the work of local artists of Tokyo. The work was truly incredible, the amount of talent was super high.

The gallery is a mix of art showcases, a restaurant, and a hostel for visitors. There were paintings, drawings, realistic art, animated art, murals, fashion, and photography. I really enjoyed all of the creativity in this gallery.

Following the tour of Festa we ate the restaurant there as a group. It was an all you can eat make your own savory pancake dinner. A mixture of meats, vegetables, egg, flour, and all types of toppings were laid out for us.

This was not only delicious but a fun experience to cook our own pancakes and bond with one another.



Made in Tokyo





Today was our travel day to Kyoto. We left Sakura Hotel at noon after a quick breakfast from 7-Eleven.

We boarded a bus to the train station and from there we arrived at our platform to await the arrival of our bullet train.

The journey took about 2 hours as we zoomed through a scenic route. Upon our arrival a guide waited for us on the platform and walked us to Piece Hostel.

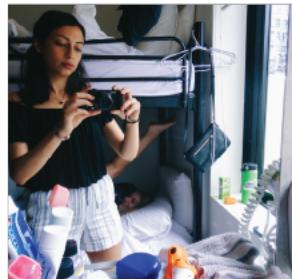
I spent the rest of the day getting settled in to our room. Sarina and I did our best to make our small quarters feel organized and spacious.

After getting unpacked it was a fun atmosphere amongst us all to be in Kyoto.

I lazed around on the roof on our floor and enjoyed the beautiful weather and sunlight that shined down on me.

To top the night off I took a relaxing bath and then went to dinner at a wagyu beef place where we were able to cook our own meat.

No complaints, Kyoto is incredible and I will cherish every moment we spend here.





Today was a wonderful day! After sleeping in I cooked eggs and toast for breakfast.

I had a check in with Kate, Jamal, and Kit to see how things were going.

The weather was prime so we decided to rent bikes for the day.

It was hot so we biked to a local Onsen, a spa full of baths. This was a very unique experience. We had to shower before entering the different temperatures of baths.

Some were cold while others were hot, there was also one with mineral water and one that had an electric flow.

In between the baths I went in to the sauna which was boiling hot.

My skin felt detoxed and I was super relaxed.

After the baths we biked to a ramen shop and had a big steaming bowl of delicious ramen.

Kyoto is much more relaxed and the environment is rich with green life.

We were exhausted after hours of biking along the river and made our way back home.

We ended the night watching a horror movie and preparing for the week that lay ahead.





We started the day off early by going to meditate at Shunkion temple.

I ate breakfast at the hostel then the group boarded a bus to the area of our temple.

The temple was in a complex full of temples. It was serene and beautiful to walk around.

Our mentor for our meditation, Takafumi Kawakami, taught us about the proper way to meditate.

We entered a room that smelled like incense and had small round pillow neatly placed in a grid across the floor.

When meditating it is crucial to breathe and let your mind flow freely.

You are supposed to sit in half lotus or full lotus position not the stereotypical criss-cross position. You lean your pelvis forward to elongate your spine.

Sitting in this position for 25 minutes made me realize that my hips are not flexible.

You keep your hands below your abdomen and breathe in less and exhale for a longer and gentle way.

I kept my eyes closed and began to let my thoughts race.

The ending was marked with instruments and we took a tour of the temple and had a tea ceremony.

We drank matcha and ate cookies. After meditating I went home and did homework.



Matcha



Today was a typical day, we had studio and seminar.

For lunch I ate soba at a local restaurant near the community house.

After class it began to rain so I went back to the hostel to stay dry.

I got some work done then joined my friends in the lobby to hang out and play cards.

I met some new friends at the hostel; Joe for UK, and Mat from Geneva.

They were very friendly and invited us to join them on the porch where Mat brought his guitar and we had a session of songs and music.

For dinner I ate at Kyoto station with a group of friends. We got ramen close to the Kyoto Tower.

It was delicious. Today was a really laid back day.





This Thursday we had a normal day of studio and seminar. It was a particularly hot day.

After class we went back to the hostel backs dripping in sweat under the beating sun.

What else is there to do on a day such as this then to go to a beach!

The feeling I got reminded me of camping on the lake but the water was clear, warm, and beautiful.

This lake/beach adventure at a place called Shiga was extraordinary to say the least.

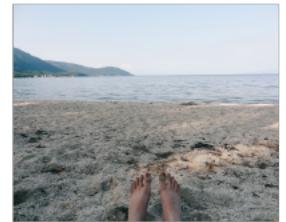
The cool water on our legs was refreshing and the sun was perfectly shaded by the trees surrounding the beach. But the air was still warm and humid.

It was truly blissful in this spur of the moment experience. It felt like one of those cheesy once in a life time moments that kind of fill your eyes up with tears.

Anyways after a few hours of listening to some good music, munching on our little picnic, and chattering away we head back to Piece Hostel.

When I got home I got dinner, showered, worked on spreads and painted face masks for my project!

Awesome day. :)



cont
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Today was a very special day for the group. We went to a traditional Tea Ceremony led by a wonderful and sweet lady named Seiko.

She taught us a lot about the meaning of a tea ceremony and its importance to the Japanese culture.

In about the 14th century a change in power began a new aesthetic of simplicity and peace that filled the culture in Japan.

It inspired the tea ceremony in many ways.

The room is always small and simple with a traditionally low entrance. The low entrance required all people entering the ceremony to bow and crouch down to the same level to enter the room.

This symbolized equality in status. Even the samurai would have to leave their swords and weapons outside the room.

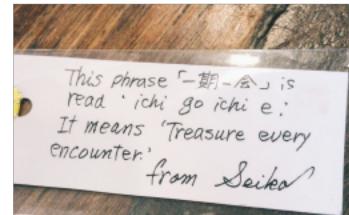
The process of making the matcha tea is a specific and crafted technique that we were taught.

And more importantly the mannerisms in drinking and thanking the others in the room is crucial to the ceremony as well.

When finishing the tea you turn the cup clockwise so the ornate side faces the other way. When you finish the tea you must slurp to show your appreciation to the tea maker.

After the ceremony Seiko gave us all a little memo that read 'ichi go ichi e' meaning cherish each encounter.

After class I explored the Kyoto Tower and ate at a dining hall there.





Today I visited the famous Nishiki Market. It is a long stretch full of shops with everything and anything you could imagine.

From seafood, to grilled meats, to high end fashion, and even thrift stores Nishiki Market is absolutely loaded.

I began the day early and took the train two stops on the green line to Shijo.

I first stopped at a famous grilled meat stand and got some food. I ate my food on the side of the busy street.

After this I began to adventure the twisting streets of the market.

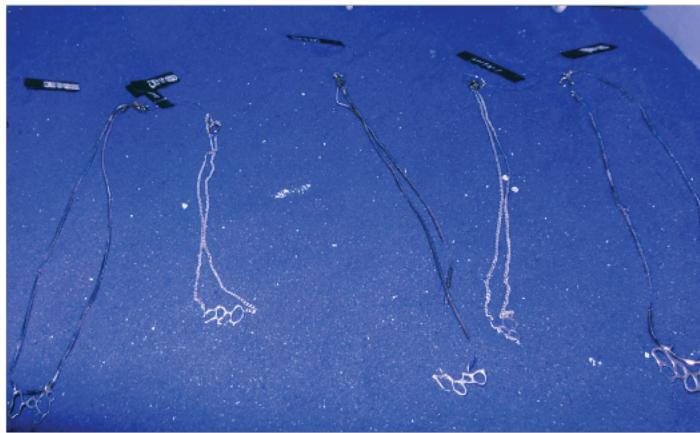
I love window shopping and with the fast flow of people pushing through the main street you were forced to keep looking about as you go.

I visited countless shops, tried plenty of samples of sweets, and even went thrift shopping.

I was famished at this point and decided on some Dan Dan which turned out to be way too spicy. So I had to get some gyoza to calm the palette!

Today was a fun day of walking around and I saw so many cool new things.







Today was another day trip out to the Washi Paper workshop in the suburbs of Kyoto.

We traveled an hour out of the city to this workshop which was engulfed by a scenic view of the mountains.

We first watched an informative instructive video that taught us how the washi paper is made.

The traditional process is incredibly long and requires a lot of manual labor and attention to detail.

It is an entire craft of its own.

We had a tour of the museum and then we each got a chance to make the paper. Just one small part of the whole process.

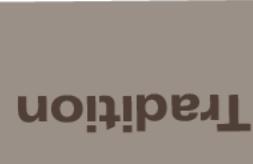
The paper consists of tree bark and plant roots that they mash into a sticky 'mucus' that binds the bark together.

The machine that makes the paper is like a pulley dangling from the ceiling with two handles.

With either hand on the handle you submerge a bamboo film inside the frame into a mixture of water, bark, and the plant mucus.

Slowly the bark pieces create a thin layer on the bottom. A specific hand movement is done to ensure an equal level. The water is drained from the bottom of the film.

After this process we dyed our paper and then left them to dry.





Today was the most anticipated day of them all. We went on a day trip to Nara.

Nara itself has a lot for history and shrines of Buddha from many years ago.

We were instantly shocked by the amount of deer everywhere.

They were calm, friendly, and curious animals that were in all colors, sizes, and personalities.

Some were older and had really big antlers, others were just babies trotting around.

Some deer were curious and daring enough that they sniffed us out while others seemed unbothered by our presence entirely.

Around the shrines there are lots of street vendors.

Many of them sold deer food that you could buy and feed to the deer.

I did this and instantly made friends! They would bow knowing that they would then get food.

It was way too cute to resist and we kept feeding these deer until our coin purses were empty.







Today we had work time for Kit's class in the morning. And our test with Jamal was in the afternoon.

I was feeling ill today and went home during lunch.

I spent the rest of the day in bed relaxing.

I went to 7 Eleven at one point to get some vitamins and fruit.

After sleeping the whole day away I was starving.

So I went to a really good chicken restaurant and got two sets of chicken to go.

I enjoyed my food to go and then began working on my final presentation and studying a bit more for my upcoming test.

I went to bed early. Tomorrow was our final day of feedback.

This trip went by so fast I am shocked. It feels like we just got here and the end is just around the corner.

Time flies when you're having fun for sure.





Today we had group check ins in the morning.

I took the final exam today. I ended up writing five whole pages. I tend to ramble but I realized in this moment the extent of knowledge I have gained on this trip.

I am so thankful for the opportunity to have had all these exposure to a culture which is so humble yet so fearless at the same time.

My time here has made me a better designer, a more consciousness person, and I have a true passion for traveling and learning.

I feel connected to the people I have met here and the experiences I have had that have brought me closer to the culture and teachings.

I hope to take my learnings with me back home. I will be less wasteful and more respectful to our Earth and the people around me.

This was our last day of classes. 5 weeks of curriculum have come to an end.

After class we hiked the Fushimi Inari path and shrines to a beautiful view at the top.

Today was a very spiritual and grounded day. I enjoyed it immensely.



Fushimi





We ended the program with everyone giving about an 18 minute final presentation.

It was so cool to see how much everyone has progressed over the short 5 weeks as designers and as thinkers.

I think everyone ended up with very meaningful personally and communally interventions.

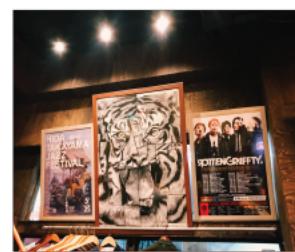
After all the presentations we went home and packed for our train back to Tokyo the next morning.

After packing we all met up for a group dinner.

It was at a very fancy and traditional restaurant where we were treated to about 8 courses of very unique dishes.

I loved the experience it was not only very elegant and beautiful to look at but it all was delicious!

I will really miss Kyoto and Japan. I hope to visit again one day but until next time Sayonara Japan.



sayonara

