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



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The JET Memorial Invitation Program was an amazing experience I am never going to forget. I am very grateful to have been given the opportunity to visit Japan since it had always been my dream to go there. This trip was very unique because we went to areas tourists normally would not visit, and we learned the history of 3.11 in Tohoku by interacting with the local community and listening to the residents' personal stories. It was also a great chance to practice my Japanese skills and learn about the Japanese culture. I made a lot of friends, both American and Japanese, and I plan to keep in touch with them.

We first stayed at the Kansai Institute in Osaka for a few days to prepare for the trip to Tohoku with our instructors. We went over self-introductions, the school visits, and the homestays. This introduction was a great way to slowly ease into the life of Japan after the initial excitement of arriving. In addition, there was a lot of free time after classes to explore the city, meet new people, and shop. I was surprised as to how much freedom we had; we could go nearly anywhere as long as we came back by curfew. It was a great way to experience Japan for myself.

When we arrived in Tohoku, I was amazed by the beautiful scenery of mountains and trees everywhere. However, it was easy to tell that areas such as Rikuzentakata and Kesenuma still did not fully recover since the earthquake. While the debris was gone, there were still many concrete foundations of buildings that were destroyed. Also, a lot of people were still in temporary housing or went to temporary schools. I knew about the earthquake when it happened in 2011, but I never realized the severity and extent of the damage. Actually going to areas of devastation is very different from reading articles or looking at pictures on the Internet. By visiting areas such as the Tree of Hope and Hotel Boyo, I could better understand what the locals went through at the time and how they plan to improve the future. I learned that the Japanese care very much for members of their community and by working together they have the strength to move forward. While much has been done, there is still a long way to go and Tohoku needs our support.

For the first school visit in Tohoku, I was very apprehensive because I did not want to make mistakes while speaking Japanese, even though our instructors back in Osaka told us time and time again to not be afraid. However, as soon as I said hello, the students were very welcoming and my fears immediately went away. They were very enthusiastic to learn about the English language and American culture. We had interesting discussions and we played many games together. It was a great bonding experience and we really did build bridges between our two countries. After this, I was not afraid for the other school visits and made friends everywhere I went.

My two homestays were also a wonderful time and I am very grateful for both of my families who hosted me. They were very generous and wanted me to see all of the best sites and eat the best food. For example, in Sendai I went to the Sendai City Museum and learned about the history of the area from the past 3,000 years to the present. I also tried one of their famous foods, gyutan (beef tongue), and it was very delicious. In Osaka I went to Universal Studios and discovered a lot about how the Japanese view American pop culture. I also attended a youth gathering of both American and Japanese students for a festival and played traditional Japanese games. My families really made me feel welcome while I was in Japan and I hope that we can meet again someday.

As soon as I came home I shared my experiences with my friends and family. They were amazed by the culture and values of the people in the Tohoku region. They were also surprised to see how many friends I made in such a short time span. Some of my friends at home who are already in Japanese classes are now further motivated to learn so that they can go to Japan one day and create their own bonds.

This trip has inspired me to continue learning Japanese in college, and in preparation for that, I am taking AP Japanese in my senior year of high school. If the college I attend offers study abroad programs in Japan, I will do that as well to further learn about the culture and language. Also, because of how much fun I had interacting with the Japanese students, I am thinking about becoming a JET in the future to teach English. I hope to encourage others to learn about Japan so that the two countries can become closer.

Finally, to Taylor Anderson and Monty Dickson, thank you for all of your hard work bridging America and Japan. It was great meeting your students in Japan and listening to their stories about you. You have really impacted their lives. Also, both of you have motivated me to take my Japanese studies even further so I can do what you hoped to achieve. I hope your stories will always continue to inspire others.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Fun with Our New Friends”

Our visit to one of the East Takata Junior High School in the Tohoku region ended with the Japanese students created a tunnel for us to go through.

Breeze #86



Breeze #85



Breeze #84



Breeze #83



Breeze #82



Breeze #81



Breeze #80



Breeze #79



Breeze #78



Breeze #77



Breeze #76



Breeze #75



Japanese Language Education Update 2

Teacher Training Program: Emily Orillon

2013 J-LEAP Report: Atsuya Yoshida

2013 J-LEAP Report: Yuko Miyata

2013 JET-MIP Essay: Alex Leal

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