



My Experience

This summer is one that I will never forget. Ever since I was little, my dream was to be able to go to Japan someday, but ever since the downturn in the economy, I didn't think that it would be possible. The day that my teacher told me about the JET MIP program, my heart filled with hope that I would be able to visit the beloved Japan of my dream. From the description of this program, I knew that the trip would be a short one, but I didn't expect to grow so much in so little time. From the beginning of the trip, to the end of the trip, I was always learning something new.

The first day in San Francisco was very nerve wrecking. I did not know who the other 31 students were, and I wondered about their personalities. I was afraid that I would be the oddball from New York City, and that they others would make me an outcast. I was reassured however, when we all ate dinner together at one table. In a matter of minutes, I made friends with Alex who was from the East coast as well. Like me, Alex loved the theater, volleyball and Broadway musicals. It was clear from then on that the JET MIP 2011 students were my kind of people. Everyone got along from day one, and by the second day, it was as if we all had known each other for years.

The bond between the fellow JET MIP students grew in Osaka as well. When we finally landed in Japan, most of our cellphones did not work. As a result, friendships formed because the only way to get in contact with someone was to actually find that person. If we needed to talk to another JET MIP student, we had to talk face to face which helped us grow closer to each other. By the third day in Japan, the JET MIP group felt like a family to me. We went to Semboku High School and met our host siblings. They were very kind and welcoming, and they explained to us everything we didn't understand with everything that they had. My host sister was a first year student, so she did not speak very much English, so whenever I could not say something in Japanese, I used sign language. It was very interesting.

The most memorable part of my trip was when I stayed at my host family's home. I was very nervous at first because I did not know what kind of people the family members would be. I wondered what the family liked to do and what they had in store for me. It was a relief when I met my host family, because they were such lovely people. My host dad was very funny man who liked to tell jokes, my host mother was so sweet and caring, and my host sisters became my best friends over night! The Omura family even had three dogs and a kitten! It was so much fun for me, because I loved animals. Over a period of two days, I got a chance to eat kaiten zushi, play with fireworks, shop in Namba, and make takoyaki with my family. My time with them was amazing, and it was more than I could ever have imagined. It was sad when we had to part; it was as if I was leaving my real family when we had the farewell party. Although my host family is so far away, I still communicate with my host sisters through facebook messages every few days. Soon, I plan on sending the Omura family a care package from New York with things that are native to my city as a thank you gift for showing me theirs.

Lastly the group of JET MIP members made my trip to Japan an unforgettable experience. This group of friends from all over the U.S. is simply a group of great people. They are funny, sarcastic, sweet, random, silly, brilliant, and most of all, caring. The chemistry between the fellow JET MIP-ers really made this trip a great experience because everyone was willing to try new things and no one judged others. The JET MIP members of 2011 are wonderful, and I think the Japan Foundation did an amazing job in selecting students. I honestly could not believe how close we grew over two weeks of time. It is sad that my new friends are all so far away from me, but the distance makes everyone unique. As a result, we all have different points of views and experiences to share. I truly am thankful that I got such a wonder opportunity to meet such amazing people this summer, and I am very grateful to the Japan Foundation for making my dream come true.