

〈Research Note〉

Japanese students and education tourism: reflections on a two-week English immersion programme in Malaysia

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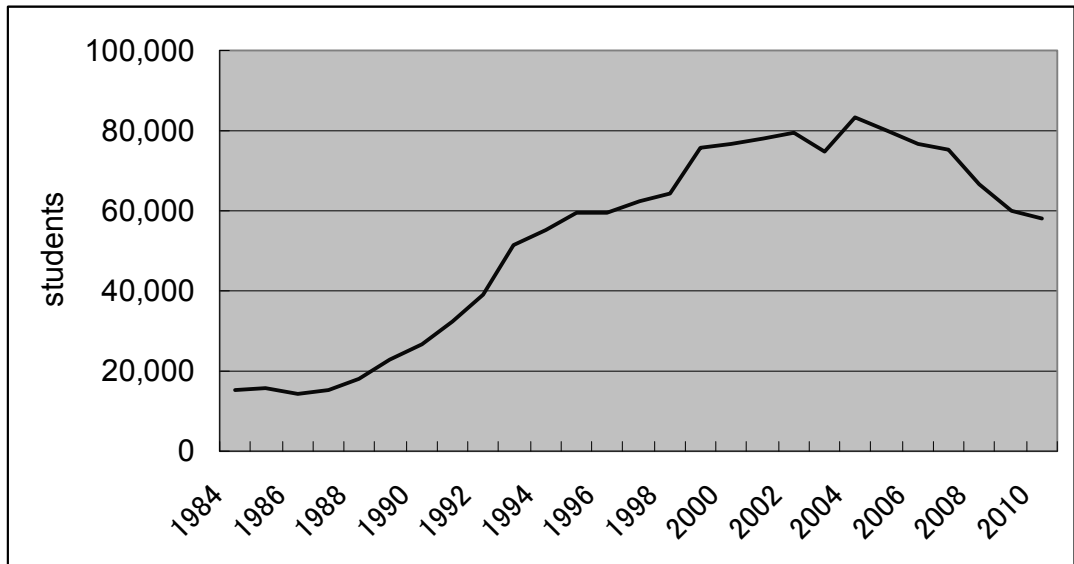
Introduction

As a means to improve the international standing of Japan and its education system, and more recently as a means to develop a more cosmopolitan workforce, the Japanese government has over the past 30 years made a succession of policy plans to increase the number of Japanese studying abroad. In the period to 2003 these plans met with considerable success as the number of Japanese students studying abroad rose from around 15,000 in the mid 1980s to some 83,000 in 2004 (Ikeda, 2011). However, the 2008 Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEXT) plan to encourage 300,000 Japanese to study abroad has fallen considerably short of its target: in 2010 just 58,000 Japanese students took courses of 3 months duration or longer outside Japan (figure 1). A malaise in Japanese *ryugaku* overseas study thus appears to be apparent.

The failure to reach the 2008 target can be seen partly in the long term uncertainty in the economy and the more recent Great Eastern Japan Earthquake of 2011 which depressed travel to, from, and within Japan severely. A second explanation is the considerable decline in the number of students studying in the United States and Britain. In 2001, 53,000 Japanese students took courses in one of these two countries however by 2009 this had fallen to fewer than 30,000 (Japan, Ministry of Justice, 2013). As shown in figure 1 this discrepancy of 23,000 is equivalent to almost all the decline in the numbers of Japanese studying abroad in the first decade of the new millennium.

At the same time as the number of students studying in the English speaking world has fallen, the numbers going to countries in Asia have, like their tourist counterparts seen rapid and sustained growth. Taking the example of Malaysia as typical of this trend, the total number of Japanese visitors - including students - to the South East Asian nation more than doubled between 2003 and 2012 to stand at 470,000 in 2012 (Japan Tourism Marketing Corporation, 2014). What opportunities can Malaysia thus offer Japan as a lifeline to escape from its *ryugaku* malaise?

Figure 1: Japanese students studying abroad (1984-2010)



Since 2003 “Education Tourism” has been a stated policy of Malaysian central government policy (Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Malaysia, 2013). This policy promotes Malaysia as a centre for excellence and champions regional international education collaboration while appealing the country’s stability, peace and technical progress (Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Malaysia, 2013). In this sense Malaysia can be said to be at the forefront of choice for educational sojourners, and may be a *de facto* means for MEXT to achieve its ambitious numerical targets. Indeed, despite strong competition from English speaking countries, Malaysia is the fourth choice destination for, and holds a growing share of, the overseas research and study tours conducted by Japanese secondary and tertiary education institutes (MEXT, 2008); between 2004 and 2008 the number of such visitors to Malaysia grew from 11,400 to 22,600 (JATA, 2013). These impressive figures are driven by Malaysia’s policy of English language as the medium of instruction at the tertiary level (and hence its potential for immersion and other language-based training courses) and its geographical proximity to Japan compared with both the United States and the UK.

In September 2013, the author was given the opportunity to act as an escort for 70 students from Josai University (JU) and Josai International University (JIU) in Malaysia for a 2-weeks English immersion programme. Together with two JU colleagues through guiding, chaperoning and advising students it was possible to observe some of the problems of study tour guiding within the circumstances of Malaysia’s education tourism. Using observations and anecdotal evidence during the two weeks’ sojourn, it is the purpose of this paper to consider the issues arising from the tour and the work of the *insotsu* (tour escort) in the Malaysian context in the hope that it can offer some insights for the preparation, implementation and management of future tours to the South East Asian country.

The English Immersion Programme at UTAR

As one of the key platforms of its educational philosophy, Josai Education Corporation, incorporating JU and JIU encourages its students to study abroad at some point during their four years as undergraduates. Students at both universities are able to select from a wide range of programmes from short international *kenshu* (study tours) to language immersion programmes and full-time overseas studies in a range of English speaking and non-English speaking countries. The 2 weeks' English Immersion Programme (EIP) held at Tunku Abdul Rahman University (UTAR), Kampar, Malaysia in September is one such programme.

The UTAR EIP is a two-credit programme in its second year and is open to both JU and JIU students. In 2013 the programme attracted 70 participants (including two who had attended in 2012) with the majority (49 students) from JU. Of the JIU students, one half (11) were from the Faculty of Tourism. There was no structured screening of students prior to the September departure and the majority of students were false beginner level English speakers. Three *insotsu* from Japan (the author and two JU instructors) accompanied the students throughout the programme. Most of the 70 students were meeting the three *insotsu* for the first time.

The total period of the sojourn was 16 days for which UTAR produced a programme consisting of English language training, cultural activities, and excursions including one overnight trip (see Table 1). Accommodation was provided for in the student residences on the UTAR Campus. Breakfast and lunch were produced by an independent caterer, while evening meals were mostly taken at local restaurants selected by the hosts at UTAR.

Teaching was delivered through UTAR's Centre for Extension Education which provided two ESL instructors per class. English language training consisted 30 classroom contact hours of the programme while cultural activities comprised 15 hours. English classes were mostly held in the morning and cultural activities took place in the afternoon. Communicative methods were employed and students worked in pairs, or groups and were encouraged to speak out during class. Students were streamed into one of four classes based on the result of a placement test. A friendly classroom environment was created through the existence of five Malaysian student helpers in each of the four classes. Five days were allocated for excursions and airport transfers, and one remaining day had no scheduled classes, events, or activities. A 'graduation ceremony' was held at the end of the programme.

Table 1: Summary of UTAR English Immersion Programme

Day	Morning Activities	Afternoon Activities	Accommodation
Day 1	Meet at Narita Airport; departure to KL	Arrive at KL; transfer to hotel.	Hotel near Putrajaya
Day 2	Lecture by former Tourism Minister	Transfer to Kampar (UTAR)	Student residence (Danish House)
Day 3	Departure to Cameroon Highlands	Sightseeing in Cameroon Highlands	Hotel in Cameroon Highlands
Day 4	Sightseeing in Cameroon Highlands	Return to Kampar	Danish House
Day 5	Welcome event; placement test	English classes	Danish House
Days 6 - 9	English classes	English classes; cultural activities	Danish House
Day 10	Day trip to theme park		Danish House
Day 11	Free (no activities scheduled)		Danish House
Day 12	English classes	Cultural activities	Danish House
Day 13	English classes	English classes; post test evaluation	Danish House
Day 14	Cultural event	Graduation ceremony	Danish House
Day 15	Depart to KL; sightseeing	Sightseeing in KL; depart to airport	On board aircraft
Day 16	Arrive Japan		

As suggested by Table 1, over the first four days - prior to the commencement of formal teaching - the group made consecutive changes in accommodation and travelled extensively. The original plan had called for classes to commence on day 2 but a last minute amendment to the programme to include a lecture given by the former Minister for Tourism Malaysia Dr Ng Yen Yen in Putrajaya on the day after arrival was made. As a consequence rather than travelling to UTAR immediately upon arrival students spent their first night at a hotel in the Kuala Lumpur area. After receiving the lecture in the morning of day 2, the group travelled to UTAR, but this was soon followed on days 3 and 4 by an overnight excursion to the Cameroon Highlands about 2 hours from the UTAR campus. It was thus not until day 5 that a classroom routine was established.

The routine of classes between days 5 and 14 was broken up by one day at a theme park (day 10) and a free

day (day 11) when no activities were scheduled. As *insotsu*, two important elements of days 5-14 were the picking up of students from their accommodation for breakfast, and also eating as a group of 70 in the evening at restaurants in and around Kampar.

Group tours: cultural interface, emotional labour and tourist regression

Despite the growing independence of travellers from Japan, the Group Tour (GPT) remains the mainstream mode of travel in Asia (Wang, Hsieh, & Huan, 2000). One of the key factors that makes such tours a success is a good balance of both ‘experience’ and ‘operations’ (Wong & McKercher, 2012), or those activities provided for the travellers and those relating to the actual management of the activities by the tour leaders respectively. Since making an ‘experience’ is key to traveller perception of places visited (Ap & Wong, 2001), the tour leader (i.e. *insotsu*) can have a great influence on visitor insight to, and enjoyment of, a destination.

A second factor that is significant to international travel is its inherent cross-cultural interface. Visitors and the visited have different expectations and interpretations of this interface and it can thus be the guide who makes understanding of deeds, actions or words of the host or the country on behalf of the group as a whole. This is particularly true if the language of the host is poorly understood by the visitor, and where there is limited contact with the host. Pizam & Sussmann (1995) found that behaviour of group tourists is dependent on this interface while LeClerc & Martin (2004) have shown that tour guide communication varies across cultures. Both studies intimate that cultural dissimilarity can cause misunderstandings, confusion or dissatisfaction for tourists if guides’ messages are not communicated correctly. Guides or *insotsu* thus need to expend considerable “emotional labour” (Hochschild, 1979) to ensure customer satisfaction.

A second key issue with guiding in a foreign environment is the issue of tourist “regression” (Dann, 1996). This refers to the manner in which tourists become childlike and reliant on others when placed in a foreign environment; a condition exacerbated by the organized group tour since tourists are “encapsulated” (Weightman, 1987) in their own lingual-cultural bubble. Surrounded by their own language or cultural norms tour group tourists thus tend to look inward to the group and thus reinforce their outsider status in countries they visit. As a leader of a tour group it is thus vital to be ready not only to concern yourself with the individual tourists (i.e. “customers”) but also the group “climate” as a whole, and in light of these to adjust the programme or “tasks” accordingly (Wong & Lee, 2012).

Issues during the study tour

From the assembly point at Narita Airport until return to Japan some 16 days later, *insotsu*, and the UTAR staff (in Malaysia) had to handle a vast range of scheduling, logistical, disciplinary, health, language and personal issues. These ranged from the trivial such as checking students had names on their luggage

identification tags to more urgent problems such as taking poorly students to the clinic or dealing with students' illicit purchases of alcohol. Each day presented a different set of problems thus making the working environment dynamic.

A useful framework for looking at such group tour dynamics has been proposed by Wong & Lee (2012) who highlight the issues of "tasks", "customers" and "group climate". With reference to these three key areas the current paper will highlight examples relevant to three practical issues identified as significant during the UTAR EIP. These are: issues associated with the experiences of travel; issues associated with food and accommodation; and issues of the learning environment. In this way it is hoped to build up a relevant framework to enable us to better assess the experiences, demands and needs of the students (i.e. customers) in the UTAR EIP.

Travel Issues

Issues arising from travel during the UTAR IEP can be placed into one of three categories; those associated with transfers to and from airports and at the airports themselves; those associated with bus trips; and periods of free time during excursions.

Airports

As mentioned above students and *insotsu* on the UTAR EIP met at Narita Airport for the first time. Lacking mutual familiarity between each other, the presence of travel agency representatives, other university staff and dedicated Japan Airlines staff was invaluable to ensure the group checked-in in a timely manner. Their existence did not insure against questions from anxious students concerned about taking off in the poor weather on the day of departure or asking how they should spend the 7 hour flight. In the two hours between meeting the group and taking our seats on board a number of issues that would reoccur throughout the two weeks had already made themselves apparent.

The first was co-ordinated movement of the group itself. At first, students seemed to be either reluctant to move as a group, or were independently moving around the terminal building. Also *insotsu* had yet to learn the basics of chaperoning the group and as a consequence the first obligatory group photo was time consuming. Although we had not yet left Japan some students had already adopted a childlike reliance on the *insotsu* while others disregarded any word *insotsu* said.

Changing money was also troublesome for the early group dynamic. Complying with group expectations is a well established concept in Japanese sociology and, at Narita Airport this made itself apparent when almost half the group of 70 flocked to one exchange counter to purchase Malaysian Ringgit! Students chose to ignore guidance to a second counter just 50m distant and the process of changing money took more than 30 minutes to complete. From these examples it is clear that the students' lack of familiarity with the situation, the *insotsu* as teachers, and the dynamics of the group made it difficult for the *insotsu* to complete tasks as much as the

problem was the lack of knowledge on the part of the *insotsu*.

The movement of the group through the security, similarly revealed how students had already regressed to relying on the 3 guides. Despite well presented documentation regarding departure procedures students seemed ill-prepared for standard airport security regulations such as removal of metal items from pockets. Once airside, impromptu student purchases en route to the gate also illustrated the need for “task” plan completion and the importance of a “group climate”.

Proceeding through to the baggage claim at Kuala Lumpur Airport also gave a hint of what might happen if the *insotsu* did not promote group climate better. Firstly, after passing through immigration students were instructed to wait at a visible point until the rest of the group had been processed. However, some of the group ignored this and searched for toilets (they had been instructed to do so before landing) or browsed nearby shops causing some confusion when a necessary head count was made before proceeding to baggage claim. Although students had been placed into groups of 8 people with leaders, the routine of moving in a group and having one person to take responsibility for it had not yet been clearly established. Moreover, since the guides were not familiar with each student’s face it made the work of locating any temporarily missing persons difficult. Beyond customs, UTAR representatives led by Mr Faizul took over the task of guiding but even during the transfer to the buses two students wandered to another floor and had to be found. These examples demonstrate the importance of having very closely controlled limits in which the group can move through an airport, and particularly it seems on arrival at an overseas destination.

Departure from Kuala Lumpur two weeks later despite being veterans of two weeks of guiding was no less complicated due to our unavoidable late arrival at the check in counter. However, after three hours in a bus without a toilet and with unspent Ringgit in their pockets students were unhappy to wait at a designated spot to allow the whole group to pass through immigration together. Instead, several students disappeared and headcounts of students were rendered difficult and thus caused some delay to our last minute boarding of the aircraft. The lesson learned seems to be that not only is a toilet break perhaps the most important thing for a guide to consider but also previous knowledge of an airport’s layout to avoid any similar occurrence.

Bus

During the UTAR EIP two buses were used to transport students to/from Kuala Lumpur Airport, for excursions, and for shorter trips to restaurants in and around Kampar. Students were assigned to one of the two buses for the 2 weeks of the programme dependent on the group in which they had been placed. On each bus one or more *insotsu* from Japan and Malaysia travelled together with the students. On the Cameroon Highlands (CH) excursion and for some evening restaurant trips we were accompanied by UTAR students as well. Translations were provided by Japanese speaking staff including one UTAR staff member who joined the CH excursion.

Spending much of their time on buses means as Weightman (1987) suggests that students were isolated from

the outside and did not need to necessarily make sense of what they were seeing or where they were going. During the CH excursion this was exacerbated by the large number of places visited and increased time spent on the bus. Had fewer places been chosen and students had more time to interact with the place they were seeing a closer more meaningful understanding of the Malaysia outside the bus window might have been possible. However, at one of the longer stops where students did have a chance to visit a market, purchase souvenirs, or buy a coffee it was clear from their reaction they enjoyed real interaction with Malaysia rather than time spent on the bus. Similar connectivity through interaction was also apparent when the group visited the *The Lost World of Tambun* theme park. Where transfer time from UTAR was relatively short and students had more time away from the encapsulation of the bus, students made their first meaningful interaction with local Malaysian people beyond the UTAR staff.

One of the key issues during transfers by bus was the interaction between UTAR staff and the *insotsu* from Japan. Through idea sharing, discussion, negotiation and reflection we were able to build up close and friendly relations which allowed for changes to tasks at short notice, but also enabled us to create a positive group climate on the bus. This fact was made particularly clear during the day excursion to the theme park. On this day we were provided with less efficient and hesitant Malay staff and relations between *insotsu* and hosts were less co-ordinated and less effective. On other days thanks to strong co-operation, candid discussion and exchange of information we could help our hosts to understand any behaviour by Japanese students that may have bewildered or baffled our hosts while they could provide insights into Malaysia and thus inform our students better.

Although shorter in duration, the use of buses to take students for evening meals also created some issues. Firstly, the logistics of students boarding two buses and having both buses arrive at a given restaurant at the same given time was quite difficult to co-ordinate. Students aired some frustration at the long time spent waiting around for “the other bus” especially before meal times. In some cases I think students would have preferred to simply walk to the local McDonalds. Although unrelated to the buses themselves, after a few days some I sensed some fatigue amongst students vis a vis travel to restaurants each evening by bus. This was not helped by the anxiety amongst some students about the food they would eat, whether they would be able to eat it, or how hot it would be.

Free Time

Free time is key element to any group tour. Even the most tightly controlled tour group tours will include an element of freedom in their itineraries so that tourists can make their own understanding of a destination rather than having it completely interpreted for them by the tour guide. Free time gives visitors an opportunity to become independent and more confident in the alien culture while giving tour guides a chance to plan and prepare for the rest of the tour.

Free time was built into the UTAR EIP each day after evening meals and although students were expected to

stay within the environs of the Danish House accommodation most welcomed the chance to unwind with their Japanese peers or have an informal chance to meet Malaysian students living in the immediate neighbourhood.

Excursions also included considerable free time. Visits to the Cameroon Highlands (days 3 and 4), *The Lost World of Tambun* theme park (day 10), and day 15 in Kuala Lumpur all featured extended periods of time the students could use as they pleased. In addition several impromptu shopping trips where students were free to do as they pleased were organised to a local hypermarket. These passed off without incident, although it is worth recalling here the problem that such a shopping trip caused on the group's first full day in Malaysia.

En route to Kampar, and in response to students' requests for shopping time, students were given 60 minutes to explore a shopping mall near Kuala Lumpur. Some students exchanged money, others looked at the goods in the store, but the majority went into the supermarket located in the mall. However when we re-boarded the bus it was apparent that some of the more confident male students had purchased alcohol while unsupervised. This caused some consternation for our hosts and also a small crisis for the *insotsu* from Japan. After extensive discussion with our hosts we decided to hold an unannounced meeting on arrival in UTAR to reiterate to students the policy of UTAR (alcohol prohibited), and also the position of alcohol in Muslim countries. From this, as *insotsu*, we learned that any future shopping trips would need to be more strictly researched, and particularly the places where alcohol would be available. On subsequent shopping trips we thus assigned one person to 'guard' shelves where alcohol could be purchased (generally a relatively small area): as a consequence the same problem did not reoccur. Shopping is a key activity for Japanese tourists and it would have been disproportionate to have taken away the free time shopping completely. Instead through cooperation, discussion and reasoning an appropriate balance was struck that satisfied customer (i.e. the students) needs and expediency (Ahmed & Krohn, 1993). This illustrates the difficult balance that needs to be struck and suggests at the emotional labour required to satisfy a group as large as the one on the UTAR EIP.

Problems with food and accommodation

Food and accommodation are two of the principal needs of the international tourist, and it is inevitable that for any tour (in particular those that travel across cultural boundaries) local cuisine will be a 'must do' activity. This is particularly true for international Japanese travellers (Reisinger & Waryszak, 1996). Similarly accommodation has independently been shown to be a make or break element of overseas tours made by Japanese students (Hirano, 2004; Matsuda, 2012). It should be of no surprise therefore that these two aspects may produce a mixture of curiosity and anxiety, as well as satisfaction and fear in equal measure when discussing Japanese visitors abroad.

Food

Thanks to its ethnic make up and warm climate, Malaysia is a country of wide culinary choices. Eating seems to be a national pastime enjoyed by all sections of society and is - compared to many South East Asian countries - hygienic and nutritious. On the UTAR EIP programme two meals per day were provided by independent Chinese Malay caterers. Discussion with them revealed that they had previously served Japanese and thanks to this experience prepared suitable food for the students and were ready to adjust the menu whenever necessary. At each meal they provided students a smorgasbord of familiar and less familiar fare but thanks to their customer focused orientation and close discussion with the *insotsu* successful changes to the menu were made. For example, on the first day Chinese Malay foods were largely ignored by students but when it was mentioned that salad, or ham and eggs would be a popular morning option the necessary changes were made. Again, this shows the need for friendly and respectful relations with all providers in the study tour destination.

Most evenings the group took bus transport to one of many nearby restaurants that had come with the tried and tested recommendation of UTAR. As a mostly Chinese Malay city, restaurants in Kampar mostly offer Chinese fare and Some students voiced their objection by exclaiming ‘not Chinese food *again*’ and sometimes I felt this seemed to transfer itself to the bus on the way to the restaurants each night. However overshadowing this problem was the condition of toilets in many of the restaurants we visited. This issue is not unique to Kampar, indeed the Malaysian government recognizes this as one of the key obstacles to overcome in order to make Malaysian tourism more competitive (Ng, 2013); it was certainly one of the most frequently voiced complaints by students on the UTAR EIP. In particular where access to toilets was through a kitchen - as is relatively common in Malaysia - students were visibly suspicious of the providence of the respective restaurant’s cuisine.

In addition to this was the anxiety created by the basic decor and environment of many of the restaurants the group visited. Many restaurants in Malaysia serve food on plastic tableware, and furniture is often simple, well used and worn. For students accustomed to superficially clean and hygienic conditions of Japanese restaurants it seemed to come as a ‘shock’. One explanation for this ‘shock’ may have been caused by the hotel accommodation on day 3 in Cameroon Highlands. Here, students enjoyed an evening meal in a 4 star hotel and with hindsight it was an experience the students clearly enjoyed in comparison to some of the more rustic Malaysian dining outings that were to follow. In one such latter case, in spite of excellent and original fare students seemed more concerned about a few flies than the food. Again, better pre-departure orientation and grater understanding by students of the realities of countries with tropical climates would help to prepare risk averse and overly cautious students for any such ‘shock’. As *insotsu* I couldn’t help come away from many of the restaurants immensely satisfied at the food but incredibly frustrated at students who were unwilling to try food due to the surroundings they were found in. At times I felt embarrassed and sorry for our hosts.

Accommodation

Over the 16 days students stayed in hotels on two occasions and at UTAR Danish House student residence for most of the time. In Danish House students shared a room (not necessarily a close friend) in a block of 8-10 students. Male and female accommodations were separated by about 100 metres.

At the two hotels the key issue that needed to be dealt with was room or more specifically bed-sharing arrangements. In order to reduce costs on the first and third nights students were asked to share a room. This in itself is not unusual however students were in some cases even asked to share the same queen size bed! On the first night part of the reason for this was due to the late booking of the accommodation, however on the 3rd night in the Cameroon Highlands it is unclear why some students had been placed in rooms with one bed other than it was a culturally acceptable practice to Malaysians. On the first night students had been warned of the situation and but on the 3rd night the bed-sharing came as a complete surprise to everyone. Unlike the first night however the Cameroon Highlands Hotel was able to remedy the problem quickly and efficiently. One interesting anecdote from the case of the 3rd night is that until the *insotsu* had checked the rooms, students had not voiced any complaint about having to share a bed for a second time. Lack of language ability may be part of the explanation but given the presence of a Japanese speaking *insotsu* this seems unlikely. Instead it seemed the students had resigned themselves to the situation of having to share a bed for a second time and that “nothing could be done”. In this sense the students sometimes showed great adaptability when it was not necessarily expected.

The accommodation at UTAR Danish House is a modern, well appointed student residence divided into blocks in which 8-10 students are housed. Each room has its own air conditioner, electric shower, power sockets and electric fan. Further air conditioning units and a refrigerator are located on the ground floor in a common area. On the first night as students showered, cooled down, charged up mobile phones and used other appliances, many of the residences lost power as the fuse boxes became overloaded. This caused much frustration and annoyance, and an undercurrent that “this wouldn’t happen in Japan”. Resolving the situation proved to be quite complex for UTAR as it required a rewiring of much of the residence during days 3 and 4. Students were subsequently advised to switch off appliances that were not in use, but the ‘joke’ of Malaysian electricity supply continued amongst students throughout our stay. This issue was compounded on the 4th day by the issue of wifi provision.

In recent years mobile technology and communication have become the preferred method for students to communicate with one another. Electronic media is the preferred way to access music, video and other streaming data. To take advantage of this, consumers require relatively high speed broadband and unlimited access contracts to the world-wide-web. As part of the package for students at UTAR, JIU purchased an allocated volume of data for students to access from the Danish House wifi network for the 2 week duration. However, by day 4 all the allocation had been used up! The inability to access the web caused considerable frustration amongst the students and also a feeling of disbelief since the students are accustomed to 24/7 unlimited web access. Further investigation told us that students had been downloading movies, music and other

data heavy media. After consultation with UTAR, we briefed students on responsible net usage and a second batch of data access was purchased; again this was consumed in just 4 days. Eventually students were given access on campus through a dedicated password but dissatisfaction with the provision was enough for some students to purchase portable wifi at considerable personal expense. Although aware of the ubiquitous use of mobile technology by students, as an *insotsu* this experience was a very good lesson to learn.

Learning Environment

Although language progress by students who attend short term language programmes may be limited (Hanna & Duggan, 2005), students are motivated to attend such programmes because they believe language development is possible (Matsuda, 2012). A second motivation to attend study trips abroad is the gain students believe they can make in intercultural competence (Adachi, 2010). At the same time in terms of classroom instruction two important elements can help to ensure the success of such language programmes: good in-class support (Tanaka, 2000) and manageable class size (Hirano, 2004). The ideal elements of a programme of studies should thus comprise small groups learning not only language but also cultural competencies that are supported by a team of professionals and student helpers.

In these respects the UTAR EIP is exemplary since it covers both language and cultural training, is taught by a team of two patient, professional teachers with ample support provided by a group of motivated student helpers. We might therefore expect few problems to have arisen from the classroom content of the programme. Indeed, this seems to have been the case.

Meanwhile, based on my own observations of classes and anecdotes from students themselves: those streamed into the top class perceived progress as having been made both in terms of language acquisition and cultural knowledge. However, in the lower two groups I felt a lack of motivation amongst the students was evident despite the best efforts of the teachers and student helpers. Although some classroom tasks and methods may have been unfamiliar to students accustomed to learning English in Japan, it seemed more that students in the lower classes were poorly prepared to study and lacked the will to participate in the class fully and make full benefit from it. Candid discussion with the teachers suggested they also felt a reluctance amongst students to speak out, offer answers freely, or provide suggestions. Research into Japanese students on study tours abroad suggests such problems are perennial (Takazawa, 1995).

At a more general level, some students complained that the Malaysian teachers had a ‘different’ accent or spoke too quickly, or could not explain in Japanese. However this should be seen as a merit rather than a criticism of the UTAR teachers. Indeed, by placing students in an English only environment students were able to reflect on their language education in Japan and also to learn new cultural norms and values.

Conclusion

Even though the number of Japanese students going abroad to study on long term programmes has been in decline in recent years the number of students engaging in programmes of two months duration or less is showing strong growth. Japanese government data shows that between 2009 and 2012 overseas sojourns by Japanese nationals of one to two months grew at a rate of 33%. This is the fastest growing demographic of all overseas visitations by Japanese nationals (Ministry of Justice, 2013). The burgeoning education tourism sector is a major part of this demographic and countries like Malaysia are at its forefront. The narrative and associated observations of this paper suggest that there are hurdles for all the stakeholders involved in education tourism between Japan and Malaysia that need to be overcome before the latter can be considered as a sustainable means to extricate Japan from its *ryugaku* malaise.

At the national policy level, Malaysia needs to consider how best to upgrade its infrastructure particularly in the area of plumbing and toilet hygiene. The ‘experience’ of travel cannot be a merely visual experience, people also demand the creature comforts of home. In tandem with this, individuals now expect to be connected and contactable on a 24-hours a day basis. This requires institutions to regularly upgrade data technology and to invest in systems that enable people to maintain contact with those in their home countries. Destinations are no longer ‘retreats’ or ‘escapes’, they have become a part of the world that we inhabit. Equally there is a responsibility for tourist donor nations such as Japan to better prepare its citizens for travel abroad. Here ‘better’ means a realistic image of the country visited should be portrayed beyond that of the holiday brochure or tourism bureau publicity. This is especially true for education tourism where students are less “encapsulated” than pleasure tourists and are more exposed to the country as lived in by the local population. Such responsibility also lies with those who guide students. As the UTAR EIP showed, this can come from close, friendly, and ties of equal partnership between the host and guest. Through such understanding and co-operation better and more appropriate solutions to problems, no matter how trivial they may seem, can be found.

The institutional level also needs to mimic the national level by providing better and more up-to-date information concerning the place to be visited. Pre-departure orientations cannot cover all experiences students can expect to make, but they do help build the foundation of the visit to be undertaken (Hanna & Duggan, 2005). As an important complement to education tourism post-return follow up should also be seen as an integral part of this process rather than being an ‘after thought’

At the individual level a range of issues need to be addressed. Individual responsibility even for student education tourism group members is vital. In doing so students will gain a more informed and critical view of the place they visit and ask more relevant and pertinent questions whilst abroad. Also as the concept of ‘satisfaction’ becomes more central to our evaluation of places (Ahmed and Krohn, 1993), guides and providers of tours need to create a more equitable “group climate” while tailor making tours. The needs of the customer in spite of concepts such as “regression” or “encapsulation” are key and as shown here, this requires flexibility in

planning and adaptability in procedure and strategy.

Taking all these issues into consideration education tourism such as shown by the anecdotes from the UTAR EIP can complement Malaysia's other Japonocentric tourism focused policies such as *My Second Home Malaysia* (Tourism Malaysia Research, 2013), and bring economic and cultural benefit to both nations. It is however the individuals such as the students, *insotsu* and local providers of education tourism such as those described here that are the important players in ensuring whether education tourism can prove to be a long term success story for all stakeholders.

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Japanese students and tourism education: reflections on a two-week English immersion programme in Malaysia

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Abstract

As the numbers of Japanese students studying abroad declines, short term study tours to countries where the political impetus to encourage education tourism is high can offer Japan a lifeline to revive its route to internationalisation. Through the experiences of a two week immersion programme in Malaysia, this study examines the issues associated with guiding, operating and managing one such study tour of 70 Japanese students. The conclusions drawn reveal that despite the inherent advantages of cultural exposure and knowledge acquisition, conservatism and lack of confidence during short term study tours can limit the benefit students gain from joining them. The need for pre-departure orientation; close communication between all key participants in the study tour; and strong leadership by tour leaders are highlighted as keys to success.

Key words: education tourism, study tour, *insotsu*, tour group, encapsulation, regression.