



## JAPAN FOUNDATION

Once I was informed about my trip to Japan, I did not know what to expect. I had some impressions about Japanese culture from my Japanese class but I had no idea exactly how much of that would hold true, common, or noticeable compared to other unanticipated aspects of the culture. In the face of my complete obliviousness towards the experience ahead, the only lingering feeling was some slight anxiety towards going to another country for the first time. Needless to say that my initial apprehensions were correct because I certainly did not gain any favor for the long flights I had to endure over the course of the program but that is a whole other thing altogether. I was also unsure about how to feel towards the fact that thirty-one other participants would be alongside me but this was cleared up in no time. Upon meeting the program staff and the participants, I saw that they were all really nice and interesting people so any anxieties about the trip went away right at the start. It was fun meeting people from different states who I would never have known if it were not for this trip.

While I was in Japan, the fact that I would be living in an entirely different country hit me even right at the time I arrived at the airport. Japanese airports are a lot more stylish than American ones. Anyways, I could only marvel at the differences that I instantly took notice of on my way to the Kansai Institute, such as the fact that everything is written in Japanese, which one would expect so it was not that big of a deal in hindsight, and the fact that many cars are of a different build than the ones in America. The first few days of my stay in Japan were pretty much a chain of noticing small details about Japan that I could only assume were mundane to Japanese people but were a surprise to me. It was also my first time tasting authentic Japanese food other than sushi, which I dislike so that was a nice change of pace, and I really liked it. It also helped me expand out of my limited range of Chinese food that I eat every day at home.

Visiting the Japanese high school was a very enlightening and fun adventure. The day that we went there became the day that I really started putting my Japanese to the test since I wanted to be able to communicate with them on at least an elementary school level or else we would start hitting some road blocks in communication. Trying to talk in Japanese to the students was a lot harder than I expected. It is a completely different feeling than the speech practices in the classroom because I had to make myself understandable through Japanese or else it was just not happening at all. Of course, I could have cheated and spoke a little rudimentary English but there is no fun in that. Anyways, it was very interesting to learn about what school in Japan is like and walking around Osaka getting a bit of Japanese culture and lifestyle knowledge. The game center was just ridiculous to someone like me who lives in an area that lacks many arcades. The Japanese students were also a lot of fun to hang around with and it seems like everyone else shared the same sentiments. It is really a shame that it was for only that day.

The homestay was another big adventure and that lasted for a short one day also. It seems like great adventures last for shorter periods of time. Anyways, my host family was incredibly polite. I tried to be polite since that is the courteous thing to do but they would not let me and I was stuck getting beat in politeness at every corner. I did give them their gift I brought from America and I was glad that they seemed to like it. I had two host brothers, Seiji and Kazuma, and their mother. Seiji liked Harry Potter so I ended up spending a lot of the evening watching Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1 in English with Japanese subtitles. An evening well spent, I have to say. I was really surprised how many American movies are so popular over in Japan. It seems like Harry Potter is just as popular over there as it is here. I suppose good franchises know no borders. I also got a taste of takoyaki and biking around the neighborhood. I tasted a total of two different takoyakis during my stay in Japan and I must mention that my first impression was not great but the takoyaki I got during my homestay was one of the best things I have ever eaten. I guess there is a big difference depending on where you buy it, which I suppose holds true for anything. As for the biking, it seems notably more difficult in Japan, especially in winding roads within neighborhoods. The cars are notably smaller in Japan and as such the roads are incredibly narrow. I had a hard time getting my way around the roads on my bike so I cannot imagine how much skill it takes to drive in Japan. During my homestay, I also got to experience taking a Japanese bath which included all that procedure about washing yourself beforehand and stuff like that. It was still a little daunting since I was not used to it. Also, they mentioned that they had an intercom in the bath in case I had trouble. That is some advanced bathing technology right there. My stay with them ended the next day after Seiji and I did karaoke with some of Seiji's friends for five hours. It was then that I realized I am not yet built to withstand karaoke for five hours.

In between all the events going on, I would sometimes join a group of the participants to go the shopping mall near the Institute and another shopping mall that I found out about two days before we all had to leave. The shopping clerks seemed a lot more helpful and polite than in America. There was that one pretty cool moment where the shopping mall was just opening up and all the clerks and staff were standing outside their respective stores and bowing, waiting for the first customer. I thought that was just cool. I also managed to blow all my money, which means that Japan has a lot of cool stuff and also a lot of really expensive stuff.

Overall, I definitely learned a lot from this experience and I think other people can learn a lot from similar experiences too or even just going to a foreign country. Going to Japan revolutionized my perspective on both the world and my Japanese studies. Seeing a different culture for the first time, it made me realize exactly how limited my perspective is by just staying in America and only thinking about American culture. I want to broaden my horizons and I think this trip helped accomplish that and made me realize that I should have that as a goal in the first place. Next time I go to Japan, which is a definite by the way, I want to already be fluent in Japanese so that I can take the time to learn more about the country itself without any language barriers. Until then, I can only continue my studies, keep in touch with the other JETMIP participants and the Japanese people I met in Japan. I look forward to more global experiences in the future with this experience as a foundation.