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Coming into this program I honestly didn't know what to expect out of the trip except meeting new people, using my Japanese and doing some work. Some of my worries and nervousness before coming into this program was that I wasn't confident with my Japanese skills and if I would be able to get along and make friends on this trip.

At the very beginning of this trip, my flight had gotten canceled and had to be rescheduled. The rescheduled flight time made me late to the first day of orientation in Los Angeles which made me even more nervous than before. I was sure that the other Mippers would have gotten along already from spending the day together while I had just gotten there. However, I soon found out that everyone was super friendly and just wanted to get to know everyone. The flight from Los Angeles to Haneda Airport to Kansai airport was probably the longest and most exhausting day but I had a lot of fun interacting with the other participants. At the Kansai institute, where we stayed at most of the time, we attended Japanese classes that helped supplement our speaking skills and prepare us for the school visits. The original plan for touring in the Tohoku Region was to go to Sendai, Ishinomaki, Rikuzentakata, and Kensenuma but unfortunately we heard that a typhoon was approaching on the day we were traveling to Rikuzentakata. This information made big changes to our plans for the Tohoku Study Tour. The trip to Rikuzentakata and Kensenuma got canceled which made everyone sad since we were all looking forward to meeting and talking with the people there. This gave us a few more days to adjust to the time difference and (such). The Japan Foundation then planned a day to visit Nara because of the cancellation to Rikuzentakata. I wasn't quite sure of what to expect

since I'd just recently heard of it. We saw temples, shrines, and wild deer in Nara which was amazing because I'd never been so close to a deer before. The day in Nara definitely lifted our moods from staying at the institute for a few days. It was also our first take on Japanese culture and made us see new places. The time spent in each location was short but was used every last second we were given. My group and I was almost late to the meeting spot because the okonomiyaki restaurant had taken a bit longer but the wait was worth it. The most memorable part of that day was running back to the meeting spot while we were holding our food in one hand and going up a set of steep stairs to make it back in time. After Nara, it was time to begin our trip to the Tohoku Region.

For the trip, we went to Sendai and Ishinomaki. The first school visit was to Watanoha Elementary School in Ishinomaki with fourth graders. I was a bit nervous to finally visit the school, but after an ice breaking game called Split Splat, my nervousness went away and I just enjoyed myself. Some of the fourth graders helped us write our tanabata wishes which was really sweet of them. They were definitely the most adorable kids I've met. They arranged to sing us a song called Niji no Uta which was both sad and beautiful. Their voices were like angels and the song made some of us cry because of their strength and hope. We also saw the Taylor Anderson bookshelf's built by Mr. Endo who's three children were taught by Taylor Anderson. We later visited Rainbow bridge, which was also built by Mr. Endo at the site of where his house used to be. Even though he had lost all three of his children due to the tsunami, he still had the strength to look upwards and to keep going. This was one thing I really admired about the people of Ishinomaki. The next school visit was to Ishinomaki Kobunkan High School, where we toured Mt. Hiyori and NEWSsee together. I was impressed by the way Mr. Takeuchi had taken command and created the handwritten newspapers to inform the people in his city. We also met up with a few of the Kiwi Club members who were taught English by Taylor Anderson. During this time, we all had a really great time talking to the members and interacting more with the Kobunkan high school students. The last high school we visited in the Tohoku Region was East Sendai High School where we participated in Tea Ceremony and Kendo. I was amazed at how good the students were at making tea after only learning it for two years. When I was making tea during Tea Ceremony, I felt proper and sophisticated, but when I participated in Kendo, all I felt was strength and control. Despite the hot weather, wearing the Kendo clothing was fun, but learning the steps of Kendo was hard. However, the saddest part about the Tohoku Study Tour was departing from the students after having an amazing afternoon together making us all friends.

Before meeting our host families, we were taught the Kansai dialect to help us understand them better. The homestay weekend was definitely the best part about this trip. It showed us real Japanese homes, meals, and lifestyles. At the beginning, we were all really nervous to leave and stay with the families for the weekend without the help of others. By the end of homestay I had fallen in love with my host family and I didn't want to leave them yet. There was definitely a change in feelings which I really didn't expect from the homestay weekend. After the homestay, I was faced with the fact that we only had about three more days in Japan. In these three days we visited Kyoto, Tokyo, and met up with our host families for the last time during the Completion Ceremony. During the last couple days, we got closer than before and we ev

started sleeping in each other's rooms. On the last night in Japan, many of us decided to sleep in the lounge together. These sleep overs showed how close we all got together and how deep our friendships became. Even though we may never see all 32 of us in the same room again, the experiences we experienced together lies deeply in our hearts and minds. Thinking back to the first few days of the program, I never really thought that I would make 31 friends so fast in such a short amount of time. I became closer and more comfortable with these people more than I will ever be compared to the people in my school or town.

This program definitely gave me a clearer view and understanding of Japan and its people instead of learning only through books and photos. This experience made me want to keep studying Japanese so that once I return, I would be better than before. It also improved my Japanese speaking skills and I learned many new Japanese words. Coming back home, I've told my experiences to my family, friends, and whoever I could talk to. My friends were definitely surprised at how nice the Japanese people were and how you could find an old styled house next to a more modern house. My experiences made my siblings want to also visit Japan in the future. Since they already studied a bit of Japanese, it made them want to go even more.

In my personal message to Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson, I want to thank them for adding on to this bridge of connections between the US and Japan. This opportunity changed my views and gave me a push towards building more networks. These new friendships that I made, the people that I met, and all the things I learned was all because of how dedicated and interested you were in Japanese. This definitely planted the seed for new and better relationships. This experience is an unforgettable one and will always remain with us.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Life in Japan”

This photo was taken in Rinku Town on the way to the supermarket near the Kansai Institute. I chose this photo because I love how the older style houses are right next to the modern houses. It just shows how the Japanese people are able to keep their culture alive and it's out there for people to see.

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