



ISB ALUMNI PROFILE



Name: Koji Kuwano
Hometown: Nara, Japan
Graduation Year : 1988
Year(s) at ISB: 1985-87
Last degree received and from which university:
Bachelor of Arts in English, Kansai Gaidai University
Currently living in: Cairns Australia

I was born in Chiba (suburb of Tokyo), Japan, but when I was 2 years old my family moved to Panama due to my father's job, and we lived there for 4 years. When I was 5, we moved back to Japan but not to the Tokyo area where I was born and my parents are from but to Osaka where the language and culture, even within Japan, are so different from Tokyo. This was my first culture shock experience... in my home country.

I was 8th grade when my father was assigned to work in Brussels. They told me that I could choose the school – ISB or the local Belgian school where people speak French. I spoke neither English nor French, but since I was little bit more familiar with English, I chose ISB, which proved later that my decision was right.

The culture shock I had at ISB was even bigger than what I had when I returned to Japan from Panama. At ISB, everyone was from everywhere and everyone spoke different languages. Students had more freedom compared with the school in general in Japan. The sports field was huge and I was surprised that everyone took a bus to go to the school (in Japan we usually take trains or walk to school). I was also shocked that people drive on the right side in Belgium (in Japan we drive on the left side of the road), and also that there was no sun most of the time.

I was in the varsity swim team for 3 years (I was the first Japanese swimmer at ISB)! It was not easy to beat other swimmers as almost all students were much taller and bigger than me but I practiced hard and learned how to challenge myself. It was very hard to wake up at 5am every day for practice but it was really fun to swim with the team. I am very thankful for my father for getting up early in the morning with me every day to drive me to the swimming pool – it must have been harsh as he always came home from work around midnight. Without his support, I couldn't have these precious memories with the swim team, including the trip to Cairo and London and the gold medals we got at ISST!

I have been working in the tourism industry for 10 years here in Australia. I was working at a wedding company in Japan and they transferred me to Australia as the Branch Manager. When my term was finished, instead of going back to the Japanese headquarters, I resigned as I wanted to

stay in Australia with my wife and son. I now work for a tour guide company in Cairns. My responsibilities are to manage all staff, sales, marketing, and administrative tasks. We operate the tours for Japanese customers and also send staff (i.e. tour guide, drivers, office personnel, etc.) to the Japanese tour agents upon requests. There is a huge market here in Cairns for the Japanese tourists so fortunately we are quite busy all the time.

A difference in working style between Japan and Australia was the third culture shock in my life. In Japan, people live to work. Many Japanese people spend too much time in the office that they don't get to spend some quality time for themselves nor with their families. In Australia, people work to live. Work is just a part of their lives and they seem to know how to enjoy their lives. I understand and respect the way Australians work. Although I spend longer hours in the office than my Australian colleagues, I am trying to follow the "work to live" philosophy. It is indeed great that I have more time with my family.



The job I do requires strong communication skills and patience. Every customer has a different demand and we need to make sure we do everything to make them satisfied. Japan is known for its excellent hands-on customer service and our clients expect us to provide the same service here in Australia. It is not always easy to provide everything they ask but we have to do our best to meet their needs. Yes, the job can be exhausting but when we hear our clients say THANK YOU, it makes everything all right. The power of THANK YOU is amazing. It motivates us all and keeps us going! If I can say one thing to our client... please do not complain about the weather. I have no control of it!

I am so glad that I went to ISB. ISB experiences taught me not only the language but also to think outside the box, understand the culture and how to be sociable with anybody. One of the greatest professional and personal skills I have is people's skill and I learned this thanks to my international friends at ISB. What I experienced at ISB is my treasure that I will take with me everywhere I go.