

## First Winter Monogatari

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*Japan has always been my dream destination.* There are several things I love about this country and one these is that Japan's tourism is not only about showcasing its natural beauty, but also about sharing its rich culture and flavorful cuisine. Each prefecture has its own charm, and what makes it even more amazing is how the scenery transforms with every season. Nothing looks the same when the seasons change which makes you want to see more.



*Photo taken in Jozankei*

Hokkaido was the destination of my first field trip at Rikkyo University. During winter, it becomes one of Japan's most sought-after destinations and I am blessed to be able to visit and experience it. It is also one of the most stunning prefectures I have visited since arriving in Japan and I was mind-blown by the trees and mountains covered in pure white snow like it's some postcard I only used to look at or Instagram reels I only used to watch in the past.

During the first semester, I enrolled in Asian Economic Development, where I reported on part of Hokkaido's history. Through this course, I learned about Hokkaido and the Ainu people, and this new knowledge greatly piqued my interest. Visiting the place allowed me to immerse myself in the rich culture and history I

once studied in class. I even bought a handmade keychain crafted by the Ainu artists which is my proof of appreciating and supporting their culture.

During the field trip, we visited Lake Shikotsu where we attended a local snow festival and gazed at ice tunnels and towers as if we were walking through an icy canyon. We stayed in Jozankei, where a candlelight festival was being held. It was wonderful and warm despite the freezing temperature at night. My first onsen experience was a memorable one as it is one of the boldest decisions I have made in my life, and soaking in it after a long day was healing and restoring. The next day, we trekked in a snowy mountain near our hotel in Jozakei. This joyful activity lights up the heart like how the sun warmly makes the snow particles sparkle beautifully. Sliding down the icy slopes, making snow angel, eating melted



*Photo taken in a snowy mountain in Jozankei*

marshmallow, and making a snowman while enjoying the scenery were my best memories of the trip.



*Photo taken in a ramen shop in Sapporo*

Aside from the breathtaking snowy scenery, Hokkaido does not fall short when it comes to food and treats. Hokkaido's milk products are as white as snow and taste unlike any milk products I have had before. I have tried their fresh milk, milk soft serve ice cream, milk cookies, and milk pudding. Aside from their milk products, Hokkaido also offers variety of specialty dishes. My friends and I tried an authentic miso ramen in Sapporo, which allowed me to experience the rich flavors the region offers.

One of the reasons I chose to study in Japan was to better understand its tourism system, and this trip did not disappoint. Through this experience, I began to see why Japan is so successful as a global destination. Transportation is smooth and easy to navigate, each prefecture offers something distinctive, and seasonal festivals are thoughtfully organized and engaging. Visitors can enjoy both local specialties and international cuisine, and payment systems are generally convenient and flexible. Although some establishments still accept only cash, most shops and attractions provide multiple payment options, making travel easier for foreigners like me.

The field trip was short, and it was unfortunate that we could not visit Otaru, but it allowed me to enjoy a winter wonderland and immerse myself in Japanese culture and cuisine unique to Hokkaido prefecture. I am deeply grateful to God, who made living in my dream possible, with all of my heart and soul. I am also thankful to JICE and to the MPMA faculty—Kataoka-sensei and Lim-sensei—and to the staff, Uehara-san and Orihara-san because I am able to share this wonderful experience with friends and classmates. This field trip was more than just a winter getaway. It deepened my appreciation for Japan and strengthened my understanding of how culture, organization, and hospitality come together to create meaningful tourism experiences.