

FEBRUARY, 2013: BREEZE ISSUE #64

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



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Way before I started learning Japanese, I had already been deeply interested in the language and culture of such a wonderful country. Of course I had thought about going to Japan someday in my life, but I never would have thought I would get the opportunity to go before I became a senior in high school. I had once believed that my chance to go to Japan would have to wait until after college, which would be a few more years later. Having this chance to go to Japan with 31 students from all across the United States was a spectacular experience, and although cliché made my dream of going to Japan come true.

When I had first arrived in Osaka, my first impression was Japan is beautiful. The atmosphere was a bit different for me as it was my first time in Japan - I became amazed with everything that came into my view. Simply seeing even a trash can was interesting for me - everything was different compared to America. I couldn't stop looking around in awe as we walked, dragging our suitcases with us. Although it was true that Japan did have high humidity, it hardly bothered me at all for the first few days because I was too awestruck to even care about anything else. Even with the high humidity, I was pretty sure I just walked around with a dazed expression on my face the whole time.

During the first week of our trip, we visited the Tohoku region. Tohoku was deeply affected by the tsunami and earthquake of March, 2011. You would think that after a year, things would be all okay. However, I was in for a surprise. Throughout the beautiful areas we visited, you could still see signs of the tsunami's effects. I cried during the first week of our trip because it was painful to see what happened. It strengthened my resolve to help out in whatever way I can, and it also made me proud to be part of the bridge between our countries. I knew at that point that I could make a difference by at least telling people about my story so that they are more aware of the situation. One thing that stood out a lot was seeing banners telling others to smile and to not cry for them. It was touching to see, and it allowed us to realize that they are doing their best to move on still.

Being in Japan, there was never a moment where I was bored. There was much exploring to do, and I made sure to take advantage of the free time we had sometimes to go out to Rinku's outlet mall. Rinku was dangerous to my wallet - everything there was adorable, and I can't even remember how many times I had to be dragged away from a store by a friend before I spent all of my money in one go. Just entering a store made me feel like a little kid again. I ended up spending the majority of my free time in Rinku, which I absolutely do not regret.

My favorite part of the trip would really have to be my home-stay with the Oda family. Many thoughts ran through my head before they arrived to meet me. I became flustered, and kept practicing my introduction so that I wouldn't have trouble talking to them for the first time. The Oda family was a loving, friendly, and fun family to spend two days with. They constantly asked me if I wanted any souvenirs, where I wanted to go, and if I was hungry or thirsty. It was hard to pay for myself as they considered me to be their real daughter too. They would constantly stop me from taking out my wallet even after several protests from me to pay for everyone. During my stay, they took me to Kyoto to the Kiyomizudera, which is a Buddhist temple. Words cannot even describe how awesome it was. It was heartbreaking to leave them on the last day - I remember crying a lot with my mother, sisters, and baby brother. We still keep in touch via e-mail, so this only strengthens my will to improve my Japanese so I can better communicate with my family.

Immediately coming back from Japan, I told some of my friends and family about my trip and showed them pictures of my trip. They were amazed to see how many memories and experiences I had during this short interval of time. They were inspired at my willingness to go on this trip as the only person from my state, and told me that they felt it was a huge first step I took. A friend told me that I had inspired her to go visit Japan too when she gets the chance.

Finally, I would love to thank both Ms. Anderson and Mr. Dickson. You both have been a huge part of the bridge between Japan and America, and words cannot even fully describe the contributions you have made for both countries. Your generousities have made a huge impact on all of us, and you have both inspired me to continue on with my studies in Japanese. I will do my best just like you both have. Thank you very much for everything you have done for all of us.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



"SMILE!"

Lucky students who got to experience wearing a yukata, but also learned quickly that sitting was not as fun...

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Annual Report

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