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① La Universidad Latinoamericana de Ciencia y Tecnología (ULACIT)

I took classes at ULACIT in San Jose, Costa Rica. We had discussions and worked in groups to understand how sustainable development is possible in Costa Rica.

For example, we studied about Chiquita, the famous banana plantation. Chiquita strives to preserve birds and animals in tropical rain forests, and recycles banana leaves and stems into composts. The company pays better wages than the other plantations. We could see what efforts were being made for sustainable development.

We also studied about tourism. Tourism is the main income for Costa Rica though it can be a cause of environmental disruption. We understood the importance of eco-tourism and the balance between development and environmental protection.

② Visits

We visited several places in order to see what was being done for sustainable development.

- Florex···A company that makes biodegradable detergent. Their products achieve biodegradability of over 70%. They do not use substances that diminish levels of oxygen in water and aquatic fauna. Their products do not contain ingredients that are considered carcinogenic.

- Dole···The famous banana plantation. Not only do they preserve birds and animals in tropical rain forests, they try to improve the lifestyle of laborers who are (mostly?) from Nicaragua. We learned about conflicts between Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

- Wind farm···Atop a hill near Arenal Volcano. Wind power amounts to only 2% of the total power generation in Costa Rica. More work is needed to increase this percentage.

- Inbio Park...Located in the suburbs of San Jose. We saw a variety of snakes, butterflies, and crocodiles. Aside from this abundance of wildlife, the park has another dimension: it has its own laboratory. Researchers from U.S. pharmaceutical companies work there. If they discover something they can use it to make new medicine, but they still have to pay money to the government of Costa Rica. This system provides a good and vital income for developing countries rich in natural resources.

③ Topics Covered by In-class Guest Speakers

- The Earth Charter
- Rainforest Alliance
- The Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad (ICE, a state-run electrical company)

④ Short Trips

During my stay in Costa Rica, I went to national parks to get a hands-on experience of eco-tourism and to enjoy the wonderful nature.

- Braulio Carillo National Park...I enjoyed water rafting.
- Vol. Arenal National Park...There are many hot springs here. We couldn't get closer to the active volcano, but we relished the hot springs.
- Cahuita National Park...A small park in the countryside inhabited mostly by black people. The climate was rather Caribbean, or hot and humid. The area around the national park was not safe.
- Manuel Antonio National Park...The biggest and most famous national park in Costa Rica. It took five to six hours from San Jose by bus. It has the most beautiful beach, and rangers keep it in good condition.

By participating in this program I was able to learn a lot about sustainable development. I was introduced to perspectives that I would not have been exposed to had I simply stayed in Japan. This experience helps me to think about the issue at a global level. I would like to say thank you to everyone who worked to make this program happen.