

Learning Even After the Lecture Ends

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What does it really mean to learn something, not just study it for a grade, but genuinely understand it?

My time in the Master of Public Management and Administration (MPMA) Program has shown me that some lessons are better understood if we can see how it affects real-life situation. Beyond Stata lectures, derivatives, and policy presentations, our field trips allowed us to experience some of the concepts we discussed in class.



MPMA Winter Fieldtrip in Sapporo in February 2026.
Photo: MPMA staff and students

As a second-year student now in my final semester, I have had the chance to join four overnight field trips: Asahikawa in December 2024, Kumamoto in July 2025, Sapporo in February 2026, and finally, Nagasaki in July 2026.



MPMA Winter Fieldtrip in Asahikawa in December 2024 .
Photo: MPMA staff and students



MPMA Summer Fieldtrip in Kumamoto in July 2025.
Photo: MPMA staff and students



MPMA Summer Fieldtrip in Nagasaki in July 2026.
Photo: MPMA staff and students

Although not every lesson could be demonstrated, some were better applied in our respective workplaces, our overnight field trips make the lectures become somewhat tangible.

Beyond the Itinerary

Before joining the program, I rarely researched the places I visited. As long as I knew where the beautiful spots were, I was usually satisfied. MPMA field trips changed that through the pre-seminars led by Shizuka-san , which encouraged us to understand a place before arriving. This also reminded me of something I experienced during my Nihongo lessons with

the Rikkyo Ladies' Club. We once had an exercise where we had to describe, in Japanese, a place we had recently visited. The sensei encouraged me to go beyond the itinerary and describe my *inshō*

(印象), or impression. That caught me off guard. Partly because my Japanese vocabulary was still limited, but mostly because I realized I had never really formed an impression in the first place. I had been treating trips like a photo album to flip through rather than experiences to reflect on. That became a small turning point for me.

From then on, I began trying to understand a place before I arrive, hoping to appreciate it more than simply checking another destination off my list.



Pre-seminar handouts for the four MPMA overnight field trips, introducing the themes, destinations, and issues explored before each trip.

A New Purpose When Time Froze at 11:02

Before visiting Nagasaki, I had already encountered some of its history in our Asian Economic Development course, including its connection to Christianity in Japan and the story of the hidden Christians.

One of the first exhibits that caught my attention was a clock frozen at 11:02, the

“The clock had stopped, but it took on a new purpose to preserve a glimpse of the past”

exact moment the atomic bomb detonated over the Urakami district on August 9, 1945. Written as a date, 11/02 could also be read as November 2, All Souls' Day. In Christian tradition, it is a day associated with remembering the departed. I knew this was simply a coincidence but looking at that stopped clock, 11:02 felt like an eternal All Souls' Day, a reminder of the lives lost and the importance of remembering them.



The clock that stopped at 11:02 in Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum.

I began to think that Nagasaki had done something similar. The city had experienced destruction, but it did not allow that destruction to become the end of its story. That brought me back to a lesson from Local Government and Public Services class: How does a local government rebuild a city after devastation?

I could no longer answer that question simply by looking at a textbook. I was standing in a city that had already lived through it.

Retelling Stories

The care for preserving history continued throughout our trip. We visited Shimabara Castle and the Mt. Unzen Disaster Memorial Hall, also known as the Gamadasu Dome. The memorial preserves the remains and stories of the 1991 Mount Unzen eruption, allowing visitors to understand the disaster and learn from it.



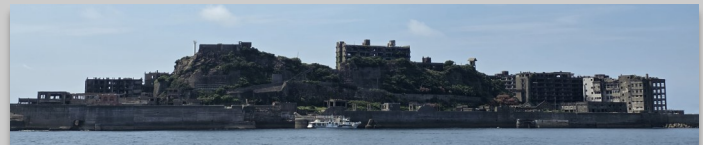
Philippine MPMA graduate students (from left to right) Lorie, Christine, Vee and Grace take a break at the Gamadasu Dome after the tour. Photo courtesy of Grace Castillo.

From traveling on land, we moved to the sea, heading toward Gunkanjima Island.



Boarding and returning from the Heritage Tour to Gunkanjima Island.

From afar, Gunkanjima looked almost like a battleship floating in the middle of the sea, true to its nickname, “Battleship Island.” Just like the clock at 11:02, Gunkanjima carries memories long after the people who created them have moved on. The community is gone, but the buildings remain, retelling its stories to every new group of visitors.



Gunkanjima Island, also known as “Battleship Island” for its resemblance to a battleship when viewed from afar.

B-I-N-G-O ...and Bingo was the Game-O!

Our field trip was not made up entirely of solemn historical reflections. One of the things we look forward to during our field trips is the games organized during the bus



Christine and Lorie during the bus ride to Shimabara Castle. Photo :Venus Custodio.

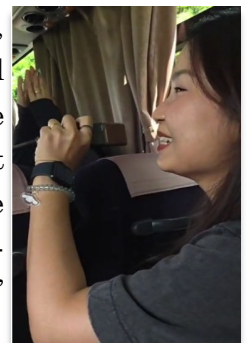
rides. During my first MPMA field trip, I won a Rikkyo tote bag in Janken pon game organized by the MPMA staff,

Orihara-san and Uehara-san. I still use the bag today. For this final trip, my fellow second-years, Sophy, Christine, and I, asked permission to organize a Bingo game during one of our bus rides.

It was surprisingly fun! Students, professors, and staff all waited eagerly for the next number. The most heart-stopping moment came when you needed only one number until someone sitting behind you gleefully shouts “Bingo!”



Sophy enthusiastically explains the Bingo game mechanics as participants get ready to play. Photo (left): Bunnary Rin.



first. It was one of those “almost but never enough” moments. Nevertheless, every win was met with applause and a little friendly teasing.

Not Quite the End

We had visited historical sites, explored new places, taken countless photographs, and shared meals and conversations with our classmates.

Surely, that was it but not quite. After our late lunch, while preparing to head to the airport, an unexpected earthquake struck.



An earthquake warning received on my phone while waiting for our flight back to Tokyo.

A tsunami warning followed, and our flight was delayed by about 30 minutes. The experience was unsettling, particularly because only the day before we had learned about how an earthquake and volcanic disaster had affected communities in the Unzen area. Now, we were experiencing an earthquake ourselves. Thankfully, everyone in our group was safe. We eventually departed that evening, although the delay meant arriving in Tokyo close to midnight, with everyone rushing to catch the last train

home, which everyone successfully did.

It was perhaps the most unexpected lesson of the entire trip. We had spent two days learning about disasters, communities, history, and resilience. Then, on our way home, we were reminded that these are not simply topics that belong in museums.

Natural disasters remain part of the realities faced by the communities we study and serve. For a public management student, that realization felt particularly significant.

Ending... Is It?

Looking back at the four MPMA field trips to Asahikawa, Kumamoto, Sapporo, and finally Nagasaki, I realize that what I will carry with me is not simply a collection of photographs.



Second-year graduate students (from left to right): June, Nam, Christine, and Lorie, on their flight back to Tokyo. Photo: Nguyen Thi Thuy Dung



Christine captures a moment with her Filipino kohais, Grace and Venus, at Oshidori-no-Ike before dusk.

At 11:02, I was reminded that history is not only something to remember, but something to understand; At Gunkanjima, I saw how places can continue telling stories even after their communities are gone; and on our way home, the earthquake reminded us that some of the issues we study are not con-

finied to textbooks but also part of the realities faced by communities. As my own time in the MPMA Program approaches its end, I am reminded that an ending does not mean that the learning stops. We may have reached the destination, but what we learn from it can continue long after we return home.

Perhaps that is exactly what made Nagasaki a fitting final lesson from our field trips with MPMA.



Lorie at the exhibits inside Shimabara Castle during the Nagasaki field trip. Photo: Christine Medrina