

OCTOBER, 2012: BREEZE ISSUE #60

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



2012 JET MEMORIAL INVITATION PROGRAM REPORT PART 3: JAPAN BOUND!

by Thomas Lin, Program Officer, JFLA

Previous Issue: Pre-Departure Orientation

As we sat on the plane waiting on the runway to depart Los Angeles International Airport, the captain suddenly announced through the intercom that our flight was being delayed for up to an hour. I became a bit concerned because we had roughly two hours to make our connecting flight to Osaka once we landed in San Francisco and with an hour delay we would be cutting it pretty close. As some of the participants sitting near me dozed off, I tried to put my worries in the back of my mind and tried to relax. After 45 minutes sitting on the runway, we finally got news that the plane was ready to depart, which was a

welcome relief. The flight was nice and short as we landed in San Francisco an hour and a half later. A representative from the travel agency met us at the gate to escort our group to the connecting flight at the other end of the terminal. When we finally got to the gate, we found out that the airplane had some sort of mechanical issues and our flight would be delayed yet again. We waited at the gate for about an hour before the airline decided to bring in another plane to take us to Japan. I was relieved when we all made it aboard and I made sure that everyone was accounted for. The morning was extremely hectic from leaving the hotel at 5AM to the flight delays, but we were finally on our plane flying to Japan.

The flight was long, about 13 hours, and after a few movies and two meals, we started our descent into Kansai International Airport. Once we landed and exited the plane, the excitement grew among the participants as they started seeing signs and decorations at the airport indicating that they were in Japan. We went through customs one by one and after collecting our luggage from the carousel, we headed out and were greeted by staff from the Japan Foundation Japanese Language Institute Kansai. They made sure that everyone was accounted for and we headed out of the airport to board the bus. As we walked out of the air conditioned airport, the humid air outside enveloped us in its heat and reconfirmed that we were in Japan. After a short bus ride from Kansai International Airport, which sits on an artificial island in Osaka bay, we arrived at the Institute.

The participants separated into four groups and were given tours of the Institute so they knew what kind of amenities was available to them and where everything was. Aside from our group, there were Japanese language learners from all over the world studying at the institute including groups for Australia, China, Korea, as well as individuals from the United States there as part of our grant programs. After touring the facility, the participants were free to go have dinner and familiarize themselves with their new surroundings with a curfew of 9Pm throughout the entire trip.

The next morning, all the participants assembled in the main classroom at 9AM sharp where we went over the itinerary and the assignments for the entire trip. Afterwards, created a collage with a map of the US with famous landmarks and pictures of the students showing where they were from. This was later presented to the two elementary schools the participants visited in Rikuzentakata.

In the afternoon, Jonathan LeFore, a JET assistant language teacher who taught English in next town over, dropped by to talk about his experiences during his appointment in Osaka. The participants enjoyed his presentation as many indicated a strong interest in participating in the JET program after college. Following the presentation, everyone returned to their rooms to pack their bags for the Tohoku trip and two hours later, we were on a the bus heading to Osaka Airport. This is a smaller airport compared to Kansai International and is located about an hour away near Oasaka. We stayed at a business hotel inside the airport and had dinner at a nearby restaurant. When we got back to the hotel, I worked with two of the participants who were selected to give speeches in Rikuzentakata. The next day we would be headed to the Tohoku region.

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Annual Report

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