

YCE Japan Summer of 2019 -

Overview of my stay:

I flew to Tokyo on the 10th of July and flew back on the 6th of August, my stay in Japan was almost 4 weeks long. I spent the first 10 days with an older family in Nakano city. Their daughter drove me around and took care of me but my hosts were absolutely amazing. Every day that I was there a new person or multiple people would pick me up and I would spend the day with them. Which was really nice because I got to meet many different types of Japanese people. One of the nights that I was supposed to stay at their house I spent the night at another family's house and they were amazing. The week after I spent at camp around Nagoya for the first 4 days and then moved to a different youth hostel in Kyoto. After camp I spent 5 days with another host family in Nagano city, but turned out they were really busy so for 3 nights I stayed in a super fancy hotel, which on one hand was a bit disappointing but on the other it was nice to have my own space for a few nights. After this the Lions programme was over but I still really wanted to visit Tokyo so I went to Tokyo by myself with the Shinkansen and stayed there for 3 nights in a capsule youth hostel.

Food

As you can suspect the food in Japan is simply brilliant. The classics such as sushi and sashimi were amazing, however what surprised me is that most Japanese people actually prefer meat over fish. The meat dishes there are the best I've ever had. Examples are yakiniku and steak houses. Some other good foods are unagi, gyoza and beef bowl. I have also eaten quite a few strange foods such as jelly fish for breakfast, the liver of an eel (very bitter) and sea urchin which wasn't particularly great.

Camp

I really enjoyed camp because I met so many great people. The best activity that we did at camp was by far the first activity that we basically did straight upon arrival at the hostel, fishing by hand. I was actually really good at it! Therefore others let me catch their fish for them. One person caught a fish but freaked out so kinda threw it in the air and I caught the fish in the air with one hand. However the camp experience could have been a lot more fun if the organisation was different. They had very strange rules but I think that it was the culture differences that led to the confusion of the absurd rules. Despite that I made some amazing friends at camp. There was one girl from Bologna, where I used to live as a kid and she was hilarious her name is Giulia. A Swiss guy named Leon was great, a Serbian girl named Dina and she could speak fluent Italian so me Giulia and her would speak Italian together. There were also two Germans called Marcus who was very useful in organising the group, and Ruben who was an expert when it came to the fun fair. Which we also went to with camp which was hilarious. We also went to a maid cafe but I'll take about that later.

Tokyo

The last few days of my stay in Japan I went to Tokyo with the Shinkansen from Nagano City. There I stayed in a capsule hostel. I knew that a very nice German guy named Killian from camp was also in Tokyo at the same time as me so we spent everyday together city seeing. I had also met this girl Ono Mayu in Nagano city she is the daughter of one of the Lions members there and she lives in Tokyo. So she offered to be our tour guide around Tokyo for a day, and that is what we did. We went to Tokyo tower, the imperial palace and to the very busy shopping centre around Shibuya.

Things that I didn't expect:

When going to Japan I expected almost everything to be digital and high tech, however I was very surprised to see that Japan is in fact very behind on average day technology. All computers are about a century old, All ticket machines are very unclear and very old technology, even when entering the country the fingerprint scanner and camera to take a picture of you were on the point of breaking. Japanese cars are the strangest things ever, the shape of them seems very non aerodynamic, just a rectangle. Speaking of, they drive on the left side of the road which I didn't expect. The drinking age is 20 and smoking is not allowed on the streets but is only allowed in restaurants. I didn't expect the Japanese people to be this kind and welcoming. They shower you with gifts and its not like I was an exception because people at camp got even more than me.

The many things I did:

I painted my own typical Japanese cat, I went to a garbage burning facility, went to a museum of Hokusai (the most famous Japanese painter) and visited the major of Nakano City, went to a factory where they make local traditional Japanese sweets out of chestnut. I also visited another museum and a temple and a guitar shop, this was all on the first day in Nakano City. Therefore as you can imagine I did a crazy number of things which were all bizarre and very special. I will just tell you about the most special moments I had. With some friends and group leaders from camp we went to a maid café. This was a ridiculous experience, it was very uncomfortable but enjoyable because it was so different that I couldn't understand it, which made it very interesting. There were also a few sketchy things with the maid café which made it uncomfortable, for example there were signs everywhere which says that your not allowed to touch the maids and you are not allowed to take any pictures. It was a crazy experience! One morning I went to play croquet with a group of elderly people in the middle of nowhere and they were much much better than me (a picture of the group can be seen in the bottom right). Another amazing experience was my second host picked me up all the way in Tokyo and drove me to Nakano City which is a 4 hour drive and the whole time we sang songs together in the car. This is because we like and know the same music so that was a perfect match. I also stayed in the Snow monkey village so naturally I went to see the snow monkeys which were actually quite scary! Another day one man was showing me around and he is a Shimasen player, which is the Japanese version of a guitar, so he gave me a lesson, which didn't go great but it was an amazing experience.

All round experience:

My entire life I've wanted to visit Japan and my dream has finally come true and it was so much better than I imagined. Its also much better than simply a holiday to Japan, I got to experience real Japanese culture and meet so many amazing people. Would I recommend Japan? Yes of course! The culture, the history, the food and the people are all amazing. There isn't much better than Japan. Some things that are ordinary in Japanese culture are very disrespectful in other cultures, such as slurping and burping. This might get unpleasant at some times but you get used to it. I have had the experience of a life time and I would like to thank the Lions here in Arnhem and the Lions in Nakano City for the amazing organisation and the constant care that is provided.