



## JAPAN FOUNDATION

My experiences in Japan, they will forever be in my memory. I cannot begin to put into words the changes inflicted on how I see the world and its people. From the day I first landed and underwent the change of climate, and onward- doing tricks of a dock with local students to cool off, to exploring the local food and stores, as well as the customs and practices of a truly different and unique people. Visiting Japan has left me utterly filled with joy that I could take part, and saddened that there are those who refuse to even try to know another culture.

The first day after spending a night in Japan passed quickly, which is odd considering I woke up at 5 in the morning due to the time difference. Breakfast was a surprise, fried meat for breakfast, and bread, a nice change from my usual cereal. As well as Miso Soup, a bowl, or rather 3 bowls of which I had with practically every meal. Following this was the orientation, introduction, and tour of the institute, which included a meeting with a current JET ALT who shared his experiences and gave us an in-depth example on what it is like to participate in the program. It was at this point that I most likely learned the most about the Jet Program and what it works for. Indeed it has become a rather large consideration when I think about my future, and not just because of his oration, but also because of what followed.

The Next day included visiting Senboku High school, as well as travelling to downtown Osaka and getting a feel for what life might be like in the city. The high school came first of course, I was impressed at just how many Bicycles there were, when compared to the four or five, including me, who ride to my school, the number was immense. We put on slippers, which was certainly a novel, and continued to our selected classes, I had chosen calligraphy. The class was not as tightly ordered as I had imagined, yet it seemed to flow more smoothly since everyone did their part. The calligraphy itself was very interesting, though it was troublesome for me at first, I have since purchased brush, stone, and paper to practice at home. After the classes where over we Ate lunch and departed with our designated partners to Osaka Castle. The castle was immense, and I appreciated the moat we had to traverse in order to enter. Once inside we thoroughly explored level by level, an act which enhanced our knowledge of the history of the castle and the prefecture. I found the figurines poised in battle extremely interesting since they were both detailed and engaged in an organized battle. After this we traveled to an absurdly large shopping center, which I promptly got lost in. Many Japanese exchange students claimed that shopping was their hobby, and this had always confused me as I did not understand how it could be considered a hobby. I understand now, I could have spent weeks in the various shops and stores available, but ended up settling in a book store of all places, and 13 floors up bought 8 novels which I plan to read when I gain the proficiency to do so. I then watched the clerk take each individual book, wrap it both neatly and efficiently, and place them in a bag for me. I found the wrapping and sealing of anything bought in the stores extremely considerate and in a way wish it was the same here in the United States. I then realized I had absolutely no time left, and had to find the bus before time ran out, a task which I somehow managed. It was time to say farewell to our partners and hosts until Saturday when we would see them again.

We then left Osaka and headed for Kyoto. It is truly wonderful how nature is kept intact even inside parts of the city. I was also thrilled to be able to visit both Kiyomizu-dera as well as Kinkaku-ji. In order to reach Kiyomizu-dera we had to walk through a large path of well-placed shops stocked with countless variety of goods which provided plenty of temptation. However once we reached the temple itself it was an easy task to forget shopping in order to behold such an interesting place. The view itself was astonishing, but what truly amazed me was there seemed to be fewer tourists than parishioners. And beyond the temple itself were paths leading into the surrounding trees and forward to small shrines. I felt honored to be able to traverse these trails and pay my respects. I never imagined I would be able to visit these places in my lifetime, and felt I want to learn even more about their significance now that I have. Following my 10 minute Blitzkrieg of the shops we left for Kinkaku-ji. I cannot really express how beautiful I found it, the trees and plants where well-tended, and being able to walk through them on paths was wonderful. Not only this but seeing the gleaming gold color across the water through them and over roots was infinitely more impressive than pictures. As was the case on most of our visits I wish I had more time to just relax and take it in, but will not let that ruin such an experience.

The next major impact I experienced was my homestay with the Kamada family. To be honest I was terrified at first, as I had not yet met my host sister. I recall entering the room and looking around, I see a family beckon to me but am unsure, still I went to them and sat down. After being introduced to my host sister Momoka, Okaasan, Obaasan, and Kento, we all went to lunch at a sushi restaurant, and being handed a fork. I chose the chopsticks, and proceeded to amuse myself and hopefully my hosts by trying to eat Udon with the chopsticks. After this we all went to the mall where we browsed a few shops and then went and used a purikura booth. Purikura, I knew what it was, I knew what it did, I had no idea what was happening, definitely glad I did it though. We then went to their home, which was quite nice, simple and elegant. I would love to live in such a place. It was there that I met Ojiisan and eventually Otoosan as well. We ate a homemade dinner, the main dish being Karaage, which I have since learned to make, it was delicious. After dinner we went on a walk together, and paid a visit to the local shrine to pay our respects, then continued on our walk. When we returned to the house Kento set up a new Wii fit that they recently bought, and he proceeded to utterly devastate the rest of us at the games. We lit off fireworks and then I was given a tutorial on bathing, which was both strange but useful. I was surprised to find the Japanese style bath to my liking, and then headed to my designated Futon. The following morning I woke up and had leftovers and bread for breakfast, it was a very tasty breakfast. I played several card games with Ojiisan, Momoka, and Kento before Ojiisan had to leave for his job. Momoka and Kento then kindly helped me with calligraphy. After this we headed out to the museum, which Ojiisan worked at to take a walk, and say hello. After this we headed to another museum, dedicated to the Danjiri festival, followed by lunch at Ganko, a fancy restaurant. I had a fantastic time with my host family, they were extremely kind and they lived as a family, which is more than I can say for many people in my own country I know. I will cherish the little time I had with them and plan to continue my studies so that one day I may return, perhaps for a visit and be able to communicate with them more proficiently.

During the next week the group split into two, one halve going to Iwate, the other to Kobe. I was in the group heading to Kobe, to the Hyogo Prefecture Museum of Art, the Disaster Reduction Learning Center, and of course ate Okonomiyaki. I was very pleased with the museum, which was holding an exhibition in which they built an animated set from Kari-gurashi no Arietti. I felt like Alice through the looking glass, and could not believe anyone still preferred the old style of hand drawn/and or actual sets in favor of Screens. I have always preferred how actual sets looked compared to screens, and am glad someone is still pursuing the style. The disaster reduction center was also very informational, I do not often hear about disasters in-depth since none occur around or near my home. I found it saddening how easily people can have their world ripped out from under them, but at the same time heartened that people would actually work together to pull through. I was also impressed with how many different methods could be employed to stabilize a building in the case of an earthquake. The restaurant where we ate Okonomiyaki was very interesting because they brought us the ingredients, and then we cooked our own food, this was my first time doing such a thing, and to be honest it was a very nice way of doing things, no chance of being overcooked/undercooked, and you knew how long until the food was done. It was wholly delicious, and I wish there was a similar restaurant near where I live.

My stay was magnificent, and my only regret is that I was not able to stay longer, and perhaps that I am so poor at sharing my experiences. I began learning Japanese because I was interested in the culture, and since my stay this desire to learn and study the culture and history of Japan has only grown. The architecture of the castles and the Hyogo Museum, to the customs of its people- and let us not forget the food, Japan has enraptured me, and acted as a fuel which spurs me on to learn. For the future I plan to continue my studies, and if at all possible I will one day attempt at becoming an ALT in the Jet Program. Beyond that I also hope to involve myself in more exchange programs, perhaps during my first summer upon completing high school. I thank all involved in permitting me this chance to visit Japan and broaden my knowledge of its land, people, and customs. Thank You.