

# Developing intercultural awareness through country research projects

Renée Renjel  
*Sophia University*

## Reference data:

Renjel, R. (2006). Developing intercultural awareness through country research projects. In K. Bradford-Watts, C. Ikeguchi, & M. Swanson (Eds.) *JALT2005 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

This paper will focus on integrating country research projects in Advanced English university courses. Students are assigned various countries around the world during an ongoing research project that lasts throughout the academic year. The goal of this project is building intercultural awareness, increasing knowledge of the developing world, exploring stereotypes, developing research skills in English, and finally giving a formal presentation on the assigned country at the end of the course. Students have commented that the country research project was the highlight of the course.

This paper will discuss the benefits and challenges of developing this project based on the writer's experiences in the classroom. The writer will offer general suggestions on how to plan and organize such a project. In addition, the writer will suggest a timeline with stages of the project highlighted and give suggestions for the final presentation phase. This paper will conclude with extensive feedback from students.

ここでは大学の上級英語講座における国別研究プロジェクトについて述べます。

国際的な感覚の習得、発展途上国に関する理解の向上、ステレオタイプな考え方の再考、英語での研究スキルの向上、そして最後に担当した国の研究結果のプレゼンテーションを行うことを目的に、生徒たちは一年間をとおして割り当てられた国の研究を進めます。生徒からは、このプロジェクトが授業でもっとも興味深いものだったと述べています。

この論文では私の体験を元に、このプロジェクトの効用について述べていきます。またプロジェクトをどのようなスケジュールで進めていき、最終的なプレゼンテーションにつなげていくかなど、このプロジェクトを行うための一般的な方法を紹介します。最後にこのプロジェクトを経験した生徒からのフィードバックで締めくくります。

**T**his paper will focus on integrating country research projects in Advanced English university courses. Students are assigned various countries around the world during an ongoing research project that lasts throughout the academic year. The goal of this project is building intercultural awareness, increasing knowledge of the developing world, exploring stereotypes, developing research skills

in English, and finally giving a formal presentation on the assigned country at the end of the course.

Students have commented that the country research project was the highlight of the course. They developed valuable research skills and learned how to be creative researchers in their search for information on their countries. A feature of the project is for students to find as many direct resources as possible for the assigned countries and collect information through interviews and discussions.

This paper will discuss the benefits and challenges of developing this project based on my experience in the classroom. I will offer a list of general suggestions on how to plan and organize such a project, including a list of countries used in past projects, useful resources, and strategies for creative research. I will also suggest a timeline with stages of the project highlighted and offer suggestions for the final presentation phase. This paper will conclude with extensive feedback from students about their country research project experience throughout different stages of their learning.

### Project rationale

There is a growing awareness among many language teachers for the need to teach intercultural awareness as part of a foreign language curriculum. There are a variety of approaches to teaching intercultural communication in university EFL courses in Japan. Teachers may offer content-based courses on intercultural communication that are primarily academic in focus. Others may include a unit on intercultural awareness, and others may select textbooks that include substantial cross-cultural material. There seems to

be a growing selection of textbooks and materials devoted to teaching intercultural topics.

I have found that university students in Japan are extremely interested in topics in intercultural communication and are highly motivated to study this subject in greater depth. However, there are two significant limitations. First, many of the materials and textbooks give just a superficial glimpse of cultural issues and as such often tend only to emphasize cultural differences and reinforce stereotypes. Second, many materials I have found on the market in Japan tend to be focused solely on Western cultures, with the greatest emphasis being on American and British cultures, values, and norms. I believe that only studying these cultures can give students mistaken ideas about “major” and “minor” cultures that are worth studying.

I have found that one excellent way to give students a valuable and meaningful intercultural experience in the classroom is through long-term country research projects. I have found it to be a very meaningful experience for the students and discovered it has a transformative impact on their way of viewing their research country, their own country of Japan, and ultimately their own cultural identity in a global society.

For the past five years, I have been exploring ways to integrate country research projects in my university courses on intercultural communication. I view this as a way for students to broaden their knowledge of the developing world and apply the frameworks they are learning about intercultural communication to a meaningful and creative independent project.

## Background

The country research project is one part of a university course on intercultural communication that lasts one full academic year. Throughout the course, students study various theories and frameworks of intercultural communication, including definitions of culture, cultural perspective, stereotypes, values, communication styles across cultures, adaptation, and cultural identity. There are assigned textbooks and reading assignments for the course. The country research project is one ongoing facet of the course, a continuing thread, that has the goal of giving students an opportunity to apply the cultural frameworks we have been studying in class to a new context, in this case, an assigned country in the developing world.

This project came about because of student feedback in past intercultural courses I had been teaching. At the end of the year, students commented that they were very motivated to study intercultural communication in greater depth and wanted to learn not only about western cultures, but also about cultures in Asia, Africa, and South America.

I thought of ways I could make the course more diverse in terms of culture topics, but realized if I were to teach about too many cultures around the world, it would be a near impossible task and students would have only a superficial glimpse of each culture.

Therefore, I thought one of the best ways to give students the chance to learn about diverse cultures was to assign a year-long ongoing country research project during which each student researches a different country. I also chose this approach because several of the courses I was teaching were required to include some aspects of “research and study

skills.” I concluded that this project would give students the chance to learn about a new culture in great depth and would be a meaningful personal experience with a lasting impact. Also, instead of lecturing on various cultures, I wanted students to give formal presentations at the end of the year and learn about these countries from each other. I hoped to create an entirely learner-centered, self-directed project that would challenge and interest my students.

## Project organization

The country research project is one ongoing parallel aspect of a course on intercultural communication. The project lasts throughout the academic year, with students passing through various stages of their research from April through December. At the beginning of the academic year in April, each student is assigned a country in the developing world. The students drawing a slip of paper select this country randomly. Students progress through the year by doing research through books and the internet, as well as doing experiential research by conducting interviews, going to restaurants and performances, or taking lessons in language, cooking, or music. Some also become active in volunteer groups or cultural organizations. They explore various creative approaches to researching about their assigned country in greater depth. The students are to focus not only on the basic information and objective surface culture, but as they progress in their research, should also explore the deeper subjective culture as well – the values and beliefs underlying and shaping the society. Finally, in the last weeks of the academic year in December and January, students give formal presentations on their assigned countries.

## Teaching context

The projects are part of classes conducted at two universities in Tokyo. Both are yearlong courses meeting for one 90-minute period per week. The levels of the students range from high intermediate to advanced. Class sizes have ranged from 15 to 45 students, generally averaging between 30-40. At one university, it is a required advanced level course for first and second year students. The students at this university are majoring in foreign languages such as Portuguese, German, French, and Russian, as well as business. Many have had experience living or traveling abroad. At the other university, it is a smaller elective class and students are majoring in foreign languages and literature. They are second to fourth year students. Students at both universities have had exposure to studying about western cultures, but few opportunities to study about non-western cultures and the developing world. They have selected my course after reading the course description, so they have some awareness of the intercultural context of the class.

## Benefits of the project

On the language level, it is an important chance for the students to develop valuable research skills, critical thinking skills, and learn from experiential approaches to research. It is a challenging project requiring advanced research mainly in English and this has a strong impact on developing students' language skills. It is also a way to build confidence in English through a formal presentation at the end of the year.

Furthermore, students can learn to become self-directed and independent researchers. I have found that one of the key lessons students learn through this project is the importance of initiative. This is a quality many foreign teachers in Japan would probably like to see a lot more of from their students. Independent research projects are not usually a part of the Japanese curriculum in secondary school, so students have usually never been faced with such a significant academic project that requires their own initiative, motivation, goal setting, creativity, and reflection. Therefore, I believe the project is a very good way to encourage initiative and self-direction, which I feel are extremely valuable study skills for students.

Another significant aspect of the project is that students “learn by doing,” not only from researching facts and statistics in books. Additionally, because it is a long-term ongoing project, there is ample time for discussion and reflection with classmates. The project encourages experiential research and learning. Experiential learning can be described as a process by which the experience of the learner is reflected upon and from this emerge new insights, discoveries, and understanding. The experiential learning model highlights reflection, discussion, analysis, and evaluation of the experience. This is an important part of the country research project process.

Finally, there is significant intercultural learning that results from this project. It is a way to develop intercultural knowledge and awareness of the developing world, a topic not often touched upon in many courses. It is an important chance to examine stereotypes about unfamiliar cultures and reflect on shifting perspectives of what is a “major”

and “minor” culture. Furthermore, it increases meaningful awareness of serious issues and problems facing many countries in the developing world today.

### Suggested timeline and assignments

I would next like to offer my suggested timeline and details of assignments throughout the various stages of the project. This timeline is meant for a university course lasting one academic year. One year is an ideal length of time for this project as it gives ample time for exploration, research, and reflection. I have not tried this project in a semester long course, but I believe it could be modified to fit such a schedule if needed.

#### April

At the beginning of the academic year, I introduce the country research project as part of the syllabus and answer any general questions students may have about the assignment.

#### May

##### *Step 1: Assign countries, project outline, world map*

After the Golden Week holiday has finished and the students have completed final registration for their courses, I give students the basic information about the project (Appendix 1 and 2), explain the process and goal, and assign the countries. I write the name of each country on a slip of paper and have each student randomly select a paper. It is a dramatic moment when students find out their countries.

Their first reactions are usually surprise and then panic because most of the countries they know only by name or have never even heard of before. Students are sitting in small groups of four in this class, I have them talk to their group members and discuss what their country is and what they know about it at the present moment.

Also in this lesson, I pass out the full list of countries (Appendix 3) to each student along with a blank world map. I then have students work with their group members to locate each country (theirs and all of their classmates) on the map and write the country name. Their homework is to complete the world map with all of the countries of their classmates. They keep this map with their other class materials and refer back to it throughout the course, especially when working with new partners and group members. Also, later in May, we have a world map quiz in class. Students are expected to know the names and geographic location of the countries of everyone in the class.

The other homework is to gather basic facts about their country and for this I recommend the Lonely Planet website which has a lot of useful information in English. Lonely Planet is a publisher of travel guidebooks and is especially noted for their books on travel in the developing world. Lonely Planet has a website with a lot of relevant information and is one good place for students to start their research. Students are to bring whatever printouts and information they find to the next lesson to share with their group members.

### *Step 2: Discussion of first impressions*

In the following lesson, the students discuss their first impressions of their countries and then share basic facts they have learned so far. Students also report any information they have found on the internet, including the Lonely Planet website (Appendix 4).

### *Step 3: Basic facts and embassy visit*

By the end of the month, students should have gathered the basic facts about their countries and shared this with their group members. In addition, I ask students to visit the embassy of their country if there is an embassy located in Tokyo. The purpose of the embassy visit is to give students a first direct contact with their country, collect information, and hopefully meet a contact person that they can interview at a later date. I have found it's extremely important to tell students that many embassies have limited hours that are open to the public, so it is important for students to check the schedule carefully beforehand. Sometimes it's necessary to make an appointment. In addition, it's important to teach students polite language to use with the embassy staff so that they make a positive impression and future students in the course will receive a warm welcome.

This is one advantage of being in Tokyo for this project – of course there are more resources directly available to students such as embassies, cultural organizations, etc. I have been fortunate to make several important contacts at some of the embassies in Tokyo and these people have helped my students tremendously. In some cases, students have even met or interviewed the ambassador and been invited to

special cultural events and festivals at the embassy. In case there is no embassy in Tokyo, I suggest that students go to the national tourist office or another cultural organization. Students can also look at the embassy's website on the internet.

## *June*

### *Step 4: Regional support groups*

Next, students form regional support groups following the list of assigned countries and regions. Up until now students have been sitting in their regular groups of four, but now they change their group and sit with their new regional group members. This will be their new group in the class until after summer vacation. We spend time on introductions and share the country information, impressions, and resources they have found in the first month of their research. Students in the regional groups tend to form close relationships and go to embassies, lectures, exhibitions, and restaurants together to help support each other in their research. At the end of the year, students comment that the regional group was a very important help to them during this project and essential for their motivation and progress.

### *Step 5: Travel and cultural information*

In the early summer, students continue to research focusing on basic facts, travel, and cultural information. At this point they are still getting to know their country and are beginning to have a good grasp of the basic information.

### *Step 6: Creative research*

By the end of June, students need help in finding additional resources. At this point, I give them a list of resources and suggestions for creative research (Appendix 5). I emphasize that this project is not to be only textbook learning, in fact it should an experiential project involving creative approaches to finding information and building personal connections. I also stress that the success of this project depends on their own initiative and creativity. Some students may say that they have more “difficult countries” (Malawi, Uganda, Namibia) and other students have “easier countries” (Thailand, Brazil, Mexico). However, I tell them that the success depends on them, not their country. In fact, they come to realize it can actually be more challenging to research a more famous country since there is an overwhelming amount of information available and the larger embassies are not as likely to personally welcome student visitors. On the other hand, smaller embassies are often very happy to have visitors, eager to share information, and there is a greater chance of meeting diplomats or the ambassador.

### *July*

As summer vacation approaches, students have completed researching basic facts and information about their countries. They are starting to discover which aspects of the culture interest them the most. At this stage, I focus on “personal research” which is experiential in nature and gives students the chance to “learn by doing.” I encourage students to begin attending exhibitions and festivals, taking lessons, listening to music, seeing films, and finding contact people

to interview and learn from during the projects. They should become involved with their research country on a personal level. This will be the focus during summer vacation.

### *Step 7: Progress report #1*

Before summer vacation, I assign progress report #1 (Appendix 6). I feel it is essential to have students turn in at least three significant progress reports during the year. This way, I can check the progress of their work, check the resources they are using, and offer suggestions and advice. More importantly, students have a chance to reflect on their own research and share their progress reports with other students. Students get encouragement, resource ideas, and motivation by sharing their progress reports. The report is not meant to be a repetition of facts and statistics they have found, but a reflection on their learning experience and strategies for research.

### *Summer vacation*

#### *Step 8: Deeper research*

During summer vacation, students are to focus on deeper research (Appendix 7), including learning the values that are the foundation of the culture. They study the religion, educational system, and family structure. Some students research common expressions and proverbs that represent key values or themes shaping the society. Students can also focus on current events, social issues, and current problems in the region. They are expected to keep up to date with the current news in their research country. It is hoped that all students will do at least one or two interviews with people from their assigned country or with others who have lived

or traveled in the country. During the long summer vacation, students have more time to explore cultural performances, take lessons, and do other activities.

### **October**

#### ***Step 9: Progress report #2***

Progress report #2 is due in the first class after summer vacation. In this paper, students write about the research they have done over the vacation. Students are encouraged to bring photographs of their restaurant visits, cooking lessons, music performances, festival events, people they have met, etc. Students share regional and cultural information with their support group. All students read each other's papers, discuss them in detail, and offer comments and suggestions for further research. After I read all of the papers, I select some excerpts and distribute them for all of the students to read (Appendix 8). I have found students are highly motivated by reading about the interesting progress of their classmates.

### **November**

Students wrap up the main research by late November and start to think of how they will organize information for their presentation. They begin to formulate a general outline.

### **December**

#### ***Step 10: Progress report #3***

Progress report #3, the final progress report, is due in early December. In class, students share their ideas in their

regional support groups and also other discussion groups. In December, we begin to focus on presentation skills and organizing and presenting visuals. We discuss how the presentation will be evaluated, announce the presentation dates, and work on writing introductions and conclusions. We also discuss how to make a presentation interactive and the importance of audience. Students practice with their peer support group and offer advice.

#### ***Step 11: Presentation stage – 3 weeks***

Students give their presentation in small groups of four students each. They will give their presentation three different times in three different groups. The presentations will last over a three-week period from mid-December to mid-January. This format allows students to make interactive presentations with plenty of opportunities for questions and answers. I want them to have several chances to give their presentation, each time improving their presentation skills, gaining more confidence, becoming smoother and more dynamic presenters, and developing an awareness of audience. Students learn how to improve their presentations by listening to a variety of other presenters and learning from their strong and weak points. Between the first and third round, there is a dramatic difference and transformation. Presentation rounds #1 and #2 are held during the last two classes in December, before the holiday break begins. After each round, students are given suggestions on how to improve their presentations and they think about what they learned from the presentation styles of other students. The final round takes place in January, after the holiday break.



### *Step 12: Peer evaluation*

Students evaluate themselves and their classmates after each presentation. They give a score from 1-5 points in each of several categories: preparation, visuals, organization, interest, and presentation skills (Appendix 9). This information is kept confidential. I have found that peer evaluation has an extremely strong impact on student motivation. In addition to the numerical evaluation, students are to write short responses about each presenter, from a few sentences to a paragraph in length.

### *January*

Round #3, the final round, is held during the first lesson back in January. At this point, students have made significant improvements to their presentations and are usually full of confidence. They have had the opportunity to fine tune their presentations skills and develop into true “experts” on their assigned countries. At this stage, I feel that most students have developed a true passion and deep interest in their countries and are able to communicate this very effectively to their audience.

### *Step 13: Self-evaluation and final grades*

The final grade for the country research project is made up of the progress reports, peer evaluations, self-evaluation, and my own evaluation during the presentation phase. The final paper on the country research project experience is also a part of the final grade.

Students submit all peer evaluations and self-evaluations. On the evaluation form, they also vote for the top three

outstanding presentations among all those they have seen. All evaluations are held as confidential and I’ve found this ensures accurate and honest grading. If students are given clear guidelines in how to evaluate, I feel they can do an excellent job.

### *Step 14: The last class, final paper, wrap-up*

For the next lesson, which is the final class meeting of the year, students have homework to write a reflective paper (Appendix 10) on their country research project experience, including the experience of giving their own presentation, getting the reactions and comments from others, and listening to a variety of presentations from their classmates. In this last class of the year, we have a wrap up discussion and students share their comments and insights.

### **Concerns and limitations**

Students often ask at the beginning of the year why they can’t choose their own country. My answer is simple. I want them to learn about a country they might not have chosen on their own and a region they probably know very little about. I hope the project will open up completely new experiences for them. If students have contacts or resources in any of the countries we are studying, I encourage them to share these with other students.

I feel this project works best with students who are at least high intermediate to advanced level because of the challenging nature of the research and presentation. I believe it could also be successful at lower levels, but would need to be modified. Additionally, students in the Tokyo area or

other major cities do tend to have more resources available. Students not in these areas would need to do more research and make contacts by e-mail.

As for limitations, time is the key factor. I have always done this project in a year- long course. I think a project such as this requires a great deal of time for ongoing research. Class size is best when there are enough students to have variety in the regions covered.

### Student feedback from final papers

I have included excerpts from the final paper mentioned above (Appendix 11). What stands out to me is that it was an important learning experience for the students on many different levels. Above all, the country research project resulted in a strong motivation to learn more about cultures they had previously know very little about.

### Conclusion

At the beginning of the year when our class is studying about perceptions and stereotypes, students are very surprised when they hear that many people in the world don't know the differences between Japanese and Chinese culture, even that people have commented "Isn't Japan a part of China?" By the end of the year, students realize that like these people they at first criticized back in April, they didn't know anything about the differences between Brazil and Argentina or Malawi and Kenya. They were in fact guilty of the same cultural misunderstanding about regions of the world far from their home country. Even students' perspective on major and minor countries shifted when they realized that

while Japan may be the center of the world to them, to a farmer living in rural in Africa, Japan is in fact a minor faraway country full of mystery.

There is much that I could write about the final outcomes and insights gained from this project, but I think the best comments are offered by the students themselves in their progress reports and final reflection papers. Through these comments, it is clear that students benefited from this project and that it had a deep impact for many that will last far longer than the impressions of any book they have found in the library. Many students have kept up the personal connections formed during this project and have become more curious about the world around them on a deep and meaningful level. They may cheer for the Senegalese national soccer team, cry when they hear the news of the tsunami devastation in Sri Lanka, or become directly involved in fundraising for the earthquake survivors in Pakistan. For them, these countries are no longer faraway places only in the news, but places that they feel a personal connection with. That has been the most important goal of the project all along.

### Appendixes

The following are sample handouts from the classroom that were distributed during my presentation.

## Appendix 1

### COUNTRY RESEARCH PROJECT

#### INTRODUCTION

##### Project:

This is an ongoing research project for this course. You should learn about your assigned country by collecting information from a wide variety of sources: the internet, library, embassies, tourist offices, cultural organizations, NGOs, and volunteer groups. You should find as many resources as possible to give you in-depth knowledge of your country.

In addition to doing research from books, you'll be expected to do a lot of experiential and personal research by doing interviews, going to restaurants, performances, exhibitions, and "learn by doing."

##### The facts:

You should start by researching the basic facts of your country. This should be your focus during the first month.

- Official name
- Population
- Capital city
- Major cities
- People
- Languages
- Religions
- Government

- Holidays
- Climate
- Currency
- Major tourist attractions

You should also begin collecting colorful pictures, maps, and brochures.

**Recommended Website:** <http://www.lonelyplanet.com>

## Appendix 2

### COUNTRY RESEARCH PROJECT

#### BASIC OUTLINE

##### Part 1 - Introduction

What did you know about this country before you started this project? What were your feelings when you were assigned this country to research? What stereotypes did you have about this country? What were your first impressions as you started to find out more about this country?

##### Part 2 - The facts

You should present the basic information about your country:

- Official name
- Population
- Capital city
- Major cities

- People
- Languages
- Religions
- Government
- Holidays
- Climate
- Currency

### Part 3 – Travel information

- How to get there from japan
- Best season to travel
- Major tourist attractions
- Major events
- Popular activities
- Typical food
- Accommodations
- Transportation
- Costs
- Advice for travelers

### Part 4 - Cultural information

You should present information that would be interesting and useful to someone traveling, living, or doing business in your country. At least part of this should focus on the “deeper culture” in the bottom part of the iceberg. You can choose to focus on any of the following:

- Greetings
- Daily life
- Traditional clothing
- The arts
- Social customs
- Body language
- Polite and impolite behavior
- Roles of men and women
- Family relationships
- Living arrangements/housing
- Typical food/famous dishes
- Educational system
- Deeper values

**Part 5 – Deeper Issues**

You should also explore some “deeper issues” for your project.

- Current social issues facing society
- Current political events
- For this part, students have chosen to focus on issues such as the positive and negative impact of tourism in their country, genocide in Cambodia, child labor in Nepal, the AIDS epidemic in Botswana, the destruction of the rainforests in Malaysia, street children in Brazil, protecting the endangered mountain gorillas in Uganda, etc.

**Part 6 - Extras**

You should have explored several of the following as an “extra” for your project:

- Interview - someone from your country
- Interview - people who have traveled to your country
- Cultural performance
- Restaurant
- Film
- Book
- Language lessons
- Cooking lessons

Tell us about your experiences.

**Part 7 – Conclusion**

You should wrap up your presentation by telling us the most important things you have learned about your country. How have your impressions changed? What important knowledge have you gained during this project? Leave your audience with a strong final impression and message.

Your presentation will be 15-20 minutes in small groups of 4 people. You will give your presentation 3 times in different groups beginning in December. You will need to do serious ongoing research and prepare extremely well.

**Appendix 3****COUNTRY RESEARCH PROJECT**

Regional Groups:

1. North Africa/Middle East
  - \* Morocco      \* Egypt      \* Turkey      \* Israel
2. West Africa/East Africa
  - \* Senegal      \* Mali      \* Kenya      \* Tanzania
3. South Africa/East Africa
  - \* Uganda      \* Namibia      \* Malawi      \* Ethiopia
4. The Americas/Caribbean
  - \* Mexico      \* Guatemala      \* Cuba      \* Costa Rica
5. South America
  - \* Peru      \* Brazil      \* Argentina      \* Chile

6. North Asia  
\* Mongolia \* Bhutan \* Nepal
7. South Asia  
\* India \* Pakistan \* Sri Lanka
8. Indochina/South East Asia  
\* Vietnam \* Cambodia \* Laos \* Myanmar

### Appendix 4

#### COUNTRY RESEARCH PROJECT

##### *Discussion Questions*

1. Where is your country on the map I gave you last week? What are the neighboring countries? What is the official name for this area of the world?
2. What was your first reaction when you were given this country last week? What did you know about this country?
3. Where did you search for information during the past week?
4. What have you learned about your country?
5. What are your first impressions about this country as you begin your research?
6. Where do you usually use the internet? Do you have a computer at home?
7. Are you good at using search engines to find information on the internet? Which search engines do you usually use?

8. Do you ever use English to search on the internet? Give examples.
9. What is your biggest concern with this project?
10. Are there any questions you would like to ask about this country research project?

### Appendix 5

#### COUNTRY RESEARCH PROJECT

##### *Creative Research*

Internet Research:

Although it may be easier to read information in Japanese, it is much better to do more detailed research in English. There is much more available in English and from people all over the world. The information in English is often more interesting and detailed too, especially for developing countries.

Basic search engines:

<http://www.yahoo.jp> or <http://www.yahoo.com>

Yahoo is a good basic search engine and is very popular. You can also use Yahoo to search for Groups and Discussion Boards related to your topic. Yahoo has a lot of information, so you need to do a detailed search. You can also check to see if your country has its own Yahoo site, for example India and many countries do. This way you can find more local information, including local groups and local newspapers.

<http://www.google.jp>

Google has good information too. You can search in

Japanese or English. Click on “images” to see many photos. You can also search for Groups too.

You need to do detailed searches to get good information, otherwise you will get too much information.

Interesting sites:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com>

This is a major site for independent travel in English. They have many links posted for many countries, especially in developing countries. Also, there are useful message and discussion boards for travel in various parts of the world.

<http://www.virtualtourist.com>

This site is for independent travelers around the world, with “real travelers, real info,” as their motto says. Many backpackers and world travelers post their personal travel stories and links to their own websites. You can contact many members by e-mail and join discussion groups, so this could be useful to find a contact for your country, travelers and local people too.

<http://www.bootsall.com>

“The ultimate resource for the independent traveler.” This site has many travel stories, guides, and message and discussion boards.

<http://www.bugbug.com>

Great general site for travel information in exotic countries around the world, including world wonders and world festivals. Very colorful with nice photos.

<http://www.earthcalendar.net>

Fun site. Enter your birthday and you can find all the festivals on that day around the world. You can find the dates

of many interesting festivals.

<http://www.amazon.com> or <http://www.amazon.co.jp>

Great way to search for movies and books about your country. You can find reviews and a lot of detailed information. Easy to find who are the famous film directors and writers in your country and what the classics are to watch and read. Then, you can order them easily. Highly recommended!

Other Research for “Extras”

There is so much available on the internet about any topic, so it is easy to research if you use creative research skills. Check for:

Personal Homepages

Written by people who live there or who have been there. Very interesting. I found a bilingual website by a Japanese man who loves Bhutan very much and has wonderful information on his site. You can easily contact such people and ask them more questions. They love the countries and I’m sure they would be happy to help. Don’t be shy about contacting them.

Groups, Discussion and Message Boards

You can find many topics related to everything.

Write to People

For example, I found a website for the University of Namibia. You could easily write to someone in the English Department or other departments, introduce yourself, and ask them for help with your project. They would be happy to hear from you and glad that you have taken an interest in their country.

Pen Pals

You can try to find a pen-pal or e-pal through many pen-pal organizations on the internet. Ask me for further information.

On-line Newspapers/Other Media

Try to find the local newspapers, which are often available on the internet. For example, *The India Times*. Try to learn about the local media and read the news from their perspective. Also check for local radio stations.

In Tokyo:

Foreign Students in Tokyo

Try to contact people through Sophia's international student office.

International Organizations in Tokyo

Many wards in Tokyo have an international association with foreign and Japanese members. Minato-ku, and Meguro-ku have large and active international groups.

Special Events at the Embassies

Many embassies regularly have special events, festivals, concerts, art exhibitions, film festivals, etc. Call the embassy often to see what is coming up and keep in touch with them for updates.

Foreign Restaurants

Be friendly and interview people who work there. You can make many good contacts if you ask around. Don't be shy.

Take lessons

You could take Tango, Salsa or belly dancing lessons, Indian cooking lessons, African drumming lessons, language lessons, etc. Tokyo has everything!

Interview me

I've been to many of the countries, so please feel free to interview me about my experiences. I can show you many photos too.

You must be creative and aggressive researchers to get good information. You have to go find people and let everyone in your life know that you are doing this project. That is how contacts are made! You must have the initiative.

You should also be careful and cautious researchers. Try to get many good sources of information so you get a well-rounded picture of the country. You need to hear many opinions to form your own opinion. The purpose of this project is to develop research skills, become a creative researcher, give an interesting presentation, learn from others in the class, and above all, learn about a new place in the world. The most important thing is this project should open up a new world to you.

**Appendix 6****COUNTRY RESEARCH PROJECT*****Progress Report #1 - July*****Assignment:**

Write a 1-2 page report about the progress you have made so far with your country research project. This paper must be typed. Use paragraph format and indent at the beginning of each paragraph. Single spacing is fine. Proofread your paper carefully for spelling and grammar before you turn it in to me.



**Possible topics to include in your paper:**

- What was your first reaction when you were given this country? What did you know about this country at the beginning?
- What are your first impressions about this country as you begin your research?
- Where have you been searching for information? Give details.
- What are the most interesting things you have learned about your country?
- Have you been to the embassy or national tourist office in Tokyo?
- Have you found restaurants, cultural organizations, or other resources to help you
- Have you found interesting books, films, or magazines
- Have you found someone from your country or someone who has traveled there?
- How do you plan to continue your research during summer vacation? Be specific with a concrete plan
- What is your biggest concern with this project?
- Are there any questions you would like to ask about this country research project?

**Appendix 7****SUMMER ASSIGNMENTS**

You should continue to learn as much as possible about your assigned country by collecting information from a wide variety of interesting sources.

Deeper Cultural Information

At this point you should already know the basic information about your country. Now you should begin to research about deeper cultural information and find themes or topics that interest you the most. Find interesting books (non-fiction and fiction) on your country/region and try to learn as much as you can about the culture in this part of the world. Please let me know if you need any help or are having any problems in your research.

Extras

During summer vacation, you should also do some of the following as an “extra” for your project. Be creative and take the initiative to find good information for your project.

- Find and interview people from your assigned country.
- Find and interview people who have lived in or traveled to your country.
- Contact volunteer groups and NGOs that send volunteers to your country.
- Attend a cultural performance related to your country.
- Go to a museum exhibition related to your country.
- Visit a restaurant which serves food from your country and learn about typical meals and foods.

- Find recipes on the internet and try to make them.
- Go to an international supermarket to find special ingredients.
- Watch a famous film from or documentary about your country.
- Read a book by a famous writer in your country.
- Take lessons on something related to your country.
- Find a cultural organization in Tokyo and go to their events.
- The possibilities are endless!

#### Recommended further research

- Read personal “travel stories” on the internet, for example: <http://www.virtualtourist.com>
- Check out JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) and JOCV (Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers). <http://www.jica.org>

#### Progress Report on (name of your country)

Write a 2 page summary of your progress on your country research project during the summer. Due at the end of summer vacation.

## Appendix 8

### COUNTRY RESEARCH PROJECT

#### *Excerpts from progress reports*

“I interviewed my friend who is from China. She is an exchange student at Sophia University. She told me about the differences between Japan and China. She also told me a lot of things, for example, about the educational system in China or how young and old people spend their time in daily life.” - Tomoko Yamakura, China

“I found recipes on the internet and tried to make Bolivian food, for example rice soup and stew. I think they suit Japanese taste. I went to a shop that sells folk crafts of South America and found Bolivian folk crafts, such as Bolivian dolls, knitting, and so on. I got some of them. Finally, now I’m interested in Bolivian music the most. Bolivia is famous for folklore, which means music of the Andes. They have a lot of original instruments and their music is full of variety.” - Keika Shindo, Bolivia

“I went to the Malawi embassy in Takanawa and talked with Efreem Z. Chilima, who is working at the embassy as a counselor. We talked about politics, history, culture, language, people, the school system, and foods about Malawi. Malawians speak English, so I didn’t have any problem communicating with him. I also went to an Africa restaurant in Shinjuku called “Rose de Sahara” with my English classmates. We ate some alligator

meat , African principle food called Nsima, and so on. We also talked to an African man working there about Japan and Africa in Japanese.” - Shiho Nakamura, Malawi

“I borrowed the film “Buena Vista Culture Club” and I think the best of Cuba’s culture of music was show in it. I could see the daily life of Cuba too. I have also found an interesting essay about a Japanese girl who went to Cuba to study drama for two years.” - Eriko Nozawa, Cuba

“I thought I wanted to eat Mexican food. Luckily, there is a Mexican restaurant near this university. I went there at once and ate Mexican food called tacos. The taste was very delicious and a little spicy, but the way of eating is difficult for people who eat it for the first time. To experience Mexican things in my own body is very fun, more than just reading difficult documents about Mexico. The most important thing is to see with my own eyes, to hear with my own ears, and to feel with my own body!” - Tomohiro Kenmochi, Mexico

“I lamented my bad luck in taking charge of an almost unknown country and was worried about my future. I started my research on the internet in Japanese, but the research was the same as the library. Next I did research in English. Then I could get a lot of interesting information. I realized Japanese people are not paying much attention to African countries. Mali was a French until 1960. I major in French language and culture, however I

was ashamed I didn’t know it. I felt like learning harder than before. I found a homepage written by a Japanese woman who loves Mali very much. After looking at that, my image vastly changed. I realized the more I learned, the more I love the country.” - Chihiro Hattori, Mali

“I went to the embassy of Venezuela. After 15 minutes sitting on the sofa reading information, a diplomat appeared and I was taken to a room for diplomats. The woman was from Venezuela and she is also a student at Sophia University, in the Faculty of Comparative Culture. Therefore, she was very kind to me and answered my questions.” - Tomohiko Ishibashi, Venezuela

“I found two people who had been to Cambodia and I could talk to both of them. One went there for travel, and the other as a volunteer. The former traveled to Cambodia on his own. He told me what he saw in Cambodia. His travel without a package clearly told me how Cambodia is. The later was a volunteer who went there this summer. His reference to children in Cambodia was impressive for me. I learned much from the two people who went there actually. That can’t be learned from books or guides.” - Erina Tanaka, Cambodia

“I researched about Chilean foods on the internet. I am planning to see a movie about Chile, “The House of the Spirits.” - Mika Matsumura, Chile

“I borrowed some books and video about Nepal. Especially the video was impressive for me. It

was a folk music video and had songs of Nepal. The songs sounded very sad the country appeared humble. Furthermore, I had a chance to talk with a Japanese woman who had been in Nepal 10 years ago.” - Azusa Nakai, Nepal

“My country is Thailand. I’m lucky, because I’ve long wanted to go there. I interviewed two friends - one who has traveled to Thailand, and the other who lived in Thailand for four years and went to an international school there. I have another two friends who have lived in Thailand, so I’ll try to interview them too.” - Hitomi Sato, Thailand

“I have interviewed my mother’s friends who have lived in Turkey for three years. The husband has answered my questions by e-mail. He loves Turkey. He had lived there from 1988 to 1991. What I thought was interesting was that the image of Japan and Japanese is good in Turkey. As I researched about Turkey, I became interested in the relationship between Turkey and Japan, so I want to search about it further.” - Marie Kanari, Turkey

“I’ve always been very careful if there is any information about Mongolia. All members of my family call me when they hear something about it. I found some information from comments of people who have visited there from their homepage. The internet is very useful, because many ordinary people can express their opinions easily and directly. I also got some interesting information

from a book which is written by a Japanese woman who has married a Mongolian man. She tells us about Mongolian culture from the view point of Japanese. So, we can feel their lifestyle easily. Finally, my students whom I teach English to, met a Mongolian man in her class at school. He is from Ulanbatar and is here to observe the education in Japan. What a good chance!” - Miho Shiba, Mongolia

“There is a lot of information about Kenya and about the trip to Kenya. That was very interesting and helpful. That kind of information is the honest information of travelers. And I also found information from a doctor who stayed in Kenya for three years. From this information I know the serious problem in the country. There are many street children in Kenya. This doctor saw the present conditions and reports them in detail. I want to tell about this problem in Kenya and want everyone to know this and help. Also, I found a person who stayed in Kenya for a few years. She promised to tell me more about the life in Kenya.” - Yukiko Inoue, Kenya

“What is very interesting about this country is that there are many Japanese immigrants in Brazil. The history of immigration to Brazil started 100 years ago. A very interesting point for me is the relationship between Brazil and Japan, which is longer than the relationship between the United States and Japan.” - Hiroo Takeda, Brazil

## Appendix 9

### COUNTRY RESEARCH PROJECT

#### Evaluation

Name    Country    Preparation    Visuals    Organization    Interest    Pres. Skills    Total

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Comments:

## Appendix 10

### Final response paper due

You will write a 2-3 page paper on your Country Research Project experience in this class. What did you learn about your country and about other countries? What was most impressive for you? What did you learn about researching? What did you learn about giving a good presentation? What did you change or improve between your first and last presentation? Why? What do you wish you had done differently? What did you learn from other presentation styles you saw in class? Was it helpful to have regional support groups? What helped you the most during the research project? What advice do you have for future students? Reflect on your experience and share your insights.

## Appendix 11

### Excerpts from end of the year feedback

“ I gave a presentation in English last year, and I gave small presentations in French many times, but I’ve never prepared for a presentation throughout a year. I learned many ways of researching – on the internet, going to the embassy, restaurants, a concert, etc. These presentations were different from presentations I gave before. I spoke to only 3 people, not in front of a class, and I could ask them questions and get responses. Their responses are very important, so I improved my presentation according to listeners’ responses.

I learned meanings of hand gestures of Indian dance, word structures of Indonesian food, working children in Ecuador, people’s lifestyle in Papua New Guinea, religiousness of people in Nepal, wedding customs of Bhutan, etc.

I advise next year’s students to prepare long beforehand. I started preparing my final

presentation two weeks before, but I should have started earlier, because I couldn't sleep but two hours the night before the first presentation.” - Yo Kunieda, Mali

“This was the first time for me to use the flipchart in the presentation, so that we can make it more interesting. I strongly feel the visuals were so effective. And some students brought the real things like music, coffee, tea, and dress. Thanks to them, this long-term project was so lively, vivid, and exciting.” - Mayumi Fujimi, Morocco

“I learned so much from the other classmates' country research. There were many countries I knew only the names. Everyone researched deeply and had many interesting points. It was very helpful to have a regional group for support. We talked a lot about how our presentation was going and I was really looking forward to seeing their presentations.” - Mikako Hayashi, Vietnam

“At last, I have to say thank you for the advice from many people. The members of the regional group helped me so much. For next year's students, I would like to say that this country research project is very hard and laborious, but as one of the experiences in your life, it will be very valuable and important.” - Mayumi Kodama, Thailand

“The most interesting thing is of course the country research project.” - Emi Odaka, Uganda

“I learned how important a tool English is to research information. Actually, Namibia is a minor country in Japan, so it is very difficult to search for information, but I could find out so much information about Namibia in English. I realized English is such a useful language to find information. As you said, it does not mean Japanese is an inferior language, but from the view to find information, I have to admit that English is a superior language.” - Haruka Ishu, Namibia

“I hadn't known much about my country, Ethiopia, before I started my research. In Ethiopia, HIV and drought are widespread. Mostly, many children are suffering from these conditions. I was shocked because I lived without caring about these problems in developing countries before I started my research. Now, I know the serious conditions in Ethiopia and other countries, so I decided to raise money for developing countries through UNICEF. I would like to contribute to the people living in developing countries even if it is little that I can do for the people.” - Miho Araki, Ethiopia

“What I learned about my country Malawi was the close relationships between people. People in Malawi help each other to live. This attitude made me realize something important for us as human beings. Even after the presentations finished, now I read the books about Malawi to know deeper information. Through the research, I got interested in the other country for the first time.” - Yusuke Furikada, Malawi