

NOHONMATSU TRIP

This was my second trip to Nihonmatsu. It was quite a small group of international students, only four of us and all from different countries. We got to Nihonmatsu very fast - no traffic on Saturday morning and went to the center where our cooking classes was planned to take place. Our colorful aprons were matching the spirit of sakura mochi class and our teacher was the owner of the famous wagashi shop in Nihonmatsu. It was quite a special event, since not everyone has a chance to try one's hand at making wagashi. Wagashi express the beauty of nature and reflect a specific season. We first tried our hand at sakura mochi - confections wrapped in salted sakura leaf. After that with acute fascination, we were watching the teacher making confections looking like cherry blossom. They were real small pieces of art. We tried to imitate making similar ones. It was a gratifying experience !

The Yoshiko Omatsu place where we were taken for lunch was very homelike. It is extremely popular with local people and was almost full. Lovely atmosphere and delicious food ! The green tea- macha- was a real treat. We had a photo taken by the entrance and I paid attention to a small garden with pine trees and stones. Couple of ume trees were already in blossom- first sign of the spring.

Our next stop was sake brewery. Here we learned many interesting things. I hadn't realized that there were specific varieties of rice for sake, different from those used in cooking. In colder climate sake will come out better, as fermentation process is longer. We saw the entire brewing chain, tested different sake and even sampled something which was half-sake - white liquid with rice, sweetish and tasty. The Nihonmatsu sake is famous in the Fukushima prefecture and considered to be one of the best in quality. We appreciated an opportunity to see the brewing process with our own eyes.

Finally we dropped by the shop where the wagashi teacher worked. The interior was delightful: dolls and other traditional things and the owners were very cordial. We enjoyed their warm hospitality and bought some beautiful hand-made sweets.

Before leaving we were given free tickets for books. Last time using a similar ticket I bought a wonderful book: "SOUL of JAPAN. The visible essence" which I am savoring at leisure. I will make a point to buy another book about Japanese culture this time.

It was a perfect Saturday day: relaxing and enjoyable.