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## JDS Okinawa Field Trip

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Even though it was a cold day in winter season, I got up early morning in 11th March 2013, to go to Haneda airport as we headed for Okinawa, one of the most interesting prefectures in Japan. The journey has taken around three hours when we landed at Naha airport in Okinawa. However, being able to see the different side of Japan, made our stay in Okinawa a most memorable and wonderful time indeed. Our group consisted of all the first year JDS fellows of 2012 batch. Rivera sensei accompanied us along with Ohono san.

The tropical climate made me feel that I am back in my home country, but all the other things such as foods, culture as well as the problems face by okinawan are very much different from my own experience back in my home country and even different from the things in mainland Japan. Despite the fact that, these groups of islands are blessed with nature, they had suffered and still suffering with war related issues.

After having delicious Okinawan soba noodles for lunch we visited Kakazu Takadai Park, where most brutal war between US and Japan occurred during World War II. The bunker, made by Japanese soldiers even without proper tools, made us understand the severity of the war. In addition to that the Park gave us a clear picture about the present situation of the Okinawa as we looked over the US air base in Futenma. There I realized why they say "bases are not in Okinawa, Okinawa is among bases". On the way to the Park we observed the damage made to Okinawa International University building by a helicopter crash.

Then we visited Sakima Art Museum which has opened on the restored land from US military in 1994. The Museum has collection of art works done by Georges-Henri Roult and descriptive art work drawn on the wall of the museum called "Map of the Battle of Okinawa" by Toshi and Iri Maruki which is displayed to convey the truth of the "Battle of Okinawa". With the understanding of cruelty of war we arrived to our temporary home in Okinawa "Ginowan Seminar House" where we had our dinner. After the dinner we all gathered again for a wonderful lecture on the topic "foot step of Okinawa and Okinawan identity" delivered by Professor Makoto Aragaki.

The second day of the study tour was designed in order to give us the impact of war, bases and human activities on the natural environment of Okinawa.

Discussion held both at Onna-son village and University of Ryukyus Tropical Biosphere Research Center equipped us with the traditional and novel knowledge on sustainable use of natural resources. In the evening of the second day we were amazed with the beauty of Ocean Expo Park & Churaumi Aquarium.

The number of Japanese and other war monuments and peace memorials at Okinawa explain us the number of the war victims in Japan during World War II. There were hundreds of memorials having name of war victims on them. It was really a shocking thing to see the "Itokazu Abuchiragama" cave which was used as a war hospital during the Okinawan battle.

Cultural events of Okinawa and Syuri Castle gave us the insight on the unique cultural characteristics of Ryukyu Kingdom. Dinner at public market also helped me to understand the culture of Okinawa.

As a whole Okinawa study tour can be regarded as one of the most memorable and useful one as it has given us a better knowledge about war, peace, environment, culture etc. of the poorest yet attractive prefecture of Japan.

All the first year JDS fellows are very thankful to JDS programme, JICE, ICU, Professor Rivera, Ms Satoko Ohono, Ginowan Seminar House and all the other wonderful people who made this event a memorable one.

Uthpala Wijekoon

