



2011 JET-MIP ESSAY

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CAYRA DEGIULIO

ALASKA

WASILLA HIGH SCHOOL

On the first day, we landed. Everyone was tired and excited. We got through security without any problems, picked up our luggage, and took a short bus ride to the Kansai Institute. I was very impressed by the Institute. The food was good and diverse, although the cafeteria system was confusing at first. I loved my room. Like everyone else, I had my own room that was set up for comfort. I had a wonderful view of the ocean on the 13th floor. I loved being able to get up and go for a bike ride. The student store was cool, but redundant as I had already brought most of the stuff I need with me. I appreciated the little coffee vending machine. Karaoke was okay, but I felt that only a few people ever actually got to sing, and felt unwelcome when I tried to sing. I liked the massage chair in the lounge.

The first trip was to Semboku High School. I was rightfully nervous, as I knew my Japanese wasn't very good. I took the calligraphy class, which was interesting, but very stressful. I felt I didn't understand very much of what was going on and, as mentioned before, I didn't know enough Japanese to understand what the student next to me was saying. We also went to an English class. It was fascinating to see how much English the other students spoke. At lunch, we met our host siblings. We were given a free bento box, with a mixture of American and Japanese foods. I thought it was very odd that we were given a pair of chopsticks and then told to eat a hamburger patty with them. We traveled around Osaka, visiting the beautiful Osaka Castle and touring downtown Osaka with them. I loved Osaka Castle best on this day; I loved everything about it.

Visiting Kyoto was definitely one of my favorite experiences. We visited two temples, Kyou Mizu and Kinkakuji. Kyou Mizu was bigger and had many, many shopping opportunities. It had a little section of it dedicated to the god of love, which was fascinating. I loved watching the rituals of the temple. Kinkakuji was definitely the prettier one. With the gold leaf wall and the way it sits as though floating on a pond, it looks like something from a story book. I also liked how closer to Earth that temple felt, as we walked through the woods and passed shrines. I got a fortune ticket here and got the luckiest kind, Dai Kitsu.

I went to Kobe with about half of the other students. The Earthquake Museum was tragic and sobering. The video of what it would have felt like in those chaotic minutes during the Kobe earthquake was shocking. I wish we could have had more time at this museum, to look and experiment with their to

The Art Museum was also very interesting. I loved that exhibition about Hiyo Miyasagi's newest movie. However, I do not know whether another exhibit in the future will be as satisfying for the next group of students.

The home stay was by far the most interesting and most challenging part of this trip. My host sister, Momoko Kawanishi, and I ran errands with her father. I tried the shaved ice, which is very similar to shaved ice in America. For lunch, we ate somen, then we just hung out in Momoko's room. She invited some of her friends over and they took me to a small Shinto temple, where I tried the rituals of their prayer. We then went to a small mall, where I was bought some small presents. For dinner, we ate takoyaki (a first for me, and was the only Japanese food I didn't love) and bits of other food. We stayed up a while, playing with fireworks, and went to bed around eleven. We woke up, had breakfast (rice and miso soup, yum), then went to another mall, where Momoko practiced with her dance club, Foxy. I watched their performance and they were very good. Then we said good bye. Sadly, I didn't see her again because she did not come to the Farewell Party.

Overall, I enjoyed the trip very much. I felt many of the "classes" were pointless, as we couldn't understand what was wanted of us and most of what they taught us had been previously explained. I was slightly concerned about safety at first, as, in America, letting 32 teenagers off of their leashes would be a bad idea, but there where no problems.

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5700 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 100

Los Angeles, CA 90036

P. 323.761.7510

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