



## Experience report

IAESTE internship in the Switchgear Engineering Department of Hitachi Ltd. Power Systems Company, Hitachi Works in Hitachi City, Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan

July & August 2011

### General situation

The main issue when thinking about Japan at the moment is for many the big Tohoku Earthquake and the following nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima prefecture. Nevertheless, I decided to do an internship in Hitachi city which is at the coast around 100 km south of the crippled power plant. My main concerns were the radiation threats which turned out not to be a real problem in my region. Online available measurement results of environment, food and water levels allowed regularly checking the conditions. More impact on the daily life in Ibaraki prefecture had the direct consequences of the tsunami and the earthquake. Some roads and houses still reminded of the immense forces of such events while they were getting fixed more and more. For instance, my office was replaced for the first half of my internship due to heavy damages on the building.

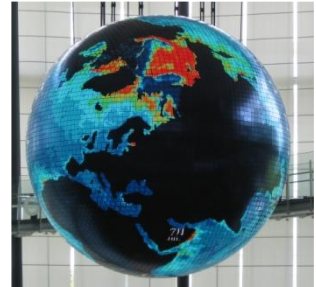
As a result of the several power plant shutdowns, energy saving was always on schedule to avoid power shortages. If going to the Tokyo area, public screens even showed the current amount of saving.

Nonetheless, these issues were mainly random phenomena in my experience of living in the region.

### Work experience

Although Hitachi Ltd is not that famous in Switzerland it is with its 362,000 employees still one of the most reputable companies inside Japan. Thus, several large factories are vital part of the Hitachi region and employ many inhabitants.

On my first day of work I intended to appear somehow professional so I exchanged my T-shirt with a nice polo shirt and took out some neutral jeans. Far wrong as I noticed, the standards in Japanese offices are shirt and trousers (or the unfashionable official Hitachi-clothes); for everybody. As a matter of fact, a shopping trip became



necessary to avoid unwanted attention. Once done this, I fitted well in the surrounding and also got used soon to some uncommon office customs. One of these was the morning calisthenics to music (called Radio Taisō / ラジオ<sup>たいそう</sup>体操). While the work started at 08.30h, everybody was in the office maybe 10 minutes before because at 08.23h there was Taiso-music coming from the loudspeakers all over the factory. Hearing this, the workers get up and follow the predefined stretching exercises for a total time of around six minutes. After finishing, there is some time until the bell rings at 08.30h for signaling the start of work. The rest of the day I was taking part of the open plan office environment as well as possible. The loudspeaker always signaled the breaks and the end of work at 17.00h while the last one was usually ignored by the very majority of my co-workers. Sharp tongues even claim that the best worker in a Japanese office is not the one with the best output but the one with the longest attendance...

To relax from these stresses, many after-work parties were organized and held in Japanese-style locations. I also attended some of them and it was always much fun to see co-workers outside the office in a less stiff surrounding. Sometimes the language difficulties known from the workplace even turned out not to be that of a problem anymore.

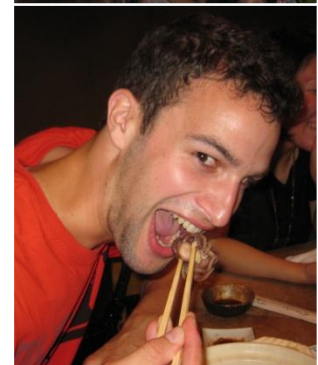
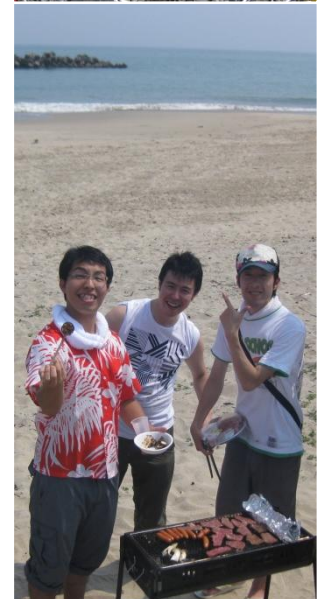
As an issue of energy saving, the big companies in the region were asked to harmonize their weekends by having them complementary inside the week. Therefore, Hitachi's holidays were moved to Thursday and Friday (instead of Saturday and Sunday). Since it was the same for almost everybody I had contact to, it was not a problem at all. Sometimes it was just a bit difficult to attend the IAESTE events on the real weekends.

The content of my work is not exceptionally mentionable since the surroundings build the main impressions.

### Leisure time

Having a nice amount of holidays during summer time, I had many possibilities for leisure activities. Main attractions in close proximity built the various sand beaches which were despite perfect weather almost empty this year.

When I was not taking care of my very nice apartment and bicycle, I usually spent free time with two other IAESTE trainees in my region, a Swede and a German. We explored interesting places or events in Ibaraki and also went to farther spots such as Hokkaido or Nikko together. Moreover, there were many activities of the IAESTE local committee taking place in Tokyo which is around two hours by express or three hours by local train from Hitachi. Because of this distance and the need to catch last trains I was not able to attend all the events, unfortunately. Nevertheless, a participation at Kirin Beer Factory Tour, Welcome Party, IAESTE Forum in



Kyoto (included a visit of a nuclear research reactor and discussions about nuclear energy together with around 80 students from all over the world), Japanese Language Class, a visit of the biggest nightclub in Japan or an IAESTE Party at Thanksgiving was still possible. All those events were much fun and offered many opportunities to learn about foreign cultures and thinking.

A specialty of the Japanese local committee might be the fact that it includes a high number of students. That means they also attended many activities and provided many opportunities for getting to know the foreign culture while having good conversations. Furthermore, these citizens appeared to be eager to organize events and really helped wherever needed.

### Conclusion

In spite of the hot weather and the occasional earthquakes I really enjoyed the summer. Actually, I got used to those uncommon things pretty soon. The well-organized and polite country offered great experiences in a truly different culture. This was completed by interesting insights in a reputable Japanese company and the sincere support of the IAESTE local committee.

I highly recommend these student exchanges and want to express my appreciation to all involved people making it possible!

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