

MAY, 2016: BREEZE ISSUE #103

A FREE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE

2015 FUKUOKA JAPANESE CULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM MARK NEIL GERVACIO UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MANOA HONOLULU, HI



FIRST IMPRESSION AND THOUGHTS

This was during my last semester as an undergraduate at UH Manoa, and I never really took the initiative nor spoke to my family about studying abroad. However, like some kind of miracle I was given one of the best opportunities in my life. I remember it like it was yesterday; receiving an email from one of my *sensei* saying that I was recommended to be a participant for the second annual Fukuoka Japanese Cultural Exchange Program. I was so elated that I thought this was all a dream. My first thought was, “Should I do it?” and consulted between friends and family. I don’t know why that was my initial thought, but maybe it was because it was my last semester and I didn’t want to be behind on any assignments, and not being able to graduate. Still, they fully encourage the idea because I’ll probably never be given this kind of opportunity again.

One other thought that was running through my head constantly until my departure was having to deal with the airport process. This was my very first trip ever after all. After spending almost 12 hours on an airplane, I arrived in Nagoya with an hour layover. Even though I was stuck at the airport waiting for my connecting flight, at this point I couldn’t believe I was in Japan. On the evening of Feb. 24, 2016, I finally arrived in Fukuoka, Japan. I was greeted by Mr. Ryuji Nagaii,

the person I constantly exchanged emails with concerning about the program, the one in charge, and most importantly, the person who made this trip possible not only for me, but for the other 10 participants (now good friends) as well.

Fukuoka

If I haven't already mentioned, I am a student who was born and raised on the island of Oahu all my life. Living in Hawaii makes it hard for "locals" to get accustomed to cold temperatures, since we don't really have a winter season. Also the lowest the temperature can get is roughly about 59 degrees fahrenheit. What I'm trying to say is that at the time, once I walked out through the Fukuoka airport doors, I never felt the atmosphere so cold. Furthermore, throughout the week, Fukuoka kept getting colder and colder to the point that one day there was a possibility that it would snow. As I mentioned earlier Hawaii doesn't necessarily have a winter season. However, some parts of Hawaii like on the top of Haleakala, Maui and Mauna Kea, Big Island (Hawaii island) experience snowfall. But where I'm from, we don't get snow. Luckily, I wasn't the only one who hasn't seen snow yet. When that snow day came, it was indeed a *chilling* experience that we shared.



One of the things my *sensei* told me was to try Fukuoka's ramen because they are quite known for their type of tonkotsu ramen. Since she was born and raised in Fukuoka, she knew what she was talking about. So one day with my host family, we went out for ramen for lunch. Since we were in Hakata city after visiting Kushida Shrine, we headed for Canal City, a large shopping mall and entertainment complex. Once we arrived there was an overwhelming amount of shops, but I only had one thing on my mind; ramen. In Canal City

they have a floor filled with ramen shops and it was called "Ramen Stadium". What I noticed different about these types of ramen shops compared to the ones in Hawaii was that customers could order from a machine outside the shop. I never seen anything like it. All one needed to do was select their ramen, garnish, extra ingredients, and etc all on a touch screen. Once I completed my order, I took a seat and waited for my order. Once my food arrived, I dug right in. It was the best ramen I had. Now I don't think I'll ever see ramen the same anymore. If my friends ever go out for ramen, I'll probably decline.

Fukuoka Japanese-Language Exchange Program

Through this program it gives students a first-hand experience with not only culture in Fukuoka, but Japanese culture in general. It was pretty surreal because I usually learn about Japanese culture through most anime/manga and in my Japanese classes. Nevertheless, thanks to this program having this first-hand experience made me have a deeper appreciation for the Japanese culture. In fact, I think this program did a pretty good job at doing that because it touched on various aspects like customs, traditions, technology, and pop culture.



Another interesting aspect this program provided was that it took us on a trip to the other exchange students' countries; which were Australia, China, India, Indonesia, S. Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. It was emphasized that Fukuoka is great for exchange programs because it is one of the many Japanese prefectures that has the largest population of international people. So bringing 11 students from 11 different countries is a great allusion which shows that Fukuoka can be a great place for foreigners to live and get along.

FINAL COMMENTS

To my professors: Thank you very much for the recommendations. I truly never thought that I was a student that stood out in your classes. I always doubted my ability. However, no matter what, you always have words of encouragement.

To our awesome Japanese tutors in Fukuoka: You definitely made the experience a lot more fun. All of you were very surprised to hear I came to Hawaii, and was delighted to hear you all wanted to visit someday. So if you get the chance to vacation in Oahu, let me return the favor and let me be your guide.

To my host family: Thank you very much for taking care of me and taking me to various cultural sites, I certainly learned a lot of things that the program itinerary couldn't provide. I hope I wasn't too much of a burden. In addition, I am so grateful and lucky to have celebrated my 23rd birthday with a nice and loving family. Also I'm glad you enjoyed the *Spam musubis* I made. If you get the chance to come to Oahu, allow me to return the favor and show you the best parts of Oahu.

To my fellow exchange students: It was a pleasure meeting you all and thanks to the LINE app we will never be too far away from each other. Please keep in touch! Hopefully, you can come around if I come visit your country and vice versa!

To the Japan Foundation Los Angeles: Thank you for deciding to pick someone from Hawaii due to being sister prefectures with Fukuoka. Additional apologies for the lack of communication throughout the process, but thank you for being understanding.

To the Fukuoka Japanese Exchange Program Staff: Thank you very much for having me take part in this program and allow me to learn so much about Fukuoka. Also thank you very much for being so patient with me during the application process; As a representative for Hawaii, a sister prefecture of Fukuoka, you certainly made me feel like part of the family, and I hope I left a good impression of what a local from Hawaii is like.

誠にありがとうございました。

Mark Neil Gervacio



Breeze #110



Breeze #109



Breeze #108



Breeze #107



Breeze #106



Breeze #105

Breeze #104



Breeze #103



2015 Fukuoka Japanese Cultural Exchange Program

Japanese Language Education Update 30

Breeze #102



Breeze #101



Breeze #100



Breeze #99



[Headquarters](#) [New York Office](#) [Center for Global Partnership](#) [Volunteer
ボランティア募集](#) [Japan Related Links](#) [Job Openings \(Updated\)](#)

5700 Wilshire blvd, Suite 100

Los Angeles, CA 90036

P. 323.761.7510

Annual Report

© 2019 The Japan Foundation, Los Angeles

Web Design.