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



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I remember when my sensei informed me about the JET Memorial Invitation Program, all I could think of was, "Wow! An all paid trip to Japan for two weeks? Yes! Sign me up!" However, I did not think that my experience on this trip would be as remarkable and meaningful that it was.

Prior to the start of the trip, a Facebook group for the participants of the program was created. During this time, I was 1. still shocked that I actually made it past the Skype interview and 2. excited to meet all the other 31 participants online, especially after reading the experiences of the past participants. As the time trickled away, I began to prepare for my trip to Los Angeles, where I would meet everyone for the first time. During the tour in Japan, I traveled to multiple cities. Being able to explore and venture out on my own in Japan allowed me to greatly assimilate the Japanese

culture. The independence given to us made the trip even more memorable, whether it be through arcade games, or trying out new things. On the other hand, I made 31 new friends. Despite only knowing each other for two weeks, it felt that we knew each other for months. It is so odd to think that we're not going to go on a bus for two hours or have to wake up at 6:00 am so that we can make Thomas' crazy morning meet up times.

Also, traveling to places such as Rikuzentakata and Ishinomaki displayed Japan's more rural side. Seeing the people living in the regions affected by the tsunami gave me an indescribable feeling. Their persistence and willingness to rebuild and improve the future of the area was

truly inspiring. Despite the little assistance provided by the government, the Tohoku people maintained optimistic and hopeful for the future of the region. Being in the region was eye opening for me. It is easy to take things such as having my own room and laptop for granted. By meeting the Tohoku people and hearing their stories, I realized how vast the difference between our lifestyles was. However, because of their cheerful demeanor, it would be hard for anyone to tell that they were emotionally affected by the natural disaster.

As a side note, to anyone reading this, I would like to state that contrary to popular belief, Japan has not fully recovered from the March 11, 2011 tsunami and earthquake. Although four years have passed, the Tohoku region is still in the process of rebuilding cities, homes, and lives. I would like to bring awareness to the fact that the number of volunteers to the region has sharply dropped and that any support that can be given is greatly welcomed by the Tohoku people. Because I cannot directly help the Tohoku people, I hope that by spreading this message, I can somehow support them.

The mini family that I made throughout the duration of the trip consisted of people I never thought I would hangout with. I'd like to thank them for providing me one of the best experiences I've ever had in my life. These six people, in no specific order, are people that I will never forget. Bailey Well, who I first met in the airport and thought, "Wait, he's not a girl?!" Bailey was probably one of my first friends, although I do not know how, and is the chilliest guy I've ever met. Moreover, his love and passion for Japanese culture (and girls) has continuously amazed me. He introduced me to new Japanese artists, such as Kyari Pamyu Pamyu and PERFUME and has the best taste in music. Despite being the reason that the "eyebrow joke" was created, I am thankful for being able to meet him. Stephen Chen, who at first, really intimidated me with his neon shirts. With his unlimited supply of food and "fast metabolism," Stephen will forever be the person I can count on to eat incredibly unhealthy snacks in the middle of the night. Additionally, Stephen always made sure that everyone in the group was okay. I fondly remember him always asking me and others if they were okay or if I wanted to talk about what was on my mind. Georgianna Eck, also known as George, Georgi, G-Dawg, etc., was my best friend on this trip. I truly did not think that I was going to become friends with Georgi. However, I am glad I became friends with her and got to know her down-to-earth and easy-going personality. We experienced going to the onsen for the first time together and became onsen buddies. Moreover, we were also roommates for the majority of the Tohoku tour. Late night talks and naked showers will bond people like no other. Nicholas Gallitino was one of the oldest members of the group. Nick's sarcastic and spunky personality always made me laugh and his love for classical music continues to amaze me. One day, I hope I'll be able to watch Nicholas play the Viola in Carnegie Hall. With his passion for the Viola, I do not think it will be long until that happens. In addition, with about 76 horrible candids of me and a love letter, Nick is my number one admirer. Gardelio Mantuhac, who was also known as Jay-R, was one of the sweetest and most comforting individuals on the trip. He had an odd love for Japanese bread, especially melon bread. Moreover, Jay-R is one of the strongest people I know and I admire him for that. His bright intellect was illustrated through his advanced Japanese and discussion. I really hope that I will see you at Berkeley next year! Finally, A Waldron. Amy was one of the most outspoken individuals in the group. Her imitation of m

calling, “Thomas!” remains one of the funniest moments of the trip. Moreover, Amy was always lively and excited to do new things. Although I didn’t get to know Amy until later on in the trip, it seemed like she was always a part of the group. All jokes aside, these six people are people that I will never forget. I know that we will meet again, whether it be sooner or later in life.

Although I have been taking Japanese for five years, going on this trip made me realize that I still have a lot to improve. Because I was taught formal Japanese, having to switch to casual, informal Japanese proved to be a bit of a challenge. Despite the slight language barrier that was present on the trip, the JET Memorial Invitation Program has motivated me to work even harder on my Japanese. Although the future is uncertain, I would love to be able to experience working as an ALT within the JET program. JET-MIP has reminded me why I chose to learn Japanese: to gain a wider understanding of Japanese culture.

To Taylor Anderson and Montgomery Dickson, I apologize and thank you. I thank you for providing a total of 175 students an irreplaceable opportunity to visit Japan. Moreover, I thank you for allowing me to meet 31 unique, unforgettable individuals this summer. However, I am sorry. I am sorry that you two had to lose your lives in order for this program to be established. I am sorry that you two passed while following your dreams. But, I believe that I, along with the other past participants, will be able to continue your legacy. I know that through this program, the relationship between the United States and Japan has strengthened. Furthermore, your stories continue to live on in the hearts of the Rikuzentakata and Ishinomaki people and in the hearts of the past JET-MIP participants. I am truly humbled to be able to hear the stories about your lives and be given the opportunity to continue your legacy. Thank you.

NIPPON THROUGH MY EYES PHOTO SUBMISSION



“Reality”

This is the reality of the after effects of the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Disaster. Some people may think that Tohoku has fully recovered, others may turn a blind eye. However, I think that it is important to shed light onto the struggles that the Tohoku people still face. When I visited the Miracle Lone Pine Tree, I, too, was shocked at the view before me.

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Breeze #109



Breeze #108



Breeze #107



Breeze #106



Breeze #105



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