

## Arta Voicehovska, Latvian Participant

The experience, we, Culture Course participants, gained is priceless! Our course started with introducing everyone with our country cultures in five minutes. The time limit was so short and we all wanted to share more and more about the places we come from, so it was like a motivation for upcoming tasks in this course! My country - Latvia is singing and dancing nation. I told about the Latvian music and dance festival which takes a place once in five years and only the best collectives can participate in it. Every year we have at least 30,000 participants and for this kind of small country (2,000,000 population) it is a huge number. It was interesting to watch presentations about other countries and their customs, traditions, celebrations. It made my impression, not only about Japan, but about different kind of nations much wider too.

We had "once in a lifetime opportunity" to go to the famous Urasenke tea house in Tokyo and there we saw tea ceremony, Chado. In the previous day we had a lecture about tea ceremony, so we could better understand the meanings, gestures of it. We learned what we have to say during the tea ceremony if the tea is served directly to you. Now we know what "maccha" is, we know the spirit of Chado and what is the true meaning of Chado itself. We learned about the history of tea ceremony. Tea ceremony taught us to understand how important it

is to live, feel and appreciate the present moment. We have to be thankful for the time we drink tea because we will never have exactly the same second, minute. ICHI GO ICHI E - one time, one meeting.

At first you think... You know what culture is, but when you start to discuss it deeply, you realize how many aspects culture has and what it really means. We had very interesting, fruitful and deep discussions. I felt how interested everyone was in the chosen course. It was very easy to work and collaborate with like-minded people. We understood that culture is one of the most powerful ways to present your country, its art, customs, beliefs, and it is a powerful way to show your identity. We learned about the ways how to save cultures and carry them on. There aren't the best customs or cultures - every culture has to be understood and respected and that is one of the most important things that everybody should know! Actually, during the classes I felt how patriotism for my country, Latvia, is growing even bigger. I am very proud of the country I come from!

In conclusion, I want to add that this Culture Course was this amazing only because of the experienced, knowledgeable, energetic and understanding leaders we had. I feel very thankful for everything they did for us. I felt the effort which was dedicated to these courses. Thank you! I will never forget the Culture Course in Narita!

