

Excursions

Toyohashi Gion Festival: An unforgettable summer

Nur Budi Mulyono is a doctoral student from Indonesia studying at the Department of Mechanical and Structural System Engineering. Here, he shares some of his experiences since enrolling at Toyohashi Tech.

Prior to leaving Indonesia I was both excited and apprehensive about studying in Japan. Excited because of the opportunity of pursuing a doctoral degree at Toyohashi Tech—one of Japan's leading science and technology based national universities—and apprehensive because Japan is prone to earthquakes and strong tyoons. In fact the Tohoku earthquake struck before I departed for Japan—an event that made me even more nervous about living in Japan.

However, on arrival at Toyohashi Tech—which is located about 300 kilometers west of Tokyo in Aichi prefecture, and far from the Tohoku area of Japan—I received a warm welcome from staff and students, and was overwhelmed by Japanese culture, and the amazing high level of advanced technology prevalent in everyday life, such as the bulletin trains, smart phones, and even smarter household appliances.

One of the most important lessons that I have learnt so far can be summed up by the phrase—'ganbare'—literally means 'to do your utmost'. This expression sums up the attitude of Japanese people in the aftermath of recent earthquake and tsunami, when people in every corner of Japan joined hands to support the victims. I also recall that people in the disaster areas did not complain about their hardships, but rather concentrated on clearing up and recovery.

I admire the Japanese people for their positive attitude towards life in general, as well as for their emphasis on showing gratitude to others in daily life. There are seasonal festivals or 'matsuri' in Japan in which harmony with nature and gratitude to others are central themes. Examples of festivals include, 'hanami' or spring cherry blossom and 'tanabata' or summer star festival. I participated in the Toyohashi 'Gion Matsuri' this summer. It was one of the most wonderful experiences for me since coming to Japan four months ago.

I recently read that the Gion matsuri has roots as a purification ritual to appease the gods thought to cause fire, floods, and earthquakes. Such festivals are held all over Japan in summer.

For me, I had the opportunity to enjoy Gion in Toyohashi. The parades and firework (hanabi) displays were held near the Toyokawa River, which flows through Toyohashi. Thousands of colorful hanabi decorated the night sky accompanied with exhilarating music.

I thoroughly enjoyed the festival with many of my friends from Toyohashi Tech. It was a relaxing and enjoyable experience—one that I shall not forget for the rest of my life.



Nur Budi Mulyono (center in the white T-shirt) with other international students waiting for the fireworks at Toyokawa River during the Toyohashi Gion Festival in September 2011.



Spectacular fireworks at the Toyohashi Gion Festival.