

# CEPEX JSA Tokyo Internship Experience Report 2018

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## Week One: Seeing Japan for the First Time

As I boarded the flight to Narita Airport, I still could not believe where I was headed and what the two weeks would include. While I had seen multiple YouTube videos and learned about Japan in class, the upcoming days enlightened me on the Japanese culture, discovering new attitudes and perspectives of life that cannot be extensively described.

Upon arriving at the hotel in Akasaka, I felt overwhelmed and excited over the numerous differences I had already experienced, including 7/11's cheesecake and Japanese hospitality. The next day, I prepared for my first day at the Sojitz Research Institute (Soken) and was beyond nervous to not only attempt to understand the Tokyo Metro system, but also arrive at the Iino Building with minor mistakes. After accidentally walking into the wrong building, I finally arrived at the lobby and was greeted by Yui-san, who cheerfully welcomed me. Arriving at the office, I immediately began to meet the team of Soken, especially those that would help me, and those interested in Latin America or the United States. After discussing my presentation idea of Japan and China in Latin America, I met with Global HR who allowed me to understand Japanese business culture, the history of Sojitz, and the importance of the sogo shosha in today's society. This new insight allowed me to comprehend Sojitz's work in Latin America and interview Momota-san on business development in the region. Momota-san not only gave me



My first sight of Japan!

key points of the past and present of Sojitz in key Latin American countries, but also awestruck me as he spoke perfect Spanish and considered himself "half Latino". This was my first interaction meeting and hearing a Japanese businessman who had extensive history in Brazil and Venezuela, which further pushed me to present the lengthy connection of Japan and key countries in Latin America. That evening I headed to Tada-san's apartment along with Kurokawa-san, where I tried Japanese snacks and practiced some Japanese with Okamoto-san, a Hokkaido University student who met Mrs. Akie Abe that same day! My first day ended spectacularly as meeting multiple, amazing



Tada-san, Kurokawa-san, Okamoto-san and me

people eager to help me in Japan relieved my worries.

The remaining days of my first week at Soken were characterized by not only researching on my topic, but also tasting new foods and trying to have conversations in Japanese. On Thursday morning, I prepared for my interview at the Mexican Embassy, while by lunchtime Yui-san and Kurokawa-san took me to try udon and visit Daiso Japan for the first time. By late afternoon, I headed to the Mexican Embassy with Iwanami-san and Ro-san to discuss Japanese social and economic trends in Mexico. While the interview was helpful for facts on Mexico, it was incredibly interesting to learn that the city I once lived in, León, has the highest population of Japanese residents as well as to see advertisements for the film *Coco* and tequila in Japanese! Although I found facts on the cross relationships between Japan and Latin America, seeing Mexican representatives speak fluent Japanese and promote interaction between the countries brought immense amount of pride. It proved the necessity for partners to continue their efforts to learn each other's languages or cultural norms to increase benefits.



Entrance to Sensoji Temple

Once the weekend arrived, I was especially interested in seeing the historical side of Tokyo, which included visiting shrines and the gardens of the Imperial Palace. Heading over to Asakusa on Saturday, I mastered understanding the metro system, saw the Prime Minister's official residence, and saw the amount of tourists eager to see Japan. Eventually, I reached Sensoji Temple and experienced a Buddhist temple for the first time. While the architecture was beautiful, the interactions between people of different cultures was equally mesmerizing. For example, females wearing saris and kimonos excitedly joined into one picture even though they did not know each other. Similarly, the gardens at the Imperial Palace gave me a glimpse of Japan's history and love for nature with its relation to religion.

On Sunday morning, I was particularly excited because I would be learning about Japanese tea ceremonies with Iwanami-san and her family in Kamakura. Upon arriving at Iwanami-san's home, I met her father and was explained the significance of the ceremony, especially with its connection to history. Because Iwanami-san was going to perform for me, her father helped me imagine how each step would have occurred in historical days and taught me how to act in accordance with the ceremony. After Iwanami-san finished her performance, they offered to teach me how to make matcha tea and how to serve it for Iwanami-san. Afterwards, we headed to the center of Kamakura for lunch, visited Tsurugaoka Hachimangū shrine, and shopped for omiyage!



Iwanami-san, her family, and me



Iwanami-san performing a Japanese tea ceremony

## Week Two: Interning and Living in Japan

The next week at Soken was particularly focused on meeting more staff members with expertise in Japanese business in Brazil, Argentina, and other key countries, while visiting new parts of the city with the help of Soken staff. On the first days of the week, I met both Tazumi-san and Hanihara-san, who similarly had extensive history in Latin America. Both helped me understand the projects within my designated countries, like solar power and automobiles, as well as the relationship of the Nikkei with Japanese companies. In addition, I had the opportunity to meet with Mindy Allen, who works as a legal counsel for Sojitz Corporation. Although I had informational interviews during the DC internship, Mrs. Allen answered questions from the perspective of a lawyer, with experience in the United States and Japan, helping me see the multiple possibilities Japan offers.

On Wednesday, I met with Takahashi-san of the Sojitz Foundation, who not only gave me a warm welcome and spoke a bit of Spanish, he also introduced me to Japanese magic! In fact, Takahashi-san gifted me multiple materials to learn magic tricks and practice my Japanese. In the evening, Yui-san, Iwanami-san, and I headed to Yokohama to visit the Japan Overseas Migration Museum. The museum was dedicated in tracing the history of Japanese migration starting from the 1800s to Hawaii, the United States, and eventually Brazil. It seemed particularly important to represent the lifestyles of Nikkei throughout time and how it mixed with local culture. Our visit to the museum was incredibly impactful for my discussion of Japanese

social trends in Latin America and understanding how unique blends occurred, like Nikkei cuisine.

On the final days of my second week, I began to finalize details for my presentation, but went to the Brazilian Embassy with Iwanami-san for my final interview. Because Brazil has the largest Japanese population outside of Japan, the importance of culture and economic relationships was a consistent theme. Although crises may impact the growth of a relationship, it became clear that Japan's history and role in Brazil cannot be paralleled. Afterwards, Iwanami-san and I went to Yui-san's hometown near Sendagi, which still had Tokyo's older architecture. After some shopping, we went to a local okonomiyaki restaurant, where I realized Japan really loved baseball! On Friday, it was my last work day before presenting, but that evening my coworkers took me to an izakaya for my farewell dinner. I enjoyed my favorite of karagee, while discussing topics of American youth, soccer, and tarot cards.



Yui-san, Iwanami-san, and me eating okonomiyaki. Baseball memorabilia was found all over



Soken members and me after my farewell dinner



Japanese dessert from Ginza Cozy Corner

While my final weekend in Tokyo concluded rapidly, I successfully visited the areas of Shibuya, Meiji Shrine, and Harajuku, while finding omiyage. At Meiji Shrine, I witnessed a Japanese wedding ceremony and the quietness of the grounds, while at Shibuya and Harajuku I was exposed to Japanese youth, culture, and fashion. Before my weekend concluded, however, I met up with Tada-san to discuss my experience in Tokyo, see the city from his rooftop, and have dinner with his wife at a tempura restaurant.



Tada-san's wife and me

### Week Three: Presentation Day and Reflections

On my final day at Soken, I presented on the economic and social trends of Japan and China in Latin America, with a close focus on Japan's impact in the region. While it was a bit nerve wrecking to present, the importance of Nikkei in Latin America and other future trends were important to identify, as it is sometimes forgotten. Although my internship was only two weeks, I believe the experience allowed me to appreciate Japanese hospitality as well as the opportunity of meeting people eager to discuss a wide range of topics. My experience in Tokyo and Sojitz strengthened my desire of learning more about Japan and providing a liaison with either the United States or Latin America in the future. However, this desire was heavily influenced by all those at Soken who helped me with my confusions or were eager to hear about my experiences. To everyone that helped me through this journey, 本当にありがとうございました!



Tada-san and me

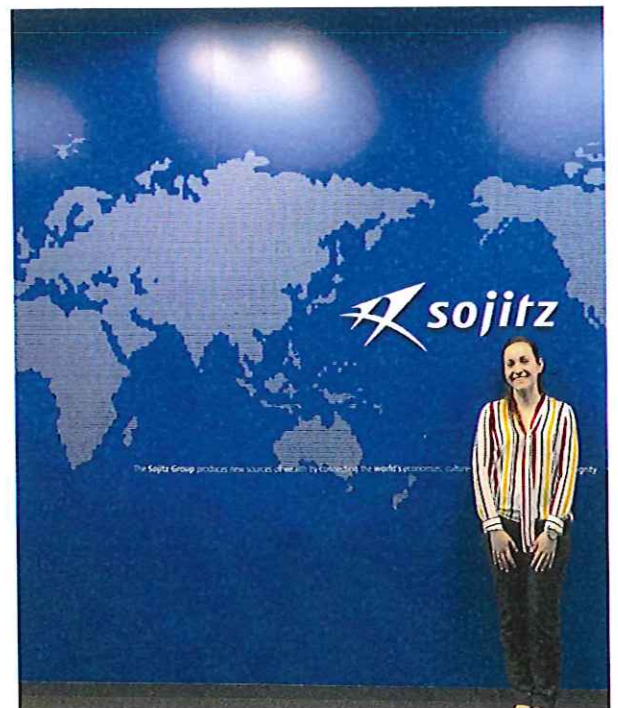


Photo of me after presenting



Presenting to Soken members



Group photo after my presentation



Rainbow Bridge as I left Tokyo