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



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My visit to Japan was not my first international venture, however, it was the first time I left the country for the purpose of study. Although I had a dream prior to departure about going to Japan and becoming a Magical Girl, that, regrettably, did not come to be. However, traveling as a student, I believe, allowed me to recognize and identify aspects of a culture different from my own while I enjoyed a trip to Japan.

So thank you Japan Foundation and Lin-san especially!

To begin, Japan is a country dominated in equal parts romanticism and practicality. The music, art, and poetry are probably the most well-known romantic arts and the machinery and social organization being the more famous of the latter category. And although no judgement is correct without going to the location and experiencing the events firsthand, I have to say many of my pre-landing expectations and anticipations were not far from correct. The modern Japanese sales-clerk, waiter, or child does not have the time to wait for someone to dwell on a response, especially not a 6' foreigner. Not to portray the country as uninviting, it's that it's not like in an RPG where you can linger for a while trying to decide how to answer. Furthermore, I very much appreciated this. There is no better way to practice the language you've been studying (whereas in my case six years) than being thrown into an unrestricted conversation in which you are expected to be able to fully comprehend and respond in real-time. Arriving in Customs at Tokyo-Haneda airport at 5:20am on a Wednesday morning to be blandly greeted and apologized to by a obviously-tired employee was for me a golden learning experience. Of course I've had experience with commands in my time studying, but to finally hear someone request something in Japanese, completely in Japanese and not repeating in English, was something I'd been waiting for. I was a little suspicious with my eagerness to show the attendant my passport and scan my finger but hearing him speak was the confirmation that I really needed to let me know I was really in the country I had longed to visit for such a long time. Not to make it seem as though every conversation I had in Japan was a cake walk; I personally believe that no amount of foreign study can replace going to the country of lecture and experiencing amenities first hand. Of course I met people with whom I had a remarkably difficult time communicating with and even those whom I was ultimately incapable of speaking with (a 4th grader being among th

but that did not mean I lost all confidence and wanted to end my studies of the language. If anything it did the exact opposite! I want to continue studying Japanese to gain such a mastery of the language that I never again have to suffer the embarrassment of saying “gomenne wakaranaindesu” to the McDonalds cashier or lie and say “jya kikemasen” to an 8 year old just because he uses common slang I’ve simply never heard before. And while that goal is for all intents and purposes unachievable, I plan to aim for that platform and see how far I can get. Being selected as a participant in the JET Program would be the most fortuitous event I can possibly imagine at this point in my life. Being able to reside in Japan and study the language while also being able to teach English to other students and expand their capabilities is something I doubted was an achievable dream before this program. Now, however, my goals are within sight.

Being in Japan inspired my desire to socialize as well as study. Awaiting the arrival of my buddy at East Sendai High School was a nerve-racking 3 minutes. In addition to my worries about my communication abilities, as the Watanoha Elementary School visit resulted in me LYING to a child whose words I was unable to comprehend, I was also afraid my buddy and I wouldn't have anything to discuss. My own personal ice-breaking tactics rely on making jokes, and I still don't understand Japanese jokes very well. ON TOP OF THAT, I didn't expect that my extensive knowledge of both Mahou Shoujo anime and what was labeled as “bad J-Pop” by friends to be of much assistance either. Boy, was I wrong. The friends I made were thoroughly impressed by my knowledge of Japanese pop culture (esp. Happiness Charge Precure!, Perfume, Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, and Shoujo Jidai) and I found it all too easy to initiate conversation. I met barriers every once in a while, specifically when talking with my host family that spoke Kansai-ben at its fullest, but I endured. Before these exchanges, while the Japan Foundation informed us of all the ins and outs of the ALT program, I was interested, but turned off by the idea that I wouldn't be able to relate to the students and thus be some boring foreign teacher no one really cared for. After the final exchange, the homestay, I can firmly assure that I now feel the exact opposite. My friends from all the schools we visited seemed so excited to talk with me and exchange emails I was a bit taken aback. I felt like an idol, honestly. My continued relationship with all of them via LINE and email makes me feel confident about going back to Japan alone and being to fend for myself. I could have never gained this confidence without this program. Thank you again Japan Foundation you held give me confidence and a goal to aim for in life.

Dear Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickinson,

Based on the videos of your time in Japan I feel we are the same in being fun-loving people so I try to keep this from being overly dismal. I just want to let you two know that you're my role models, from your efforts to make it into the JET Program, to your relationships with your students I aim to become an ALT like the both of you. While you are gone now, I can assure you, though you must surely know by now from their prayers, that your actions touched the hearts of all the people you met. Simply put, I want to do that to. Not in a self-important manner, I want to help people and have educational exchanges not just concerning language but all aspects of life. I want to strengthen the bridge you two and all ALT's, Japan Foundation members, and the citizens of both Japan and America have worked so hard to establish. I want to lacquer the handrails with knowledge and polish it with mutual understanding. I don't know if that's cliché or just overly complex but it's how I feel. So please, rest peacefully knowing that your lives have impacted everyone you knew and even those you have yet to meet.

Yours Truly

Jay (Dekai) Gillis

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Mourning Glories”

A single Morning Glory plant grows at the Ishinomaki Disaster Site where so many people lost their lives during the 3/11 disaster. While these flowers can be viewed as a reminder of those who lost their lives, it can also be seen as a symbol of hope, as the denizens of Ishinomaki work to rebuild their town

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