

NINA SANTOS X ASIA NEW ZEALAND FOUNDATION

# Japan Hui 2019





# Introduction

Long story short: I love Japan. But ironically, my understanding for the Japanese culture was so shallow. I applied for this year's Japan hui wanting to challenge my assumptions and expand my knowledge not only about the Japanese market, but also about the rich culture, history and cutting-edge tech innovation.

Thanks to the generous support of the Asia New Zealand Foundation, I got all that and more. This report will highlight some of the key experiences, moments and takeaway lessons from the hui.







YOKOMURA, JAPAN





Our journey kicked off at Yokomura Eco lodge – a 150 year old farmhouse situated about an hour away from Tokyo. This was straight up the most beautiful Airbnb ever. Most importantly, it was the perfect space for me to get to know the other Leadership network members on the trip.

I was tasked to run the icebreaker sessions with Alice. During my stint, I posed the question: **What pisses you off?**, with hopes that it would kick start a korero on what drives my colleagues to do the work they do. I was shocked to see how open everyone was. As we listened to each other's stories, I couldn't help but feel emotional, but also empowered. We all come from all walks of life, but it was amazing to see that we were driven by similar things. **Same same, but different.**

This was a really great way to start the hui. I already felt like I bonded with most of the members – even those who I just met the day before. The coolest part was we engaged in conversations that went beyond small talk. We talked about everything – from the challenges of life to starting a business.





# JAPANESE FOOD DEGUSTATION

One of the highlights of our stay in Yokomura was the dinner. (And no, we didn't ubereats Sushi or ramen). Instead, we were catered for by Chef Ozawa-San who runs small organic farm on a nearby mountain. He grows his own vegetables, smokes his own meats and catches his own fish. We had a stunning 8 meal course at our accomodation. AND - thats not even the best part. It just so happened that Celebrity chef Sachie Nomura was one of the hui attendees. She translated everything for the group and even explained the Historical context. Sachie also shared her story growing up in Japan, how she developed her love for food and eventually turned it into an empire. Ozawa-san and Sachie were a dynamic duo. I'm quite certain that I'll never get a dining experience as special as this again.







# MOUNT TAKAO, HACHIŌJI





***"It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves"***



The next day, we ventured to Takaosan, a popular hiking spot amongst Japanese locals and tourists alike. I'm not really an outdoorsy person, so I was quite nervous about this Hike. However, I had a chat to Rob, our transport guide for the day (who also happens to be the biggest adventure-junkie) and he assured me that it "wasn't a hike", it was just a walk. Plus, he mentioned something about "famous soba" - so I was sold.

It WAS a hike, but it was great nonetheless. The conversations and the company made it special. On our way down the very steep hill, Fine, Serena and myself had a korero about Social media and how it affects young people's mental health. We also talked about the 'digital gap' between social classes and how we should be finding ways to bridge it. During the hike, I was amazed by the lush forrest with mountains right in the heart of Tokyo. Often, only the hustle and bustle of the city are captured in Marketing. It was refreshing to see the other side of it. In end the end, I survived the hike with a llot more insight than when I started. Sir Edmund Hillary was right, It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves.





## SITE VISITS & SPEAKER SESSIONS

- COOKIE TIME HARAJUKU
- PEACE BOAT OFFICE
- TOURISM NZ
- THE NEW ZEALAND EMBASSY







The third day was jam packed with site visits and speakers. We started the day at Cookie time Japan. The well-loved kiwi brand only have 2 stores in the world - one in Queenstown, and the other in buzzing Harajuku. Harajuku lane is renowned for its colourful street art and kawaii fashion scene, so I think its well fitting. Cookie time's manager enlightened us on the challenges and benefits of doing business in Asia. One of the key learning points was "catering to the market", both through new products and social media marketing. For example, Cookie time Japan features key Japanese ingredients like Matcha and Miso in their recipes. Japanese people also have an affinity for Mascots and cosplayers, so Cookie time Japan try to feature "Cookie Muncher" as much as possible.

It was really inspiring a New Zealand brand thriving in Tokyo. It was also great to hear first hand from kiwis who have made their way into one of the most dynamic markets in the world. It reminded me that great opportunities await in Asia for those willing to learn and put in the work.





We then heard from Peaceboat – A Japan-based international NGO working to promote peace, human rights, and sustainability through their unique voyages. I'm really passionate about environmental action, so I was inspired to hear about how Peaceboat do their mahi through local grassroots actions and global networking.



After, we headed to the New Zealand Embassy in Tokyo for our speaker sessions. Tourism NZ enlightened us on their marketing strategy in Japan and wider Asia. I was particularly interested to know how they balance 'realness' with promoting New Zealand as "100% pure", given the plethora of Environmental issues we face. This prompted a conversation about Social media, which was great because I'm keen to learn as much as I can in that space.

The highlight of the Speakers session for me was learning about the Ainu – the indigenous people of Japan that I didn't even know existed. Our kahui Maori – Josh, Shannon and Will lead a session on Maori-Ainu relations and also ran us through the history and plight of the Ainu people. To say the korero was eye-opening is an understatement.



On the same night, we were hosted by the New Zealand embassy for a dinner and networking function. We were warmly welcomed by The Deputy of Mission, Dom Walton-France and his team. Some of the Leadership Network members also had a chance to share the things we got up to in Japan and the lessons that we've learned along the way.

I met a range of people during the networking session – from Japan based LNs, kiwi business owners, people coordinating the world cup and professionals from all sectors. It was really cool to see how each one had a connection to New Zealand-Japan relations, one way or another. Most of the speakers who we met earlier in the day also came along, so it was the perfect opportunity to ask more questions and engage in more conversations.

In the midst of all the action, I took a moment to just think about how lucky I was to be in Japan and to be amongst such an accomplished group of people. Im very privileged to be part of the network and have access to opportunities like these.







# KODOKAN JUDO INSTITUTE





My favourite flex at the moment is that I had my first judo lesson at THE birthplace of judo, with a silver Olympic medalist as a sensei. The Kodokan Judo Institute is the headquarters of the worldwide judo community. They don't usually welcome tourists – but they made an exception for the team. We were the largest group they've ever hosted in history! Talk about a once in a lifetime opportunity!

I guess you can say.... I'm a judo expert now. Kidding! But in all seriousness, Kodokan was an experience and a half. It started with a tour of the Judo museum and a bit of a history crash course. Then, we dressed up in full gear and just went for it (with a lot of guidance of course!) I really enjoyed having other LN's as a sparing partner. Our senseis shared their insight on how judo develops self-discipline and respect for oneself and others. Whilst it is a dynamic combat sport, it also demands great mental discipline. Values like perseverance, respect and discipline are at the heart of Judo, and I'm working on applying it to my everyday life.







GOOGLE HEADQUARTERS,  
ROPPONGI HILLS

Google





If I didn't believe in the power of networking before this hui, I certainly believe in it now!

During the reception at the Embassy, I met Jonathan Glassey, a fellow leadership network member who now works for Google.

My original plans for the free morning turned to custard, but the universe had my back! Jonathan was gracious enough to tour Serena and I around the GOOGLE Japan office. I was (almost literally) on cloud nine as the HQ was on the 38th floor of Tokyo's fifth-tallest building. All I can say is... I'll never look at my workplace the same way again. Lucky are those who will find themselves here during a zombie apocalypse – they have everything from nap rooms to cafes, they grow their own herbs and enjoy a 360 degree view of the city. It was great to talk to Jonathan more about his Journey as a kiwi living and working in Japan. It's definitely a dream of mine to work in one of the "big four" tech companies, and this experience just reminded me that anything is possible.









# Key learnings

*New Zealand has always had strong ties with Japan in terms of trade, tourism and people-to-people links. The Japan hui brought me to the heart of all that.*

Overall, the Japan hui was an experience of a lifetime. Although this was my second time in Japan, this trip made me see it in a completely different light. It was the perfect opportunity to reflect on my personal leadership journey and connect with other leadership network members who are all so accomplished yet down to earth. Yes, I learned a lot from the speakers and site visits, but I also treasure all the "in-between" moments and conversations with my co-participants-turned-life long friends. Whether its talking to Fine about our cultures, getting a start-up crash course from Sachie or talking about family and politics with Josh, the hui has really been one heck of a learning journey.

I've always loved Japan, but this trip has reaffirmed my commitment to Asia-New Zealand relations at a large. Whether its through sports diplomacy, food or business, its important to harness the value from the relationship between New Zealand and Japan, and New Zealand and Asia.

Thank you to the Asia New Zealand Foundation for the array of unforgettable experiences that I'll never forget. Most importantly, thank you to the other LN's for giving me a new family.