

Field trips have always been something I look forward to, and this one was no exception. Since it was my last field trip before signing off as an MPMA student, I made sure to have fun, enjoy, and take in as much as I could. This kind of activity was one way to connect theory that we had learned from inside the classroom with real-world experiences and also to deepen our understanding and appreciation for the natural and cultural heritage of Japan.



Our first stop was Aso City, home to one of Japan's most iconic natural landmarks. Yeah, I call it iconic because the view was absolutely stunning, so beautiful, cool, and relaxing that no photo can justify and capture its beauty. We began at Aso Shrine, a historic Shinto site that has stood for centuries, even surviving the devastating 2016 Kumamoto earthquake. Walking through its peaceful grounds, I was reminded of the resilience of communities and the importance of preserving cultural heritage.



Next, we visited the Aso Volcano Museum, where we watched a film about the formation, activity, and impact of the Aso caldera, one of the world's largest. Seeing actual footage and interactive displays helped me understand the complexity of managing natural risks in active volcanic zones. Then came the highlight of the day, where



we climbed for 30 minutes at the Aso Mountain Crater. Standing at the edge, gazing at the smoking crater and the vast caldera landscape, I felt a mix of wonder and humility. Nature, in all its raw power and beauty, left a deep impression on me. It was exhausting but absolutely worth it.



Our evening was spent relaxing at a hotel with an onsen, where we shared stories, laughter, and reflections with fellow students. This simple moment of bonding was one of the most cherished parts of the trip. I realized that learning also happens over meals, in hot baths, and during conversations that create lasting friendships.



The second day began with a visit to the Kumamoto Earthquake Museum. This was particularly relevant to our MPMA studies. The museum offered an in-depth look at the 2016 earthquake, from seismic science to recovery efforts. What struck me most were the stories

of ordinary citizens on how they rebuilt their lives, collaborated with local governments, and pushed for more resilient communities. It was a concrete example of bottom-up approaches to post-disaster recovery, something we often talk about in class.



We ended our trip at the magnificent Kumamoto Castle, another historical site heavily damaged in the earthquake. The castle stood as a symbol of strength and continuity. Walking its grounds was like stepping into a living history book, one that told stories of war, peace,



and the enduring spirit of the people of Kumamoto. This field trip was both intellectually enriching and emotionally fulfilling. As an MPMA student, it reinforced the importance of integrating disaster risk reduction, heritage conservation, and community engagement in public policy. At the same time, it reminded me to pause, take in the scenery, enjoy the moment, and build friendships that make this academic journey even more meaningful.

For future students considering this program, I can say with confidence: these field trips are more than just tours, they are powerful learning experiences that stay with you long after the bus ride ends.

