

How to compose study tour for training <Part 6>

Final episode: Value of study tours

We have introduced our concept and specific approach of study tours throughout this series. We made trials and errors and sometimes failed to make better study tours. However, our ultimate target in composing a study tour is exemplified in the phrase - "how can we satisfy the participants?" A study tour or training in Japan itself may be sometimes considered as a reward trip or a sightseeing tour. If so, will the participants be satisfied with such training?

It can definitely be said that participants who come to Japan look forward to learning something in our country. However, only a few of them can express what that "something" is with any clarity. Therefore, it is important to imagine when composing a training program; what the participants want to learn, what would be useful for them after returning to their home country, and where and how they can get such knowledge/techniques.

Japan is a dream country for many participants and coming to Japan is a valuable experience for them. In addition, just visiting famous crop production areas, the latest facilities/ equipment, organizations with unique activities, may give them something new and/or useful. However, what they can get depends on the participants themselves, and they may not always get suitable knowledge which would be useful in their home country. In the worst case, they cannot fill the gap between their country and Japan, and they might even consider what they learn as "useless".

What is important is to develop a study tour with a strategic perspective which is consistent with the training objectives and project activities in order to maximize the acquisition of useful knowledge and experience in a limited time.

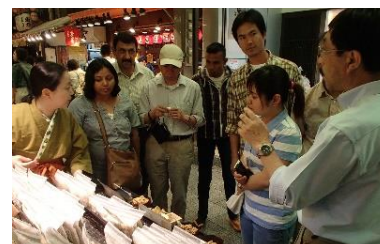
The participants will be satisfied when they can learn



Interviewing a Japanese extension officer in a tatami-floored room



Experiencing actual farming through working on a farmer's field



Learning traditional vegetable marketing at Nishiki Market in Kyoto

some things that they specifically wanted to learn.

Participants learn both tangibles and intangibles through training in Japan, and actually the intangibles may be more lasting in impact. For example, many participants are impressed by the efficient operation of buses and trains, and the sincerity and kindness of Japanese people, which they happened to encounter by chance. Especially during a study tour, they can touch farmers and rural landscapes/cultures which they cannot meet at the training center. Such experience is useful to understand each other's way of thinking and behavior. In this way, they deepen their understanding of Japan and Japanese people, which effectively makes it easier to work together after their returning home to their own countries.

The study tour is one of the most memorable times for the participants throughout the training period. Therefore, the participants after a good tour look refreshed and satisfied. In addition, there is a good reaction from the host organization of the tour where the participants can get a sense of high satisfaction. In such cases, we are often told "Please come again", despite us occupying our hosts' precious time. In such cases particularly, the contents of the study tour are improved year by year. Through these experiences, we realize that a study tour is composed by planners, attendants, participants, and hosts all together.

It is important to follow up in the subsequent training activities in order not only to have just "good experience" through the tour, but also to ensure that obtained information is firmly incorporated in the recipient's own knowledge base. This is a task that can only be achieved by those who have seen the same thing and have the same experience with the participants during the tour.