

NOVEMBER, 2012: BREEZE ISSUE #61

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



SOPHIE CHARLES

*Miami Palmetto Senior High School
Miami, FL*

MY EXPERIENCE IN JAPAN

Never in my wildest dreams did I believe that I would have the chance to visit Japan. For four years I studied about its culture and language but actually experiencing the country in the flesh was just a sweet thought. This all changed when I was selected to participate in the JET Memorial Invitation Program. For two weeks I was able to take a step out of my Miami home and spend time in the country that I fell in love with. I couldn't wait to embark on the new adventures set for me.

Before our trip to Japan, all the JET-MIP participants met at the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles to go over the itinerary of our trip. We were also able to hear speeches from Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson's family and have dinner with the General Consulate of Los Angeles. After the two days of orienteering we were finally able to board our plane to Japan.

Ten hours later we finally arrived and even though I was very tired from the trip I was so excited to experience Japan. We were staying at the Japan Foundation Japanese Language Institute Kansai in Osaka which was a very lovely building with so many amenities such as karaoke, rental bikes and an indoor gym. The meals at the cafeteria were also very delicious. I stayed on the sixteenth floor and had such a nice view of the beach and bridge nearby. The day after our arrival we prepared ourselves for the trip to the Tohoku region which was most affected by the tsunami and earthquake. Throughout the course of six days we visited four cities; Rikuzentakata, Kesenuma, Sendai and Ishinomaki. In Rikuzentakata we were able to visit an elementary school. My group visited Yahagi Elementary school. There, each of us talked about our family and hometown with a few students. It was so cute to see the students try to communicate with me in English. I also tried to use my Japanese to make it easier for them to understand. After our introductions we sang the Sanpo song together and did the bunny hop. When we had to leave, the elementary school students it was so sad because we wanted to stay with them a little bit longer. We also took a tour of the disaster area in Rikuzentakata. At first when we were going around the city and I saw large areas covered in grass I thought they were just vacant natural land. However, the tour guide told us that all the land to be filled with homes and businesses which shocked me. I couldn't believe such a prosperous city could

just vanish in such a short amount of time. Seeing the skeletons of what used to be buildings and houses made me realize that at any moment everything you know and love can be swept away from existence in a blink of an eye. Next we visited Kesennuma where we also toured the damaged areas. Afterwards, we returned to Rikuzentakata and participated in a summit with fellow High School students. Our task for this summit was to come up with ways we could strengthen the bridge between the United States and Japan. We were separated into groups and each group in the end had to present their ideas. I had a lot of fun working with the Japanese students. Although they were shy we came up with some good ideas such as keeping in touch by using social media. The morning after the summit we found ourselves in the front page of the newspaper. In our visit to Sendai we got to visit the city with a few College students. That was one of my favorite parts in the Tohoku region because we got to an outdoor roofed mall which was gigantic. There were so many stores I didn't know where to start. There was even a Pokémon Center where I bought Pikachu cookies. During our stay in the Tohoku region we also got the chance to bathe at an onsen. It was such a great experience. Onsens are rarely found in the US and being able to go to one was awesome. After our trip through the Tohoku Region we went back to Osaka and got ready for our homestays. The homestay was my favorite part of the trip. I was able to stay with my host-sister and her family and we had such a good time together. We made takoyaki and I mastered the very hard skill of rotating takoyaki. I also met with one of my friends who lived in Japan and we all did Karaoke together. I was so grateful for my host-parents because they took very good care of me even though I was only with them for two days. After the homestay we had our farewell ceremony and returned to the States. It was such a bittersweet goodbye, but our sweet dream had come to an end.

My stay in Japan has made me want to learn even more about the Japanese culture and language. Although I did study Japanese for a few years my communication skills weren't very good. I want to become stronger in the language. Speaking with the high school students and my host-family was great practice for me. I can say that by the end of the trip when people spoke in Japanese I could understand more of what they were saying. I plan to continue my Japanese studies and one day I will be able to go back to Japan and speak fluently.

Although I have not yet shared my experience with my classmates, I did share it with my family and friends. They were amazed at how much I did in just a two week span. I showed them the pictures of the ruins in the Tohoku region and they were very surprised that so much damage occurred in that area. But what also surprised them is how much of the debris had already been cleaned up. I told them about the cheery and happy personalities of the Tohoku people. Even though all their homes were destroyed they were able to overcome that and just go on with their lives.

I really appreciate the work that Ms. Taylor Anderson and Mr. Montgomery Dickson did while they lived in Japan. They left their families behind and dedicated their time to following their dreams by moving to Japan and teaching at local schools. Not everyone in the world is strong enough to do that. Although their lives were lost during the disaster, their stories still live on and they will always be an inspiration for others for years to come. From them I learned to always follow your dreams no matter how impossible it may seem. I also would like to thank their families for supporting them as they lived in Japan. It must have been hard to hear that a beloved family member had passed away. I want to thank both the Anderson family and Dickson family for providing such strong support to the JET Memorial Invitation Program. Through this program they have helped fulfill the dreams of Ms. Taylor and Mr. Montgomery.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION

"THE LAST TREE THAT STOOD IN A FOREST OF THOUSANDS"



All the trees in that forest that lined the coast in Rikuzen-Takata were swept away by the tsunami except for this one and now it is a symbol of hope for the people of that region.

Breeze #62



Breeze #61



2012 JET-MIP Report Part 4/8

2012 J-LEAP Report: Tae Okuda

2012 J-LEAP Report: Yukiko Homma

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Curtis Fortenberry

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Emily Domingue

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Jessica Lee

2012 JET-MIP Essay: Sophie Charles

Breeze #60



Breeze #59



Breeze #58



Breeze #57

Breeze #56



Breeze #55



Breeze #54

Breeze #53



Breeze #52



Breeze #51



[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.](#)