

**Developing a Short-Term Study Abroad Program:  
A Case of the TUINS-UMS Study Tour**

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**Abstract**

Higher education institutions in Japan have launched various initiatives to equip students for success in an increasingly interconnected global society. A key component of these initiatives is to motivate students to engage in study abroad programs. Toyama University of International Studies (TUINS), which embraces internationalization as one of the core educational philosophies, has also launched Short-term Study Abroad (SSA) programs since 2008 when the Faculty of Contemporary Society at TUINS was established. The International Career Development Major within the Faculty of Contemporary Society has mandated that students complete a study-abroad program for four months or longer. However, given that not all students at TUINS can commit to a long-term study abroad experience, SSA programs have emerged as an effective alternative for gaining overseas experience. The expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic, which struck the world in 2019, restricted overseas activities. In 2024, after a four-year pause, we introduced an 11-day SSA program in Sabah, Malaysia. This paper reviews the program and proposes an improvement plan to make it more efficient, well-resourced, and well-structured, ensuring that students can easily participate and benefit both academically and culturally.

**Keywords:** Short-Term Study abroad, intercultural awareness, English education

## INTRODUCTION

Association of International Educators has extensively discussed the importance of study abroad in various publications (Nolting et al., 2013; Spaeth, 2018). In the article “Why Study Abroad Matters,” Farmer (2017) highlights that studying abroad equips students with crucial global skills—such as intercultural understanding and an ability to navigate complex international issues—that boost academic success, career readiness, and personal growth in an increasingly interconnected world. Furthermore, the issue brief titled “Restore, Grow, and Diversify U.S. Study Abroad Participation” underscores the benefits of study abroad, noting that research demonstrates increased graduation rates, higher grade point averages, and the intangible positives of experiencing a different culture (NAFSA, 2021). The brief also highlights that employers value the key soft skills acquired and developed through study abroad, associating them with management and leadership qualities. NAFSA sees promoting study abroad as a means of developing globally competent individuals who are prepared to thrive in a global economy.

With regard to the situation in Japan, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has expanded study-abroad opportunities in higher education through initiatives such as the *Tobitate! (Leap for Tomorrow) Study Abroad JAPAN* campaign, launched in 2013. These efforts aim to equip young people with skills to compete internationally and excel in academic research, cultural exchange, and global contributions. According to the data released by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (n.d.), in 2021 the number of students studying abroad—including short-term and language-training programs that do not confer academic credit—among university students (i.e., undergraduate, graduate, vocational school, and technical college students) had been increasing each year. Although it began to decline in the 2019 academic year—culminating in a steep 98% drop in 2020—it rose to 10,999

(up by 9,512 students, or 639.7%, from the previous year), and reached 58,162 in 2022 (up by 47,163 students, or 428.8%, from the previous year). The number is still only half its pre-pandemic levels but continues to rebound.

TUINS has launched several SSA programs in developing countries, including in the Samoa Islands in the South Pacific and later in Nan province in Thailand, to engage with local residents and contribute to local communities. The SSA in Sabah, Malaysia, implemented in September 2024, is a faculty-led program offered as part of the ‘International Exchange Practicum’ course in our existing curriculum, and is organized in collaboration with faculty members at Universiti Malaysia Sabah<sup>1</sup> (UMS). In this paper, we refer to the program as ‘TUINS-UMS Study Tour (Study Tour),’ the name it had when it was conducted. For this program review, we categorize the process into four stages: 1. Planning and Recruiting, 2. Pre-Departure Training, 3. On-Site Activities, and 4. Evaluation and Suggestions.

## **1. Planning and Recruiting**

Developing an SSA program takes time and effort. The Study Tour was planned well in advance before its launch. One of the faculty program leaders had academic engagements in Sabah, Malaysia and took the opportunity to visit both UMS and the homestay location a year earlier. Although the visit was not originally intended for the later Study Tour, the initial investigation including potential homestay location choice, was less demanding during the planning stage. However, since the Study Tour was the first program launched in the region, the actual organization required a significant workload, despite both faculty program leaders having SSA experience.

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Dr. Robert Francis Peters and other faculty members at the Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation at UMS for their invaluable support and assistance throughout the program. Their efforts in managing logistics and coordinating activities played a significant role in the success of this initiative.

## **1.1 Planning**

### **A. Hybrid Organized Program**

As the name of the program ‘TUINS-UMS Study Tour’ indicates, this is the program co-organized by both TUINS and UMS. After two faculty members were selected to lead the Study Tour, we initiated contact with UMS and the homestay representatives to plan the details. UMS provided academic lectures on community-based and nature-based tourism while also organizing hands-on cultural experiences. Notably, students visited villages engaged in ecotourism practices, cultural heritage sites, and local bazaars, allowing them to observe sustainable tourism initiatives firsthand. Some of these cultural visits were made more accessible through UMS’s arrangement of transportation.

### **B. In-advance Funding for the Study Tour**

TUINS sponsored the Study Tour 2024 for faculty program leaders and approved the proposal for the Study Tour 2025, ensuring the program continues consecutively without interruption. Unfortunately, funding for student participants was not secured from the school in 2024, which required them to cover both fixed and variable expenses. Fixed costs included round-trip airfare, hotel accommodation fees, entrance fees for cultural sites, insurance, and other essential expenses. Variable costs consisted of meals, local transportation fees, souvenirs, and other incidental expenditures. Given the current funding situation, it is expected that securing financial support for the 2025 academic year will also be challenging.

### **C. Itinerary Planning**

Itinerary details what the Study Tour will accomplish (see Table 1). First, we scheduled the trip dates based on the TUINS academic calendar. At TUINS, regular classes typically conclude at the end of July, followed by intensive courses in August. Considering the need for pre-departure

training before implementation, we designated early September 2024 as the departure period. Our original plan was to visit UMS as the starting point of the Study Tour. This meant that we had planned academic activities at UMS first, followed by the homestay cultural experience for students. The rationale was to avoid placing students in a completely different cultural environment immediately upon leaving Japan, preventing them from experiencing a sharp cultural shift. However, our planned visit to UMS coincided with a weekend, making it more challenging for faculty members and students there to participate. As a result, we had to adjust the schedule and visited the homestay the day after arriving in Sabah. Fortunately, our students adapted well to the culture and fully engaged in almost every activity.

**Table 1**  
Overview of the Study Tour Itinerary

Day	Activities
Day 1 & 2	Travel to Destination
Day 3 & 4	Homestay Experience at Kobuni Village
Day 5	Lectures and Collection Center Tour at UMS
Day 6	Crocker Range Biosphere Reserve's Buffer and Transitional Zone Field Tour
Day 7	Mount Kinabalu Botanical Garden Tour and Kundasang Market Tour
Day 8	Workshop 1: Discover the Treasures of Kobuni Village
Day 9	Workshop 2: Co-creating Sustainable Wisdom
Day 10 & 11	Kota Kinabalu City Tour; Return Travel

Second, flexibility was essential in conducting the SSA. The initial itinerary used to promote the Study Tour included dates, pictures, and main activities, all of which played a key role in providing students with a general overview of what to expect. However, students may have noticed that the final itinerary was more extensive than the initial version. Both academic and cultural activities changed multiple times due to additional events—some newly introduced by us and others suggested by local contacts. As is usually the case, these changes were not finalized until the last moment on this occasion.

## **D. Administrative and Safety Preparations**

To facilitate transportation during the Study Tour, faculty program leaders downloaded and set up a taxi application in advance for use in Sabah, Malaysia, ensuring smoother mobility for the group. In addition, we collaborated with the Center for International Exchange to facilitate the insurance enrollment process, ensuring that all participants were adequately covered before departure.

### **1.2 Recruiting**

Although the Study Tour took place during the summer break, it was considered part of the regular teaching load, and recruitment efforts began as early as April. However, faculty program leaders faced challenges in attracting students. While the Study Tour was an elective component of the students' academic program, it did not seem to be a strong motivating factor for participation. Furthermore, as a pilot program to be implemented in Sabah, Malaysia without scholarship support, it required substantial marketing efforts from faculty program leaders to encourage enrollment.

We introduced it to students at the Study Abroad Information Session towards the end of April 2024, where other study abroad programs were also being promoted to recruit students. At the event, we passed around a signup sheet to gather information of interested students, such as e-mail address or phone number, for follow-up marketing. Unfortunately, only three or four students signed up at the time, which was not surprising, as we had anticipated low interest compared to other long-established programs held in developed countries. Since the program requires at least five students to be conducted, we used short PowerPoint presentations in the large auditorium classes multiple times to raise awareness and interest. In the days that followed, a flyer with key details—such as the itinerary, cost, deadline for application was

emailed to all TUINS students through the Center for International Exchange. Since students often do not pay attention to mass emails from the school, we also contacted individual faculty members to inform them about the program and ask them to encourage student participation. In the end, six students enrolled for the tour, some of whom were encouraged—if not strongly persuaded—by faculty program leaders to join the program, highlighting the challenges in recruitment.

## 2. Pre-Departure Training

We conducted a total of seven pre-departure training sessions to ensure that students were well-prepared for the Study Tour and could maximize their learning experience abroad (See Table 2). The training covered a wide range of topics, including English conversation and presentation skills, ecotourism, field survey methods, and pre-departure safety education. Each session was carefully structured to build students' confidence and enhance the necessary linguistic, academic, and cultural competencies.

**Table 2**  
Schedule and Content of Pre-Departure Training Sessions

	Schedule	Content
1	August 5, 2024	Overview of the Study Tour
2	August 5, 2024	English Conversation Practice
3	August 6, 2024	Ecotourism
4	August 7, 2024	English Presentation Skills
5	August 23, 2024	Community-Based Studies
6	August 26, 2024	Field Survey Methods
7	September 3, 2024	Safety Training, Travel Preparation, etc.

The English conversation session focused on practical communication, helping students build confidence in engaging with UMS faculty, peers, and local community members. The English presentation skills session prepared students to articulate their reflections and findings during

and after the Study Tour, as well as to design slides that effectively convey their message to the audience.

Beyond language preparation, the training incorporated thematic lectures on ecotourism and community-based studies, directly aligning with the focus of the program. Since the Study Tour included visits to villages engaged in ecotourism and sustainable community practices, these sessions introduced students to key concepts in responsible tourism, local heritage conservation, and economic sustainability.

During the pre-departure safety session, students were introduced to health precautions, emergency protocols, and cultural sensitivities.

### **3. On-Site Activities**

Our SSA journey began the day after we arrived in Sabah in the evening. Throughout the tour, we regularly updated our daily plans and activities on SNS to accommodate any changes, such as adjustments to meeting times. Additionally, we held a wrap-up session at the end of each day to review the day's events and discuss the schedule for the following day. The Study Tour was divided into three components: homestay experience, visits to UMS and cultural sites, and a workshop.

#### **3.1 Homestay Experience**

The first event on the itinerary was a homestay experience in Kobuni Village, Sabah, Malaysia. While participants faced some inconveniences, such as bathroom limitations and language barriers, the overall experience was well received.



During their one-night, two-day stay, students had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the culture and daily life of the Dusun people. They engaged with locals by cooking traditional dishes like Linopot (a traditional Kadazan-Dusun dish from Sabah, Malaysia, consisting of rice, often mixed with root vegetables and wrapped in a leaf), playing the Tagong (a type of percussion instrument), enjoying water activities in the Inanam River, and experiencing local pastimes such as the Congkak game and betel nut chewing. Most students were eager to try local foods and fruits, including tapioca cake, rambutan, and langsung. They also had the opportunity to see how plants like ubi kayu, pandan, curry leaf, and kunyit grow in the gardens of local residents. As part of a handicraft session, students donned traditional attire and carefully crafted their own original bracelets—each one a unique piece. These unique cultural encounters were a fresh and eye-opening experience for the students.

The cultural and customary experiences in Kobuni Village provided valuable learning opportunities for the participants. The insights gained from these experiences later served as key themes for their presentations in the final-day workshop.

### **3.2 Visits to UMS and Cultural Exploration**

After a mind-expanding experience in Kobuni Village, our students visited UMS. The visit began with an introduction to TUINS by a faculty program leader, followed by an introduction of UMS by one of its faculty members. Students then attended lectures on ecotourism and community-based tourism.

The following day, together with UMS faculty members, we visited Kg. Tudan, situated within the Crocker Range Biosphere Reserve (CRBR)—a protected area in Sabah, Malaysia, dedicated to sustainable development, conservation, and research. The CRBR is divided into

three zones: the Core Zone, Buffer Zone, and Transition Zone, each fulfilling a specific ecological and socio-economic function. As part of the Sabah government's sustainable farming initiatives aimed at reducing deforestation and soil erosion, Kg. Tudan, located within the Buffer Zone, has embraced community-based ecotourism as a means of balancing environmental conservation with local economic development. Our visit provided students with a deeper understanding of the interconnected roles of the Core, Buffer, and Transition Zones within CRBR and how Kg. Tudan integrates education and sustainable tourism while preserving its natural resources. By effectively combining theoretical knowledge from the lectures with hands-on experiences, students gained a more profound understanding of these concepts. Some were seen taking notes to prepare for their presentations in the final workshop.

Additionally, we explored the Mari Mari Cultural Village, a living museum that preserves and showcases the lifestyle, traditions, and heritage of several indigenous groups, including the Dusun, Rungus, Bajau, and Murut. Through a guided tour featuring hands-on activities and traditional performances, students gained valuable insights into Sabah's rich cultural diversity and the significance of heritage preservation.

At the recommendation of UMS, we visited Mount Kinabalu Botanical Garden, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A faculty member from the UMS Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation Collection Center accompanied us throughout the visit, guiding us through the garden. There, students gained new insights into various plant species not found in Japan and organisms that thrive only at high altitudes.

### 3.3 Workshop in Kobuni Village

As the final on-site activity, a workshop was held in Kobuni Village with faculty members and students from both TUINS and UMS (See Table 3). TUINS students presented their findings based on insights gained during the tour. The presentation topics covered a wide range of subjects, including music, community communication, environmental issues, and proposals for the homestay hosts. For many students, delivering a presentation in English was a significant challenge. However, despite recognizing their limitations in English proficiency, they found it to be a valuable learning experience. After the presentations, a Q&A session and discussions with UMS students followed, further strengthening the bonds and connections between students from TUINS and UMS.

**Table 3**

Activities in Workshop 2 Held on September 13, 2024

	<b>Activities</b>
1	Opening remarks
2	Presentations by TUINS students
3	Lecture by a TUINS faculty leader
4	Discussions
5	Closing remarks

At the end of the Study Tour, most students mentioned that time had flown by with all the activities, and some even wished they could stay longer. This suggests that our tour was a great success, despite being a pilot program implemented in a completely new environment.

## 4. Evaluation and Suggestions

To assess the effectiveness of the Study Tour, we conducted an evaluation questionnaire after its implementation. The survey consisted of 38 items designed to gauge participants' overall experience. It covered multiple aspects, including pre-departure training, homestay experiences—such as interactions with the host family, meals, and safety—academic

components like lectures at UMS, the final-day workshop, and other relevant factors<sup>2</sup>. This comprehensive evaluation provided valuable insights into participants' experiences and highlighted areas for future improvement.

To document and promote the program, we also developed a comprehensive book report, *TUINS-UMS Study Tour 2024*, that included the itinerary, promotional flyers, reports from participating students, analyses of the survey results, and other relevant materials (Faculty of Contemporary Society, 2024). This report serves both as a record of the program and as a resource for future promotion, providing insights into the program's structure, student experiences, and areas for improvement.

Building on the evaluation survey, a follow-up meeting was organized. During this session, students reflected on the strengths of the program and shared insights into its most beneficial aspects. Additionally, they provided constructive suggestions for further improvement, highlighting areas where adjustments could enhance the overall experience for future participants. This feedback serves as a valuable resource for refining the program's structure and effectiveness in subsequent iterations.

In the following section, we present key findings from the analysis of the survey results and the post-experience follow-up meeting that warrant attention.

#### **4.1 Enhancing Recruitment Strategies**

As mentioned earlier, some participants were encouraged by their academic advisors to join the Study Tour. However, in the post-experience survey on primary reasons for participation,

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<sup>2</sup> Further details can be found in the book report referenced in the following paragraph.

the most common responses were “Cross-Cultural Understanding” and “Career Development.” This suggests that many students were motivated to gain firsthand cultural experiences abroad and apply their insights to their academic and professional futures. These were followed by “Improvement of Language Proficiency” and “Recommendation by Teachers.” This indicates that some students joined the program with the expectation of enhancing their English or other language skills, while others participated due to encouragement from their academic advisors. Only one participant selected “Earning Academic Credit” as their primary reason, suggesting that fulfilling academic requirements was a less significant motivation compared to gaining practical experience and exploring future career opportunities. This aligns with the low number of initial signups during the recruitment phase, even though the program is a credited course under the current curriculum (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
Purpose of Participation in the Study Tour

	<b>Purpose of Participation</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
1	Cross-Cultural Understanding	4
2	Career Development	4
3	Improvement of Language Proficiency	3
4	Recommendation by Teachers	3
5	Earning Academic Credit	1

In light of these findings, it would be beneficial to highlight the program’s value in fostering cultural understanding and leveraging overseas experiences in the job market. Notably, one participant reported being asked during a job fair about their willingness to work abroad after joining a company. The student referenced their Study Tour experience, which was met with positive feedback from the employer. At the very least, this participant demonstrated increased confidence in tackling future challenges.

One of the most effective ways to communicate these benefits to prospective students is through peer testimonials from the former participants. These former program participants can serve as ambassadors, sharing their experiences during mandatory orientation sessions at the beginning of the school academic year, which are attended by students across all academic years, as well as in key compulsory courses where students of the same cohort are present. This approach not only enhances outreach but also help engage students who may be hesitant about cross-cultural exposure and global engagement. We've already organized student presentations in the above-mentioned settings.

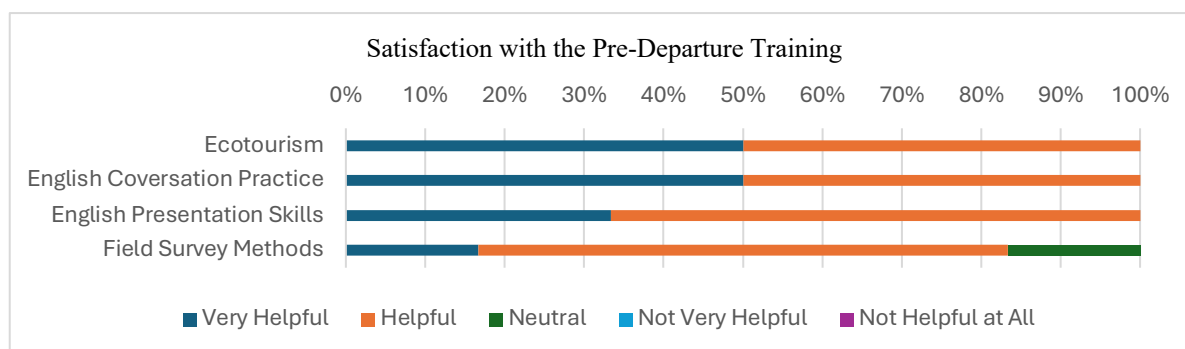
Additionally, establishing a dedicated website or social media platform featuring blogs and short videos from former programs would further stimulate student interest. The published book report on the program can also serve as a valuable promotional tool, providing in-depth insights and reinforcing the program's impact. A noteworthy point is that former program participants have continued to engage with UMS students via social media. Strengthening these connections through structured mentoring programs or alumni networks could further enhance the program's long-term impact.

#### **4.2 Strengthening Program Design**

During the post-experience follow-up meeting for the Study Tour, students shared their thoughts on both its strengths and areas for improvement. Based on their feedback and survey results, the following section outlines key aspects to enhance for future iterations of the program.

## A. Optimizing Pre-Departure Training Content

The lecture of the pre-departure training was generally well received, with many students rating it as ‘Very Helpful’ or ‘Helpful.’ (See Figure 1) However, due to the limited number of sessions, some students may have felt that there were insufficient opportunities to explore certain topics in greater depth (Table 5).



**Figure 1**  
*Student Satisfaction with Pre-Departure Training Sessions*

**Table 5**  
Training Areas Identified as Requiring More Time

	Requirement for More Time	Number of Students
1	English Presentation Skills	5
2	English Conversation Practice	3
3	Ecotourism	2
4	Field Survey Methods	2

### A-1. Enhancing English Language Proficiency

Regarding the program’s impact on English proficiency, not all students felt that their language skills had improved. Although they had opportunities to use English practically during the program, the short duration may have made it difficult for them to perceive significant progress. However, most participants reported feeling less anxious or resistant toward using English (See Table 6). While the extent of improvement varied, nearly all students experienced some form of breakthrough in overcoming their discomfort with the language. This shift in confidence can likely be attributed to positive experiences in real-world communication and interactive

activities, where they realized that “even if I make mistakes, I can still be understood” and “my conversation partners are receptive and understanding.” As the “English Conversation Practice” saw a relatively high demand for extended time in the survey (see Table 5), the need for more practical communication training has become evident.

**Table 6**  
Changes in English Proficiency and Anxiety about Speaking English

	<b>Improvement of English Proficiency</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Level of Anxiety about English</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
1	Significantly Improved	1	Significantly Reduced	5
2	Slightly Improved	1	Slightly Reduced	1
3	No Change	4	No Change	0
4	Slightly Declined	0	Not Much Reduced	0
5	Significantly Declined	0	Not Reduced at All	0

The session that students most frequently requested additional time for was the “English Presentation Skills.” (See Table 5) This suggests a strong demand for developing English presentation skills and having more opportunities for practice. This can also be inferred from students’ responses regarding their satisfaction with their own presentations in the final-day workshop with UMS students. All respondents gave a harsh evaluation of their performance, with responses evenly split between “Not Satisfied at All” and “Not Very Satisfied.” (See Table 7) While each student perceived different levels of challenges, there was a general sense of dissatisfaction.

**Table 7**  
Student Satisfaction with Their English Presentations

	<b>Level of Satisfaction</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
1	Not Satisfied at All	3
2	Not Very Satisfied	3
3	Neutral	0
4	Satisfied	0
5	Very Satisfied	0



It became evident that students needed more time to develop their English conversation and presentation skills. These competencies cannot improve dramatically through just two or three sessions, as effective communication in an international environment requires consistent practice and reinforcement. Therefore, providing more comprehensive support for English language training—such as expanding the duration and intensity of English training—will be an important consideration for future programs.

### **A-2. Bridging Academic Knowledge and Cultural Readiness**

Students also expressed interest in further deepening their knowledge in the areas of “Ecotourism” and “Field Survey Methods.” (See Table 5) In relation to these topics, during the post-experience follow-up meeting of the Study Tour, a request was made to incorporate a preparatory study session on the homestay experience. This session would provide essential background knowledge on the natural environment, culture and customs, and history, ensuring that participants are both mentally and physically prepared for their cultural immersion.

### **A-3. Fundamental Travel Information**

In one of the pre-departure training sessions, students received travel information, including health precautions, safety guidelines, and cultural sensitivities, as is done for other overseas programs. Fortunately, no major issues occurred during the trip.

Before departure, faculty program leaders installed a taxi-hailing application, which proved to be convenient for use in Sabah, Malaysia. For future programs, arranging chartered vehicles could be a convenient option to improve logistics, provided the cost is reasonable. Additionally, we rented a portable Wi-Fi device for international use, which was highly beneficial. Since we

had only one Wi-Fi device, some participants purchased SIM cards for their cell phones upon arrival at the destination airport.

However, the trip revealed gaps in our preparedness for unexpected situations. To reduce airfare costs, we chose reasonably priced flights from Japan to Sabah with a layover in Guangzhou, China. According to the original schedule, there would be no time lost, as the connecting flight was scheduled for the same day with only a few hours of layover. However, due to an approaching typhoon in southern China, our travel agency informed us before departure that we would need to stay overnight in Guangzhou and depart the next day. This change posed a particular challenge for one student with a Vietnamese passport. Since she needed a visa to leave the airport in China, she had to stay overnight in Tokyo after flying there from Toyama with the group. She then met us at Guangzhou airport the following day for our departure to Sabah.

Ironically, the real trouble began after our arrival in Guangzhou. Japanese citizens were not permitted to enter China without a visa<sup>3</sup> and were required to obtain a temporary visa for an overnight hotel stay. Since our itinerary included a direct connecting flight to Sabah, securing a visa had not been part of our plans. The visa application process at the airport was time-consuming, and we barely made it to the hotel restaurant before closing time. This experience underscored the importance of preparing for the unexpected and remaining adaptable when faced with unforeseen challenges during travel.

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<sup>3</sup> The Chinese government suspended the measure exempting Japanese nationals from short-term stay visas since March 2020 due to the spread of COVID-19 but resumed it on November 30, 2024.

Unexpected challenges also arose on-site, not to mention that currency exchange rates were more favorable at downtown banks than at the airport. For instance, due to limited information about the cost of living in Sabah, Malaysia, one student ran out of cash midway through the tour and had to borrow from others for entrance fees—some of which were only disclosed on-site—as well as for souvenirs and other unforeseen expenses. These incidents highlight the need for stronger financial planning for future pre-departure training.

After implementing the Study Tour as a pilot program in the 2024 academic year, we are now prepared to provide well-informed travel guidance for the next academic year. Pre-departure safety education was a crucial component of the training. To enhance this, future sessions should incorporate more comprehensive safety education, including case studies, real-life simulations, and, if possible, expert-led lectures. These additions would better equip students for emergencies and ensure their well-being during their stay abroad. The Japanese Nationals Overseas Safety Division at the Consular Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (n.d.) has produced a video series, *Overseas Safety Toranomaki*, which provides guidance on avoiding trouble while abroad. Strengthening this aspect of the training will ensure that participants not only gain academic and cultural knowledge but also develop the skills to navigate unforeseen challenges with confidence and resilience. Overall, students showed a strong preference for extending lectures that focus on developing practical and applied skills.

## **B. Refinement of the Main Program Content**

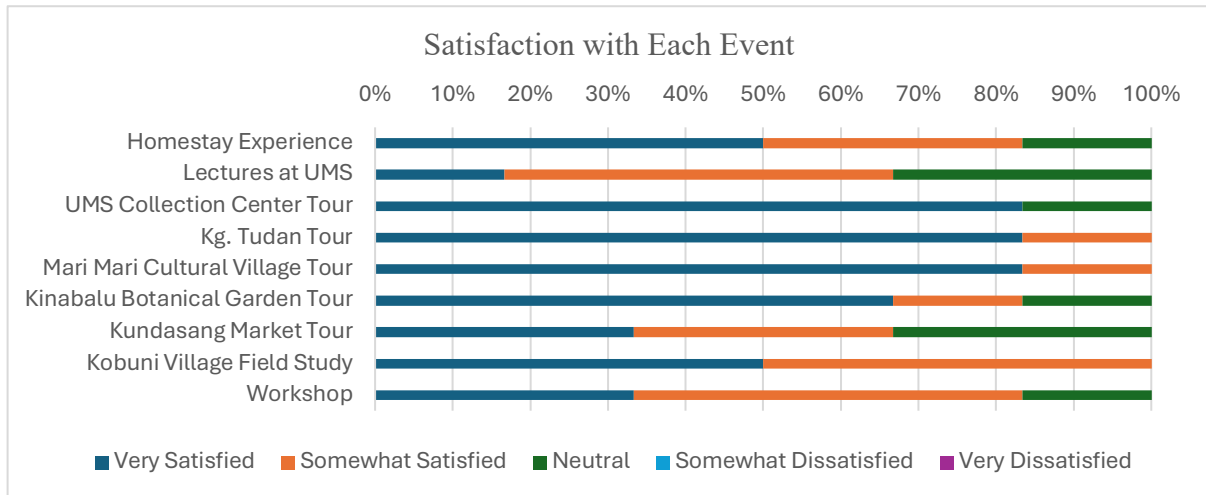
Utilizing the survey results and feedback from students in post-experience discussions to refine program design will be instrumental in enhancing learning outcomes and overall participant satisfaction.

**Table 8**  
Student Ratings of the Study Tour and Recommendation Likelihood

10-Point Scale	Number of Students	
	Satisfaction with the Study Tour	Likelihood of Recommendation
1-7	0	0
8	4	3
9	2	1
10	0	2

Regarding overall satisfaction with the Study Tour and participants' willingness to recommend the program, all respondents rated their experience as an "8" or higher on a 10-point scale. This indicates a high level of fulfillment among participants, who acknowledged the benefits of the overseas experience and expressed a strong inclination to recommend the program to other students. Notably, two participants assigned a perfect score of "10," suggesting that, for some, the program had a profoundly positive impact, potentially serving as a transformative experience or a valuable foundation for future academic and professional endeavors (See Table 8).

The findings also indicate a trend of higher satisfaction with experiential and interactive activities compared to lecture-based sessions. This suggests that integrating more active learning components into future iterations of the program would be beneficial. For example, the homestay experience was particularly well received and will continue to be a central feature of the Study Tour. Some participants noted that, should they participate in the program again at the same location, they would prefer to stay with different host families to gain a broader cultural perspective.



**Figure 2**  
*Student Satisfaction Ratings for Each Event*

Similarly, visits to the UMS Collection Center, Mari Mari Cultural Village, and the Mount Kinabalu Botanical Garden were highly rated, underscoring the value of fieldwork-based learning experiences (See Figure 2). These findings highlight the importance of fostering hands-on engagement in study tours to maximize educational impact.

While this overseas study tour provided significant opportunities for intercultural learning, there remains scope for optimizing the allocation of time and the content of certain activities to further enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. For example, lectures and workshop presentations were not among the most favorably received components of the program, primarily due to challenges related to English comprehension. This issue was particularly evident in the workshop setting, where students were required to engage in presentations and discussions in English with limited preparation time (See Figure 2). Despite these difficulties, students generally valued the opportunity to interact with their peers from UMS, highlighting the importance of direct engagement in fostering meaningful cross-cultural exchanges.

In light of these observations, future iterations of the program would benefit from enhancing collaborative learning initiatives with UMS. One effective approach would be to facilitate joint research projects in which students from both institutions work together on topics of mutual interest. These projects could be presented at a joint workshop, with faculty members from both universities serving as evaluators. Such an initiative would not only deepen intellectual engagement but also promote sustained academic exchange and strengthen institutional ties between the two institutions.

Although not directly related to the main discussion, it is important to note that allocating free time for students is essential. Due to the tightly packed schedule, they had no opportunity to adequately explore the city or its surroundings. Future programs should address this issue by ensuring sufficient time for such activities.

#### **4.3 Securing Funding**

Securing funding for the SSA program is crucial to reducing the financial burden on students, many of whom may be eager to participate but are forced to withdraw due to economic constraints. As a matter of fact, one student who signed up in the initial phase had to withdraw because of financial concerns. Faculty program leasers made great efforts to reduce costs by comparing different airfares and routes, securing discounted accommodations that were easily accessible from both the homestay and UMS, and collaborating with UMS on cultural visits. However, establishing dedicated scholarships or travel subsidies would provide direct support to students in need, ensuring that financial limitations do not become a barrier to valuable international experiences and making overseas programs more inclusive and accessible to a diverse range of students.

## CONCLUSION

This overseas Study Tour provided students with a valuable platform for experiential learning, allowing them to deepen their intercultural awareness, build confidence in their language proficiency, and develop a global perspective. Our review of the program has highlighted key areas for enhancement, including time management, curriculum optimization, and improved pre-departure support. By incorporating these refinements, future iterations of the program can further enhance student learning outcomes and foster both academic and professional growth. Ultimately, participation in such international programs serves as a crucial step in preparing students for the complexities of an increasingly interconnected world.

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