Tokyo Lights: A Creative Writing Seminar
Conducted in English

Location: Kyonan, Tokyo, Kamakura
Dates: January 1-24
Host: Film Academy at Magic Hour
Instruction: Series Lecture
Credits: 3.0

In this course, you will seek out and write your own sense of place and self-discovery from the seaside of Chiba to the streets of Tokyo and the shrines of Kamakura. You first study and model key “place” writers such as Ezra Pound, E.B. White, and Basho. Then, you will consider and explore readings from a body of writers with wide-ranging portraits and sensibilities of their own Japan. The course features guest writers who will discuss their writing process with you, their sense of writing and craft, and the reasons why they write. Other guest lecturers may include journalists, leading film and anime producers, music producers, chefs, and so on with the ultimate intent of giving students a more in-depth and unique cultural insight into Japan and its people. Your cultural immersion serves as an experiential foundation to integrate in your writing. Additional highlights of the course include a four-night stay at Sunset Breeze (a seaside retreat in Chiba), survival Japanese language training, a visit to the largest Buddha in Japan, a Matsuri performance with taiko drumming and a barbecue to follow, a trip to Studio Ghibli, and live Sumo action. As a capstone of the course, students will go on a two-day writer’s retreat to Kamakura, the spiritual heart and literary oasis of Japan.

Requirements:

A) Journal/Writer’s Notebook: The journal is the essential tool and key to writing. You will employ the 5 W’s and 5 Senses rigorously. In addition, for each piece considered in the course, you will dissect that text on the page. You will be sent out on “field” exercises where you will engage hidden treasures, landmarks, and streets as seen through the double lens of a particular writer or artist. Whatever you note in your journal, you must reflect on and respond to, elaborating and probing your own observations. Some observations may, in elaboration, take the shape of poems, bits of essays and fiction, and even dramatic dialogues. If you elect to include photographs or sketches in your journal (or music), you must also dissect your subject in words employing the 5 W’s and 5 Senses. The journal is an outgrowth of the fertile bed of your imagination and ultimately your keepsake and memento of your journey to Japan. 20% of your grade

B) Two First Draft Writing Assignments:

Your first piece (3-4 double-spaced typed pages, “raw” material but you still must edit and proofread, etc.) will be a “travelogue” of visceral scenes from the sights and sounds of your journey starting with your arrival at Narita Airport, your time at the seaside retreat and participating in the cultural activities in Chiba, your bus transfer to Tokyo, and your first impressions and days in Tokyo. You will integrate (creatively)
at least two of the texts considered in the course as you write and push for a “voice” for your creative nonfiction persona.

*Your second piece* (3-4 double-spaced typed pages) will be a personal/expository essay in which you write to the “place” of Tokyo you envision or would imagine, walking its streets, taking its trains, and gazing at its skyline. This piece will be built around a “meeting point” of your choosing. You will write reportage set at this meeting point as well as research the history of the place, what was there before, its history in relation to Tokyo, and your place in it.

Both of these pieces must first be in the form of personal/literary journalistic essay with focus on reportage and place writing technique. Of these assignments, you will select one as the basis for your final project. 30% of your grade

C)  **Final Piece of 6-8 double-spaced pages:** You will expand one of your two writing assignments as your cumulative work. Your goal: to envision and produce a substantial piece of creative writing that is at once an authentic and original representation of your time and place in Japan. 25% of your grade

D)  **Final Reflective Essay** on your total culture and in-country experience due at course end. 15% of your grade

E)  **Exemplary conduct, enthusiasm, and participation the entirety of this course from start to finish.** 10% of your grade

**Texts:**