

DECEMBER, 2013: BREEZE ISSUE #74

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



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I had never expected to actually be able to join this program, and be able to go to Japan and 5 different cities. When my teacher told me about the process, with its tests and scores and the Skype interview later on, I realized exactly how much was expected out of me as a student if I wanted to become a part of this program. The registration process was long, but I had faith in myself and

what I had studied, that the test would be simple and I could pull through. When I received my results and then spoke at the interview itself, I had lost confidence in my speaking ability, and my comprehension skills in the language. My faith in my own speaking capability would continue to shrink quickly with each passing day until I received their email. Even then, I had a lingering doubt in my head that perhaps they were mistaken, that I had barely made it and that my Japanese ability was far less impressive than the other 31 students that had been with me through the trip.

And then you go to Japan, and you learn that that was not what anyone was expecting from you. Though knowing the language will certainly make the experience more comfortable for people, the biggest importance was having the open mind and the eagerness to learn of a world that may not necessarily affect you in your everyday life, but still held significance and importance to you. None of us really knew about the Great East Japan Earthquake, and even fewer believed that the area would be in its current condition today, still within the process of its reconstruction. This trip was looking for people who would want to see that reconstruction through, not only in its infrastructure and re-establishment of old buildings and markets, but also within its people, who live their lives with a joy that shines through their murky life, a shining light that pleads to be heard and recognized by the people outside Japan.

Japan was a breaking experience, so to speak. It was uncomfortable several times, specifically because I was very unprepared for the weather of Japan, and also unprepared for the costs and burdens of living alone (with the occasional roommate) for almost three weeks. A lot of us know anime, and have learned Japan and became inspired to learn the language through anime. Though I actually began my interest for Japanese through the learning of Chinese, I also had a very large interest in what people call Japar pop culture and anime, though my time online also introduced me to many people who were older t me, and their harsh words and crueler debates, as expected of anyone on any social media website

would leave dark premonitions about having an “anime mindset” when departing. I will have to concur with those statements, these curt statements to leave the “weeaboo” thoughts behind you, because Japan is certainly not a mimetic pile of rehashed TV cartoons and movies, and no nation can ever be degraded like that. What Japan IS... is a cultural world with an entirely different lifestyle, filled to the brim with the small pleasures of life that make any foreigner wide eyed with surprise. A small hint: Vending machines are everywhere.

As I had written before, knowing Japanese isn't too large of an issue, as there are actual classes during your stay that will help you with learning appropriate phrases to use when asking questions, asking about a bathroom, what to say at homestays, etc. Most people are terrified by the idea of speaking Japanese, and how often they will have to while in Japan. It's almost guaranteed, however, that a person's Japanese will improve while they're in Japan. The most crucial thing for me was to never stop trying to speak. Even the smallest comment or the most insignificant chatter was an important part for me, for me to build up the confidence to speak and pronounce these words. Making mistakes, or more so the fear of making said mistakes, had to be ignored because those mistakes will come, and eventually fade as I continued to speak. My stay in Japan solidified this mindset for tackling the Japanese language: To not back down to any chance, be it large or small, and to not consider the possibility of failure in a negative light while practicing, because it is not something to be considered bad for learning. I also got to meet several people, and have traded contact information with many of them, in hopes of continuing this idea of communication and learning the language. I hope as I go to college as well, that I'll be able to learn more about Japanese and its linguistics, while making good use of what I've learned by talking with my newly found friends.

I have yet to speak to some of the younger students about this, and they don't know exactly what I saw. However, those who I have spoken with were fascinated with what I said, especially the status of the Tohoku area. It wasn't precisely unpredictable, but they were surprised to hear about its current reconstruction plans, and the problems with funding and support that it was facing right now. I don't think what I said would get anyone interested into going to the Tohoku area, but I think I did persuade people to believe my words, and maybe that's enough for them to consider traveling to a place like Ishinomaki if they were to ever go into the area. I think that's enough for now, and later on when I give my presentation to the Japanese class, I can do more for them. They're the ones that are going to Japan soon, and the next people to do what I have done, be it in this same program or in any other scholarship program.

Returning to America leaves me with this odd feeling in my mind, that I was missing something throughout the entire trip. Perhaps that it was too quick, or maybe returning to my home, and trying to get used to American life again was something that actually bothered my mind. Either way, I was certain that I want to return to Japan, either for sightseeing or to continue my studies there, and enjoy more of the nation and what it has to offer. I've enjoyed my time there, and I want to return to where I've gone in the Tohoku area, next time with friends from both America and Japan so we can all be together and enjoy a long trip.

Taylor and Monty, the two who had come before me and now give me this opportunity with open hands, I wish to offer them my deepest respect for what they did, and the attitude they carried as they went through the JET program as teachers. From what I have heard, these people had the same feelings for Japan, and had learned the same things I had experienced within my month. I want to continue my life with them in mind, and carry on with the same energy, enthusiasm, and joy for my studies, my travels, and my associates. To these wonderful teachers, I wish them a peaceful rest, and assurance that their lives will carry on in this world.



“Rail Overgrown With Grass”

This picture to depict the theme of this trip for its impact it had on me. To a lot of us, some public transportation like a train is nothing to think about, something that always existed and is rarely used in the first place. But to see something that had always existed in my life to be abandoned like this was a very disheartening sight, and was a reminder of just how much everyday life in Japan was shaken. The first steps of recovery should always be within the people, and within the recovery of everyday commodities like the transportation systems.

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2013 J-LEAP Report: Hitomi Komeda

2013 JET-MIP Essay: Nanette Jackson

2013 JET-MIP Essay: Kapil Kanhai

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Annual Report

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