

■ 30th START Program (Vietnam)

For two weeks from March 2nd to the 16th of 2016, 24 first year students participated in the 30th START Program (*). Led by Asami Ogura (Assistant Professor at the Institute for Peace Science, Hiroshima University) and two other supervising faculty members, the students spent this time studying at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, in Ho Chi Minh City (USSH) and exploring the local areas.

While at USSH, the START Program students attended lectures, which were taught in English, on various topics such as Vietnamese language, society, culture, and history as well as “Economic Development in Vietnam,” “Memories from the War,” and “International Issues in Southeast Asia.” Despite being confused by the use of English during class, the students did their best to participate and ask questions. They also worked closely with local students of the same age at the Faculty of Japanese Studies, discussing and thinking about the topic: “What Can Be Done to Build a More Peaceful World.” When visiting the Ho Chi Minh City University of Natural Resources and Environment, they engaged in discussions (also in English) with the local students on the differences between Japan and Vietnam, considering topics such as waste disposal systems, university student life, and the effects of climate change and giving presentations on their efforts at the end.

Beyond the classroom, local students from USSH gave guided tours around a museum containing displays on history and war as well as at the home of the president of South Vietnam during the Vietnam War (Independence Palace). The START Program participants also met with the “Tonichi Club”, which is made up of local students and residents who are interested in studying Japanese language and culture. Moreover, the participants visited an industrial complex and a Japanese-affiliated company. This was an opportunity to hear not just from the locals, but also from Japanese nationals, and with their own futures in mind, the participants asked questions about what it is like to live and work abroad. Additionally, the students gained a deeper understanding of Vietnam’s nature, history, and economic development by making a home visit and visiting various locations such as an orphanage, Can Gio Mangrove Forest, Cu Chi Tunnels, and Aeon Mall.

Immediately following this voyage overseas, the students, who once felt puzzled by many things such as the lifestyle, culture, and food in Vietnam, came to feel a sense of empowerment. By actively seeking the chance to interact with Vietnamese students, the participants gained an understanding of Vietnamese life that would have been impossible to gain from a textbook and came into contact with perspectives different from the norm in Japan. The participants were especially moved when seeing the attitude of the local students toward their studies and when hearing from the Japanese nationals working in Vietnam. Ultimately, they discovered a new enthusiasm for learning English as a tool for global communication.

The Japanese students who developed close friendships with the local students through direct exchange are, having returned home, now connected to them via the Internet. We hope that the participants will continue to value these friendships moving forward.



Photo in front of Notre Dame Cathedral Saigon



Vietnamese language class



English discussion with the local students at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Natural Resources and Environment



Student entering the Cu Chi Tunnels, an underground labyrinth employed during the Vietnam War



Speaking with students of the Faculty of Japanese Studies



Hearing from Japanese nationals working in Vietnam



A student answering a question during class