



2011 JET-MIP ESSAY

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LIFE AS A JETMIP

I've never had an opportunity quite like the JET Memorial Invitation program before. In fact, before this summer I'd never left New England, let alone America. When my Sensei first suggested I apply, I was really hesitant because I wasn't confident in my Japanese skills at all, but now I'm really glad I did. The program was the trip of a lifetime, something I plan on keeping with me for the rest of my life, and I can't express my sincerest gratitude.

When I first heard I had been accepted to go, I was floored. After the earthquake, I was nearly certain I would never see Japan while I was still young. But sure enough, I was called by the office to go see my Japanese teacher (to be honest I was rather scared I had messed something up) but to my delight he congratulated me and read the acceptance email out loud. I called my parents right afterward in an ecstatic burst of joy. Several months later as I boarded a small 3 seat wide plane in Burlington, it still felt like a waking dream.

San Francisco was just as phenomenal as our final destination, as we got to visit Japantown and even more exciting was meeting all of the other participants, 31 other people that I can now say are some of my favorite people I've ever had the pleasure of meeting. We had some amazing times before and after the main segment of the trip, from fitting nearly all of us into the hotel's rather small pool, to enjoying some of the most DIVINE hot chocolate this side of the Pacific at a small cafe. But all of this was just a lead up to the main event; the land of the Rising Sun, Japan.

I think the first thing I noticed when we finally stepped out of the airport after the 14 hour flight was the humidity, or perhaps the extra bus seats which folded out into the aisle to fit more people, I can't decide which struck me as more interesting. When we arrived at the Kansai Institute, I was FLOORED by the size and class of the building. The rooms were larger than my room at home, and the facility was complete with a full size cafeteria, karaoke room, and the best part of all, free bike rentals. I can say with absolute certainty I've never been happier in my life than when I was bicycling down the road with several of my newfound friends on our way to the mall to enjoy crepes, or sometimes just biking to get outside in Japan.

I think what really impressed me, even more than the amazing trips to Kyoto and Kobe, were the people I met in Japan. My host family was amazing from the first minute I met my brother at school. A really talented shamisen player, I actually got the opportunity to see him, our little brother, and their grandmother play at a summer festival we attended. My host mother was easily the most hospitable woman I have met in my life, I plan on staying in contact with them for many years to come.

Overall I cannot begin to sum up all of the amazing times I had in Japan. From riding the giant Ferris Wheel at the mall with my friend Sam we dubbed "Kirin" (I was dubbed Kuma) to making the best takoyaki ever with my host family, it was the adventure of my lifetime. I'm infinitely grateful for the people who made this trip possible, and I hope some day I will be able to return to Japan and see them all again.

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