



2011 JET-MIP ESSAY

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To me a plane signifies all times when boundaries are crossed, it's not until I'm on an actual plane, when I realize that I'm traveling. This is all I knew, going from country to country exploring all that each had to offer. This plane ride was different though because for the first time I was traveling to a country that I only dreamed of traveling to. I've spent my life traveling throughout Asia but I've never had a more inherent need to travel to Japan.

My senior year in high school, I realized my chances for an exchange program were dwindling. I would not be able to experience Japan from a high school perspective. When I applied to this program I was dubious of whether or not I would be chosen for such a wonderful opportunity. My Japanese language skills were shoddy but what I lacked in my Japanese I made up for in my knowledge of Japanese culture and overall enthusiasm. Through my travels abroad and my years living in Asia, I have learnt to have the utmost respect the countries that I visit and the ones that I live in. It's more that keeping an open mind. To appreciate a country from it's core you must completely immerse yourself within every facet.

Studying at the Kansai language institute was a wonderful way of experiencing Japan. Although short, JET-MIP gave me a taste of all that Japan had to offer. It revealed the traditional aspects and cultural aspects, in a variety of situations. Through visits to the temples, local high schools and our home stays we were able to experience these particular facets of Japan in ways that we otherwise would not necessarily be able to experience on an average trip to Japan.

Throughout the program, my love of Japan grew even stronger. I wanted to see more, I wanted to see everything. The visits to the high schools were great and it was exciting, for that brief period of time to be able to take a class in a Japanese high school. I found the home stay to be another thing entirely. It was a great way for us to be able to experience what living in a Japanese family was like. What I enjoyed the most, oddly enough, was not the tourist trip to Kobe that my host parents took me on, but rather being with the family, doing things they would do if I weren't a guest at their house. A visit to the old age home to visit their grandmother and attending the small matsuri outside of the nursery. Celebrating my host mother's birthday, helping her cook (I especially liked helping with the takuyaki), sharing words with the guests they had over that night. It was wonderful and I couldn't have asked for more.

I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to go on this trip. It was truly an eye opener and has made my passion for Japan grow tremendously. In the future I will be sure to continue with my Japanese studies and visit the most beautiful nation many times after.

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