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



2014 FUKUOKA JAPANESE CULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM BY JOSHUA NETTLES

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First Impression and Thoughts

On November 12, 2014, I was fortunate enough to be selected by the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles, who was tasked with finding a candidate to participate in the inaugural Fukuoka Japanese Cultural Exchange Program for one week. Ever since I had begun studying Japanese seriously as an undergraduate I had wanted to spend time in Japan to experience what it was really like with my own two eyes. Without this opportunity I am not sure I would have ever been able to go to Japan because I have to financially support myself and my sister who is currently still in school all while continuing to work on my Masters

project. Taking an entire week off of work was a financially risky decision, but knowing that an opportunity like this would more than likely never present itself to me again I decided to take the gamble and put in the application.

Students from Vietnam, Malaysia, The Philippines, China, Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan, Australia, South Korea, India and The United States all gathered to have their first Japanese experience in Fukuoka prefecture. The ages of participants ranged from 17 years old to 26 years old. Being the oldest of the participants I wasn't sure if I would be able to get along well with the other participants especially since I was the only student from the other side of the Pacific Ocean. I was also concerned about my Japanese ability since I haven't had much time to dedicate to advancing my language ability with school and work to focus on. I know that many people in Asia can speak Chinese and have ability to read countless numbers of Chinese characters which is an overwhelming advantage when it comes to learning Japanese. Also, Korean is almost grammatically identical to Japanese making it easier for speakers of Korean to learn Japanese. For Americans, Japanese is not only grammatically and orthographically difficult but pragmatically difficult as well.

After spending a total of over 14 hours on an airplane I finally arrived in Fukuoka, Japan on November 12th at around noon. I was relieved to find out that many of the other participants had shared my concerns and I found them all to be extremely friendly and intelligent people. Many of us could probably communicate with each other more efficiently in other languages, but to my knowledge all of the students took this opportunity to practice their Japanese conversational ability and refrained from speaking other languages.



Fukuoka

So after an entire week in Fukuoka what makes a prefecture that most people have never heard of stand out from the others? Well, Fukuoka is in a pretty strategic location. It is within Ferry distance of South Korea and not far from the rest of Asia. For students who are interested in international business in Asia I believe that studying abroad in Fukuoka would be a great opportunity to make connections. Sure, you can make connections anywhere but just like in Los Angeles there are really too many people to really meet someone and form a strong bond and it is also difficult to find the right people. Fukuoka is big enough to attract people from many parts of the world but yet small enough so that it is easier to meet people without getting lost in a sea of acquaintances.



It is also relatively cheap to study in Fukuoka. Honestly almost anywhere on the planet has cheaper tuition and living expenses than Los Angeles but Fukuoka is also cheap in comparison to other major cities in Japan. According to the presentation the study load at the average Japanese university is light enough to allow students to work part-time jobs to help fund their study abroad experience in Fukuoka. There are also scholarships offered by the government and many support programs for students who wish to study in Fukuoka.

I'll be the first to admit that in comparison to Los Angeles there isn't THAT much to see in Fukuoka, but for those looking for an experience outside of tourism I believe it is one of easiest places to live in Japan especially for those who wish to improve their Japanese language ability. I didn't come across a single person in Fukuoka who could speak English at a conversational level and that's probably because most people seemed more interested in other Asian languages. This means that in order to get by you'll have to rely on your own Japanese ability. However, based on my experience even if your communicative ability is low the people are friendly and patient enough to try and understand what it is you're trying to say.

I remember flying over Fukuoka and being amazed at how much green I could see from nearly 20,000 feet in the sky and on my way back to Los Angeles all I could see were lumps of brown for miles. So if you're someone who appreciates trees and would like to be surrounded by nature but still have access to a large but not too large city then Fukuoka may just be the place you're looking for in Japan.



Japanese Exchange Program

I think the program really helps give students an idea of what kind of place Fukuoka really is. It all felt really genuine to me and I don't think anyone was really try

impress us to influence our opinion of Fukuoka. Sure, we were given the chance to have many rare experiences in Fukuoka but my impression of Fukuoka is entirely based on what I observed around rather than what was being presented to me.



I think one of the strongest points of this program is that not only did we get to learn about Fukuoka but we also were able to learn about the countries that the other participants had come from. I think this program is necessary because it is true that not many people know of Fukuoka or its charm and appeal. I hope that in writing this article and sharing my experience that it may inspire others to give Fukuoka a chance and experience it for themselves. I certainly wasn't disappointed and I doubt anyone else would be either.

I hope that the program continues for many years to come and I'm looking forward to see what future participants have to say in regards to their experience in Fukuoka. Hopefully I didn't mess up too badly in Fukuoka and they'll allow another student from the United States to participate next year.

Concluding Comments

To my professors: Thank you for recommending me for the program and always being supportive of my efforts to learn Japanese. I certainly couldn't have not made it this far without you and I am truly grateful.

To our lovely Japanese tutors in Fukuoka: I You're all amazing people and hopefully we'll meet again soon. I wish you all the best in your future endeavors and if you are ever in Los Angeles or need help with anything English related don't hesitate to get in touch with me!



To my host family: Thank you for taking care of me while I was in Fukuoka. I truly had a great time and I can't wait to see you all again. I'm not sure how difficult it is for a foreigner to pass a Japanese university entrance exam, but I'll definitely be putting forth a valiant effort to make it back to Munakata soon.



To my fellow exchange students: It was a pleasure meeting you all and I'm glad that we were able to become great friends. I'm not really great with social networking or chat programs but I'll be making an effort to stay in touch! Hopefully we'll see each other again.

To the Japan Foundation Los Angeles: Thank you for being so flexible with the application process. None of this would have been possible without you all presenting me with this opportunity and for that I am sincerely thankful.

To the Fukuoka Japanese Exchange Program Staff: First I'd like to apologize for the inconveniences I may have caused by not responding to e-mails immediately and the whole withdrawing cash situation. I'd like to think that some of the Japanese SOUL (inside joke) has rubbed off on me as a result of this program and thus made me more conscience of what is considered to be a timely response. Second, I'd like thank you all for making this program possible. I had a great time and learned quite a bit about Fukuoka.

had wanted to study in Japan before this program but it wasn't until after that I had decided that I wanted to study in Fukuoka. Without this program who knows when I would have had my first experience in Japan, but more importantly than when I'm happy to say that my first experience was in Fukuoka and that I am eternally grateful to all of you who helped make this possible.

Thanks for reading!

Joshua "Jojo-tan" Nettles

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