

Youth exchange Japan 2024

Going into this experience I didn't know what to expect. I just knew I wanted to travel to a faraway country and learn more about the people and culture there. It was a scary idea at first to travel alone all the way to Japan and having to live with a family that didn't speak any English and I didn't really know anything about. It was also scary but exciting going to a camp with all people I didn't know that all had different cultures. But It was the best decision I ever made. I would not be lying when I say this is the best trip of my life and I will forever cherish it in my memories.

It started saying goodbye to my family at Schiphol. I thought to myself okay now it starts, I only have myself and have to make it worth it. I liked flying alone, because it was peaceful. Arriving in Kansai airport I didn't know what to expect, but my host father and other lions members were waiting for me at the gates. This is when I knew I was in good hands. We noticed quick that's the language barrier is a little hard, but not too much of a problem. The most used app during this holiday was definitely google translate.

The first week when I was living at my host family I did a lot of things. Everyday a few lions members from their club picked me up and I went sightseeing and eat out with them. Afterwards I always was brought back to my host family's house where I would sleep.

On day one I went to their local temple. Then 2 lions members picked me up and we first went to okonomiyaki restaurant. Okonomiyaki is a kind of Japanese pancake which is made out of egg and flavor and covered with sauces. I really liked it. After that we went to a shopping mall and there was a pet shop. It was a surprise to me that they sell dogs, cats, chinchilla's and other animals in a store. That day it was cloudy but still very hot and we went on a cruise. It was very fun but it started pouring with rain. I mean it was rainy season in Japan. At last we went to a bakery called Malebranche which is famous for it's matcha. After I was dropped off and went straight to bed because jetlag hit hard the first few days.



On day 2 I was picked up by a lions member and his 18 year old employee. We went to a kimono shop where we picked out kimono's and workers helped us get into them. It is difficult to put them on but they were very good at it. After we put our kimono's on we got our hair done with flowers in them. We both looked pretty good I must say. We decided to go for a walk around a temple in our kimono's. I was a nice idea but the 38 degrees weather and a warm kimono wasn't the best combination. We were happy to arrive in the restaurant where she worked and that was owned by the lions member. We ate some delicious Japanese food and went home. Then I went to the gion festival with my host father and some more lions members and afterwards had a welcome party which was very fun.



On day 3 I went to the gion festival again but this time with my host mother. Then we went and ate some cold noodles which I never had before but it was very good. Afterwards I was dropped off at one of the houses of the lions members. They thought me some origami and took me to a Kaleidoscope museum were I made my own Kaleidoscope with her children. For dinner we ate conveyor belt sushi which ended up being my favorite food in Japan.



On day 4 I went to the company of my host father. It was a very big company selling many stuff mostly for restaurants. We ate some very good ramen for lunch. Then I went to another company of a lions member. He owned a sticker company and I made my own stickers there. After that they took me to get more conveyor belt sushi and we went up Kyoto tower. The view from Kyoto tower was so cool because you could see whole Kyoto and even see Osaka. We also went to a store called don quijoto which is probably one of the biggest and busiest stores I have ever seen.



On day 5 I met up with other youth from the camp. It was nice to speak some English with people my age. First we went on a train through the mountains of Kyoto. Then a horse brought us too some boats which we then took to go back down the River to Kyoto again. They didn't warn us that water splashes up so I got soaked with water. We had lunch after at a very cute restaurant located next to a temple. Then they took us to a movie set museum where we did a mental challenge and saw different movie sets of Japanese movies. Afterwards I got picked up by some lions members and we went to one of their restaurants where I ate some delicious sushi.



On day 6 I went to an aquarium with the daughter and grandsons of a lions member. They lived in Finland so they spoke English. The aquarium was very impressive and even had dolphins. For lunch we had meat which you cooked in front of you on the table. It was delicious and I even tried some cow stomach. When lunch ended we went to a railway museum which was very cool. It had all the old trains and the new bullet trains which go up to 300 km an hour. Then my host family picked me up and we did some shopping and went to an Indian restaurant for dinner.



On day 7 I woke up very early, because we were going to clean up the streets with the lions club. After cleaning up most of it we had some breakfast before going back home to pack for the camp. Before going to the camp we went to a museum where the host son had an art piece presented. Then we went towards Osaka where we stopped for a quick lunch at a noodle place and then arrived at the hotel where we were meeting up for the camp. First day of camp we had some presentations and a welcome dinner. Before going to sleep me and my roommates (Maria, Zala and Audrey) ate a whole lot of Japanese snacks before going to sleep.



Day 8 we had to wake up early to drive all the way to Hiroshima. It was about a 6 hour drive but the nature we were driving through made it worth it. When arriving at Hiroshima we went to the monument first. The city of Hiroshima was very pretty and the monument was interesting to see. After walking through Hiroshima we went to the museum that explains what happened to Hiroshima. It was pretty hard to look at, because it destroyed so many lives and it ruined the whole city. After looking around the museum we went back to the hotel where we had private hotel rooms which was very nice to just come to peace after a long day. In the evening we ate dinner and had the first few presentations and we also had a discussion about peace in the world. Around 9 we had free time and this is when we really started connecting as a group because we got to talk to each other and play games. Himeesha brought henna from India and we all got really cool temporary tattoos.



On day 9 we left Hiroshima and went towards Himeji. Here we went for a walk around the castle. It was so hot so we all got cold vending machine drinks and walked around with our fans. After the castle we had lunch at a hotel and then we went off to the Kikkoman factory. In the factory we learnt about how soy sauce was made and got to see the process with our own eyes. Then we left again with the bus towards Kyoto where we spent the night in a very cool Japanese hotel. We slept on the ground, but it was fun. That night we had presentations again and I had to do my presentation about the Netherlands. Afterwards we gathered together in one of our small rooms and played werewolves with everyone.



On day 10 we started the day with going to the golden temple. It was very pretty to see. Then we went to the bamboo forest and the shopping street near it. The bamboo forest was very nice and also good to walk through cause it gave us shade. Katie and I got some matcha ice cream and souvenirs before going to get lunch at the buffet place nearby. Then we went into Kyoto to a hotel to look at the temple there and to do a flower arrangement workshop. Everyone made very pretty flower arrangements and then it was time to go back to the hotel. That evening we had a few presentations again and of course played werewolves again. We also did washing which was very fun because there were 2 washing machines and 24 people trying to wash their clothes. Also the dryer was broken so we had to hang our clothes around our hotel room.



On day 11 we went to universal studios Japan. They put us into groups of 4 and we had 2 camp counselors assigned to our group. Luckily everyone from our group really liked rollercoasters so we went on all of them. Felicia and me are big harry potter fans so we went to the harry potter part and absolutely loved it. We dragged Juray and Dobi there even though they aren't fans, I do think they liked it. We made the mistake of taking Juray and Dobi on a backwards rollercoaster because afterwards they were very sick. It was a great day.



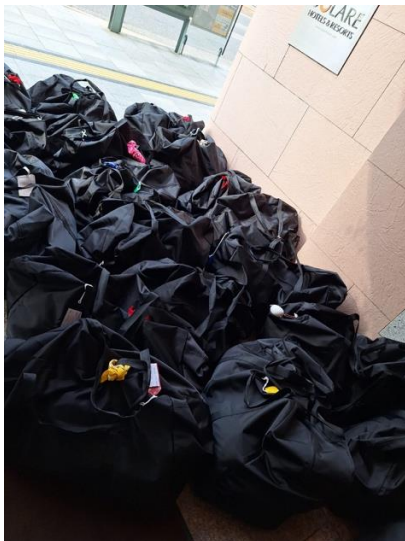
Day 12 was beach day or how they called it sea bathing. First we had to drive from Osaka to Shirahamakan. We spent almost the whole afternoon at the beach relaxing which was very nice. The water was very nice because it was very hot the whole day. We also did watermelon hitting, where one of us was blindfolded and had to find the watermelon and hit it with a bat. That evening we had dinner at a hotel and there was an amazing view of the ocean. We also celebrated Paula's birthday that evening. At the end of the evening we had a few more presentations before playing blackjack.



On day 13 we left early back to Osaka. We stopped at a very cool restaurant with a fun Japanese market. When we finally arrived we had a few minutes to get dressed in hiking clothes and we started hiking up a mountain. I did not prepare well for it, because the hike was very hard. Arriving at the top we changed into a bathrobe kind of thing and then we had a weird ritual before going under the waterfall. The waterfall was very refreshing after that long hike. Afterwards we had to hike down and I got attacked by insects but luckily Juray and Paula were walking behind me with towels to hit them off. That evening we had more presentations and karaoke. And of course we played werewolves again at night but this time we all found kimono's in our hotel room so we all put them on.



Day 14 was our last day. We left our hotel to go to a different hotel in the center of Osaka. The Hotel was very fancy because our farewell party was going to be held there. Some lions members gave a speech. Nada and topi gave a speech for all the camp members to say thank you. Then we all ate lunch together before saying goodbye's. Saying goodbye was hard because everyone kind of grew attached to one and other. That day I went back with my host family to their house again. Where I ate dinner with my host father's family. We also did some games and fireworks.



On day 15 I met up with 2 of the camp members again, Juray and Paula. We decided to see each other again before having to go back to our own countries. We went up Kyoto tower and went to Kyoto's shopping street. We also went to the red pillars and temple. Then we had lunch at a conveyor belt sushi place again (it really was my favorite). Afterwards we went back home where I went to eat dinner with my host family one last time. After dinner we went to a few shops before going to bed.



Day 16 was my last day in Japan. In the morning I went and bought a suitcase with my host mom, because I was not able to take everything back in the suitcase I brought with me. Then I had lunch at a pickle factory restaurant before leaving for the airport. At the airport I met up with Juray, Paula and Katie. We also saw some of the other camp members Pablo, Maria, Adrianna, Topi and Lara. We ate dinner together and just hung out before we had to catch our flights. Katie and I were on the same flight together so I booked the seat next to her so we could hang out a bit more before parting our ways. In Helsinki I had one last lunch with Katie and Lara before saying our goodbyes and leaving to Amsterdam. All I could think was this was such an amazing time and I am so tired.



As you have read every day was a whole journey and it was more than I could have ever have wished for. I had such an amazing time and met all new people which I made strong bonds with. We already made plans to meet up again in Bratislava in a few months hopefully but we will see where life brings us. My host family was amazing and really made my time in Japan amazing. Also the Kyoto lions club made my stay amazing by opening me with open arms. I am forever thankful.