

## Excursions

### Momiji Matsuri Shinshiro City

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On 16<sup>th</sup> November 2013 I went with a group of ten students to visit Shinshiro, Aichi Prefecture, approximately 90 minutes from the Toyohashi Tech campus. Members of the international office of Shinshiro picked us up from Toyohashi Tech in the afternoon and guided us to a village located at the starting point of a hiking course to the peak of Mt. Houraiji. The mountainous city of Shinshiro is located north of Toyohashi. As during this excursion, the mountains make it quite difficult for the city to modernize or industrialize, yet the beautiful scenery has its own merits.

When I arrived at the village, I could smell such fresh air; it was very refreshing. We were surrounded by mountains covered by brown, red and yellow trees. While walking around in the village and listening to stories about Shinshiro, we enjoyed the experience seeing and being a part of Japanese nature, which included the famous Japanese maple trees, or momiji, in their most splendid autumn colors.

After our walk we visited the night museum, which was built to educate people about the type of fauna and flora of Shinshiro. One of the remarkable animals in Shinshiro is the Eurasian Scops Owl, or 'konohazuku', which can also be seen in the night museum. This owl lives in various countries in Asia and Europe. However, one of their breeding places in Asia is in the woods of Shinshiro. Some also believe that character 'Totoro' in the 1988 Japanese animated film 'Tonari no Totoro' directed by Hayao Miyazaki and produced by Studio Ghibli is based on the konohazuku because of the remarkable resemblance of the pointy ears. Also the mountainous scenery of Shinshiro seems quite similar to that featured in other productions of Studio Ghibli.

In the evening the mountain village was lit up by candles along the walking paths which produced a very pleasant and relaxing atmosphere. Everyone felt relaxed after the trip and we all fell asleep on the bus back to the campus. We did not hike to the top of Mt. Houraiji, but if you feel like going on a relaxing day trip, I definitely recommend to go to Shinshiro and enjoy the mountain scenery, the momiji, and hike of Mt. Houraiji.



Group Photo by Ryan Flaminiano, Shinshiro-shi. Mr. De Schepper Karel is in the back row, fifth from the left.