

Eighteen days of English language skills improvement and getting to know the Netherlands: the 8th Appetizer Course for Osaka Students in Groningen.



Travelling from Osaka (Japan) to Groningen to improve your English language skills and at the same time get a small taste of the cultural diversity of the Netherlands. Twenty-seven students from the University of Osaka took this opportunity by participating in the 8th Appetizer Course at the University of Groningen from the 21st of August until the 7th of September. During these eighteen days, the students were trained in both English presentation and writing skills by experts of the University Language Centre. In addition they were offered a 'teaser' of Dutch Studies through a variety of excursions. Although the programme itself was substantial, there was still plenty of time left for social activities.

The aim of the Appetizer Course was to help Japanese students get a better grasp on the practical use of English. In Japan, English education mostly focuses on grammar and writing abilities giving students a head start when it comes to vocabulary. This does however complicate day to day interaction with foreign students. Presentation classes and speech practice offered by the Groningen Language Centre provided the students with an opportunity to tackle these issues. In order to further stimulate English speaking skills, the multidisciplinary group of Osaka students undertook a number of excursions in which they were accompanied by a team of lecturers from both Osaka and Groningen, and staff from the bureau of International Relations.

Excursions and classes

One of the highlights was a visit to a typical Dutch farmhouse in Onnen where the group enthusiastically participated in a traditional game of 'klootschieten'. They were also joined by Dutch (and international students) from the University of Groningen that Saturday, August 24th. The winning team, led by Professor of Civil Law Daisaku Kubo of Osaka University, received a medal and after a short game of cricket in the wonderful English garden surrounding the farm, the students had their first encounter with typical Dutch food. To reach their destination in Onnen, the group was picked up earlier that day by two horse and carriages from the train station in Haren.

"The most memorable thing was the horse and carriage ride we took from the train station of Haren to the typical Dutch farmhouse in Onnen. Two large horses pulled us. We could never experience such a thing in Japan! In our country, we have almost no opportunities to even see a horse in daily life! Also while enjoying the traditional ball game, we had opportunities to talk with many teachers, not only our class teachers. I had a very good time in English."

– Asami Nishimura, MA German language and culture (Osaka University)

After this first of many eventful days the students already felt more confident about their English language abilities. Despite the fact that the daytime classes were considered challenging, the diversity of the programme contributed to accomplishing the goals set at the start of the Appetizer Course. The setup of small groups being assigned to a single lecturer and having to actively participate in class to train speaking and presentation skills, was considered very helpful by the students. Especially the feedback they received at the end of each session.

"The lecturers were very nice. They gave me a lot of tips to improve my English. Presentation feedback was very useful too."

– Takuya Maeshiro, MA History (Osaka University)

Besides English language classes students were also taught some basic Dutch. The word 'lekker' especially stuck with them, because Dutch cheese was an absolute favourite as well Dutch and Belgium beer!

"English lectures were so good! I didn't have opportunities of presentation in English until then, so they gave me a lot of nice experiences. I liked the [Manscape and Watermanagement] bus excursion. And, visiting local restaurants or bars was exciting."

– Ayumi Kobayashi, MA Biology (Osaka University)

Schiermonnikoog

Travelling from Groningen to the 'waddeneilanden' only takes a few hours. While some students took the train to Utrecht to visit the On Sunday, August 25th, part of the delegation took the bus from Groningen central station to Lauwersoog early in the morning and from there travelled across the Waddenzee to Schiermonnikoog by ferry boat. Dutch and international students also joined

the group and spent the day renting bicycles, taking long walks on the beach, and visiting the light house until it was time to go home again late in the evening.

The Osaka University Centre for Education and Research

The ties between Osaka and Groningen have grown strong over the years. In 2005 the Osaka University Centre for Education and Research in Groningen was opened. One of the goals of the Centre is to strengthen its support for student and researcher exchanges between Osaka University and European universities and research institutions. Cooperation also takes place between the University of Groningen and Japanese companies in the Netherlands. The excursion to soy sauce manufacturer Kikkoman in Hoogezand on Wednesday, August 28th, is a good example of this. During the excursion, the students learned about the strong economic relations between Japan and the Netherlands and enjoyed a lunch at the factory.

The Groningen student life was further introduced by tours around the city centre, inside the Academy building and on the Zernike Energy Campus. This gave the group an opportunity to see what other possibilities the University of Groningen has to offer its international students.

Watermanagement at work

Part of the 'teaser' for Dutch Studies was an interesting and entertaining bus tour on Saturday, August 30th, to show the students about Water Management at Work in the Netherlands. The tour was coordinated by Paul van Steen from the Faculty Spatial Sciences and touched upon the history of the Netherlands and its endless struggle with water. The students were led past several monuments and dykes along the Dutch coastline. Stops were made in the twin village of Peazens-Moddergat in Frisia, terp Hegebeintum, the impressive waterworks of the Afsluitdijk and former island Schokdijk. Around dinnertime the students arrived back in Groningen to enjoy some well-deserved rest in order to study for the remainder of their stay.

Time to go home

As with all great things, the 8th Appetizer Course also came to an end. All twenty-seven students passed the course and received their official certificate in the Senate room of the Academy building. After the short ceremony, a joint dinner at restaurant Hock Sieng was held with new arrivals from Osaka. No less than sixteen students, who would be attending the annual Japan Netherlands Student Conference (JNSC) in Groningen, to address the issue of "Sustainable Energy in a Changing World" in a joint symposium on September 5.

This concluded a very eventful time in the Netherlands for the enthusiastic Osaka group participating in the 8th Appetizer Course, and even though it was nice for the students to return home again, some wished they could have stayed just a little longer. The University of Groningen would more than happily welcome them all again next year.

More information about the Appetizer Course

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