

## 2006 Essays

### Japan Essay

By Estelle T.

My time in Japan has definitely been the most life changing experience of my life. The country is so beautiful and safe. Looking back, I am still shocked that I had the courage to go. The Okamoto family, my host family, and Mitsubishi helped make this journey as smooth as possible. I was delighted to be welcomed so warmly by my host family, the YFU staff, and the Japanese people at Akutagawa High School.



The YFU staffs in California and Japan were outstanding.

They answered everyone's questions and made all the travelers feel more secure about leaving. I



met so many wonderful and curious students going through the same thing I was. In San Jose, I learned some basic Japanese expressions, Japanese customs, and how to put on a yukata.

My host parents met me at the airport with a lovely sign that said, "Welcome Estelle" in bright green paper. Mr. Okamoto took the day off to greet me at the airport. He sacrificed many more days in the next six weeks to take me on Mitsubishi tours and outings. Mr. and Mrs. Okamoto were always concerned about my happiness and made sure I was never bored. When I could not attend the high school closest to our home, my Mrs. Okamoto called another high school, Akutagawa High School, to see if I could attend school there. Mrs. Okamoto studied English throughout college and was an exchange student to the United States. She was wonderful about explaining things to me and making me feel welcome.

Attending Akutagawa High School was one of my most treasured experiences in Japan. I did everything a regular student there would do. I went to class, participated in gym, ate an obento with friends, and participated in club activities. I joined the tennis and taiko drum clubs. Takatsuki Junior High School also let me join the brass band club for about a week and help in a couple English classes. Japanese people are the sweetest people once you meet them. Everyone was excited to talk to me.

There was no shortage of fun things to do in Japan. Because I was there during the summer, there was always a festival going on somewhere. I went to Kyoto, Kobe, Osaka, Nara, and Nagoya. The shrines and temples in Kyoto are amazing. A studio by Kiyomizu dera in Kyoto dresses people up as maikos and samurais. I was dressed in a kimono, had my makeup done, and pictures taken. I also saw Kinkakuji temple in Kyoto. In Kobe, Osaka, and Nagoya, I visited Mitsubishi offices. I went on Mitsubishi factory tours with Ryan and Kalpita, the other scholarship recipients. In Nara, I fed the deer in Nara Park and saw the largest bronze Buddha in Japan inside Todaiji Temple. Everywhere I went, there were great places to shop. The Okamoto home is about a 25-minute walk from Takatsuki Station and a shopping plaza.

It has only been two weeks since I left Japan, but I miss the country very much. I miss my host family dearly and my friends. Many of my most prized memories are just from spending time at home with my host family. I played with my host brother, Ryo, and my host sister, Kyoko, frequently. We watched the World Cup, folded origami, exercised, listened to SMAP, played music, cooked, played table tennis, and tutored each other. I miss the food, trains, music, television, conversations, jokes, shopping, and the courteous people. There are so many little considerate things that I love about the Japanese people. When I buy something in a store, the sales clerk will often wrap the item and come around the counter to give me the bag. Everyone holds elevator doors for strangers. The Japanese way of life and culture are truly special.

Going to Japan was a tremendous experience. Hopefully, I will be able to return to Japan with my family. I am so grateful to Mitsubishi for giving me this opportunity. Mitsubishi is so kind for giving students the opportunity to experience Japan's beautiful culture.

## Japan Essay

By Kalpita A.



Paul Getty once said, “In Japan, [Paul Getty] was immensely impressed by the politeness, industrious nature and conscientiousness of the Japanese people.” I also had a similar experience in Japan. When my Dad brought up the idea of going to Japan, I was quite excited. My Dad had been to Japan on many business trips before and he always told me stories about Japan. When I was young, I enjoyed these stories a lot, but when I had a chance to apply, I felt like I could make my own story. When I was accepted, I was ecstatic, and I just could not believe it. The reality of the whole idea of me going to Japan did not sink in until I actually got to Japan.

When I first arrived at Tokyo’s world famous Narita Airport, I was amazed by everything. Everything looked so high-tech, the people looked busy with their own lives, and everything looked so cool! When we drove to our hotels for our one-night stay in Tokyo, I was just mesmerized by the beauty of my new host country. I felt like a newly hatched bird as I explored my surroundings with plenty of curiosity and saw beautiful mountains and rice fields (something that one does not get to see much of in the United States).



My first impression of Kumamoto (my host city) was nothing close to that I felt initially for Tokyo. Kumamoto from the air looked like a small farming town. I was quite disappointed but I was excited to meet my new host family and get to experience life as a real Japanese girl. When I met my family, I just fell in love with them. My family treated me like their own daughter and went out of their way just to accommodate my schedule into their busy daily lives. To my surprise, Kumamoto also had a lot to give me. After about two weeks of my stay, I learned how to read the train schedules and take the train solo to anywhere I wanted. I have never been able

to feel so independent in my life and I felt like I was the only one who could control my own destination.

Before I left to go to Japan, I was told that I would be facing a large language barrier since not many people know English and the fact that I did not know any Japanese did not help either. But luckily, my Otosan (Japanese Dad) and Okasan (Japanese Mom) knew a good deal of English and we were able to communicate. My three host siblings knew just as much as English as I did Japanese. My host siblings were extremely kind to me and were always willing to help me out. I remember, when I first got to Japan, I barely knew how to count to ten in Japanese. On my first Sunday night, they all decided to play Bingo with me. We made the rules so that when they pick the number, they would have to read it in English and when I picked a number I would have to read it in Japanese. This way, we could correct each other and help each other improve. This small game really improved my counting skills immensely!

One experience that I cannot forget to mention is going to school. School was absolutely amazing in Japan! Fortunately, I had four other foreign exchange students who were girls attending the same school as I did. I was able to attend school for 4 weeks and I even joined a club with one of my exchange student friends. We both did Badminton club and we both had an excellent time! The students of Tokai Daini (my school) were extremely kind, caring, and respectful towards all of us exchange students. The girls in my class were extremely curious about me and always wanted to go and hang out after school. I realized that many of my Japanese friends are very similar to my American friends. They all enjoy going shopping, going out to eat, and gossiping! The fact that a language barrier was present made communication a challenge, but we found ways to get over it by drawing, or by using an electronic Japanese-English dictionary. Going to downtown Kumamoto right after school was one of our favorite past-times. In downtown, my friends and I would enjoy eating ice cream, shopping, or doing pari cura (the newest fad amongst the teenage population).

In my opinion, I will never forget what Japan has given to me. What it has given to me I cannot describe or put into a sentence. It's funny to think that one small country can change a person that spent a meager six weeks in it so much. I have had such a wonderful time living in Kumamoto that I plan on living there after I graduate college. The people are just so friendly

and always have an open heart to welcome and help out other people in need. I remember refusing to come back to America because I loved my host family so much! They never let me realize that I was nearly 3,000 miles away from my real family. In my life, I have been fortunate enough to be an Indian girl, an American girl, and now (as my Japanese family and friends liked calling me) a “Japanese girl.”

## Japan Essay

By Ryan V.

My summer experience in Japan was definitely an unforgettable period of my life. It's amazing how the relationship between my host family and me evolved from being filled with unfamiliarity, to a strong bond of complete comfort. Initially, adapting to a new way of life



commodities

among different individuals was difficult. I was nervous about expectations and new standards. I was unsure about customs and how I would fit into Japanese culture. As time progressed, Japanese lifestyle became second nature and Japan felt increasingly more like a home, rather than a temporary residency. At first, I wondered how I would spend six weeks without all the

I live with in the U.S., such as a cell phone, car, etc. For me, it was actually more difficult coming home and readjusting to my American lifestyle. One of the biggest differences I found between the U.S. and Japan was the means of transportation. In America, many people rely solely on cars to get places. In Japan, I found transportation by bicycle and train to be a lot more common. During a day trip to Tokyo with my host father, Nobu, we made use of the subway close to ten different times throughout the day. It is a very efficient and convenient way to get from locations throughout the city. I wish there were more extensive train and public transportation systems in Chicago. It seems that the Japanese are more conscientious about preserving the environment, and I deeply respect that.

During my stay in Japan, I spent time attending various grade levels in Japanese schools. It began with teaching English lessons to third through sixth grade children at elementary school in Himeji. This was definitely one of the most amazing



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experiences I had while in Japan. The children were very enthusiastic and always filled with energy. It made me want to be a kid again. They even invited me to partake in their daily dodge ball games during recess. At the end of class I was able to sing songs and play guitar to the class. I was amazed by the response of the children as they anxiously awaited autographs after class. It made me feel as if I were a celebrity. In addition, we were able to play numerous games, draw pictures, and eat lunch together. It was really a heartwarming experience that I will never forget. After elementary school, I spent time at the public high school nearby the Kanda's home. It was enjoyable interacting with English instructors, and during class I was treated as a teacher's assistant. I was constantly amazed by how welcoming and sincere every individual I met was, one of the reasons the transition into Japanese culture was as easy as it was. After class I joined the soccer team for practice. It was great meeting new kids my age, and making friends.

Some of the most enjoyable time was time spent at home with my host family. My host grandparents treated me as one of their own, and helped me adjust to the new way of life. Living with young children was also a new experience for me. Being the youngest in my family at home, I never had the chance to be around younger children. My host siblings were completely adorable, and it was delightful to play games with them. Everyone in the household was very welcoming, and I really appreciate their sincerity. From the first day I already felt I was part of the family. They allowed me to interact in everyday life, and once a week I even joined my host sister for karate lessons. I never would have imagined having as much fun as I did over the summer in Japan, and I am grateful for every second I was able to spend with such amazing individuals. I hope that sometime in the future they can arrange to come to America, and return the great experience they have given me.