



## **JET Memorial Invitational Program 2011 Personal Experience Report**

As one of the first alumni of the JET Memorial Invitational Program, I can safely proclaim that this experience will be known as one of the best experiences of my lifetime, regardless of the years I still have yet to live. From the moment I received my acceptance letter, I was ecstatic about having this opportunity to be traveling to the actual country of Japan with all expenses paid (aside from the souvenirs of course). When else would I be able to attain such a wonderful opportunity?

After my acceptance letter arrived, I didn't take the initiative and turn in my paperwork as soon as possible, which did leave me afraid that I was not going to be able to attend this trip, but in the end, I got my passport and required information mailed to the Japan Foundation. Before I knew it, a couple weeks had passed and I was on my way to San Francisco to meet up with the group and prepare for Japan.

I ended up meeting another student who was also attending the trip and had rode the same plane as me to San Francisco because he also lived in Washington state. After we met Ms. Mamiko, more students arrived and we eventually took a shuttle to our hotel. We placed our bags and belongings in our rooms, and then we took a bus to San Francisco's Japan Town to partake in a scavenger hunt to better understand Japanese culture and befriend our fellow students. The activity was awkward, but it was certainly fun. I did feel like speaking in Japanese to Japan Town residents was almost doomed from the start since the majority of them did not speak Japanese. It did, however, teach me some new phrases and helped me remember some of my Japanese. Afterwards, we went to dinner and then back to the hotel.

The next day, we had an orientation, which did take a long time and I was certainly exhausted from sitting there all day, but later that day we had a send-off dinner where Ms. Kim-Shree Maufas, Commissioner of the San Francisco Board of Education and Consul General Inomata from the Consulate-General of Japan in San Francisco attended and spoke. We were able to have some casual conversation with them and it turned out to be really enjoyable. We then returned to the hotel to prepare for tomorrow's departure.

There is so much I can say about Japan, but there is so little amount of space I can actually write in. It was a phenomenal experience that I would never take back, and I think the students who travelled with me had the biggest role in making the trip such a wonderful experience. What was just as influential was the home stay. My host family was hilarious, and I am glad to have stayed with them. But I digress. As soon as we arrived in Japan, we were all overwhelmed by the millions of differences we could immediately point out between Japan's airports and the US's airports. We left the airport and traveled to the Kansai institute. At first, I thought the room was really small, but I soon grew used to it and came to love the idea of compact housing.

During our stay in Japan, we endured many orientations, which was bothersome, but they certainly prepared me for the customs we would encounter in different locations. The teachers were certainly funny, and I enjoyed learning some of the Osaka dialect. I did have trouble understanding a lot of the lessons since I am not very proficient in Japanese, and I know some of the other students did as well.

Throughout the trip, I visited two high schools, one where I met my host student, and the other where I felt like a complete celebrity (due to being a 6' 5" Caucasian male). It was enjoyable learning about high school classes and curriculum and actually partaking in them. The tours were memorable and then spending time with our host students at Osaka Castle made it even better. One thing that I found rather strange was how traditional Osaka Castle appeared from the outside, but then how modern it was on the inside. It had elevators, gift shops, TV's, and even a hologram if remember correctly. It was almost a surreal concept.

Our group also visited two different temples in Kyoto. The first, Kiyomizu, had one very memorable aspect of it that the other temple didn't; it had a very large yet very compact graveyard that you could walk through. I was intrigued by the many different grave designs and how they compact so many in such a small area. It had an eerie atmosphere, but it was also calm and serene. I could only imagine the many lives who have lived at this temple or their reasons for being buried at the temple grounds.

The other temple, Kinkakuji, was more peaceful and combined with nature. There were fewer buildings and more shrines, or so it appeared. Just having that characteristic made the tour very enjoyable.

Later, we stayed with our host families. My family were a very quiet family, but Kota, my host student, and Daisuke, his brother, were really funny individuals. They took me to one of the highest rated ramen shops in Japan (the food was amazing) and then I spent the day with Kota, his band, and their host students. Kota and I later went bowling with his family. The next day we went to sports center to play games before we met up with the group. I knew I would always miss the Yanagidani family.

The next day we also were able to play Taiko drums, which was immensely entertaining. The deep sounds of the drums all playing at once made your heart race, and it put on one heck of a show.

After all things were completed, we had our farewell/graduation ceremony at the Kansai institute where our host families attended. Some of us performed for everyone, and we eventually had to say goodbye to the host students, which was one of the saddest moments of the trip. We then prepared to travel back to San Francisco for our final presentations and then to take a plane home.

Overall, this trip is something that I will remember for the rest of my life, and the people I met go for the same. I am glad to have partaken in this trip, and I hope on returning to Japan one day, especially to visit my host student.