

SLSP - Hokkaido International Foundation

Matteo Silva

From early June to the start of August, I spent everyday in Hokkaido attending language and culture classes that helped hone my understanding of life in Japan. Complemented by staying with a wonderful host family, I feel truly privileged to say that my time with HIF has made this summer one of the most perspective broadening experiences of my life.

Over the course of these two months, the homestay aspect of the program truly made me feel at home in the city of Hakodate, challenging me to spend everyday communicating only in Japanese. Beyond language, I also learned to navigate daily life in Japan. Between commuting, traveling, and even in finding ways to conduct research for our Independent Studies, I had to learn how to do it all akin to how a local would. Coupled with daily language classes, this made HIF a truly immersive program that I believe accelerated my acquisition of the language beyond my initial expectations.

Regarding the aforementioned Independent Studies, another facet of the program was the independent choice in deciding what our final research project was to be, leading up to a fair at the end of the program where everyone was able to present their findings. I chose to study the city's unique architecture, as its multicultural nature offered an interesting perspective into the city's history. This challenged not only my own independence in a foreign country--as I found myself traveling to many different areas on my own to conduct research--but it also challenged my language ability as I translated numerous sources for the purpose of establishing historical records on the buildings I documented for my project. This, beyond any doubt, not only improved my language ability, but also gave me a newfound independence and new personal tools for research that will be useful going forward in my academic pursuits.

Ultimately, my research and language acquisition culminated into the creation of a personal website, documenting the pictures I took during my time in Hakodate as well as information on the buildings presented, translated both into English and Japanese. With a few final edits and finding a more permanent way to host the site, I hope that I can share this experience by digital means soon. Had it not been for the SLSP award, I would not be able to continue my studies in Japan with the same amount of confidence I have since garnered, and for that fact I am eternally grateful. Whether it be cultural activities such as tea ceremony or historical study and other forms of academic research, there are many things I cannot wait to bring back to Bowdoin once I am there again in the spring.