



Jade

From

Brampton

To

Japan

“We must enjoy everything while it lasts!”

Well I am already past the first half of my exchange, I am now in my sixth month here and I just can't wrap my head around the fact that I am already going into the descending phase of my exchange. The concept of time weighs heavily on both sides of the scale for a Rotary Exchange student. The days are going by quicker than I had ever imagined they would. Because that is the case it is essential to live these last few months to the fullest. It has been a few month since our last chat and well, a lot of things have changed in my life since then...so I guess it's time to catch everyone up...Let's get started!

December was a very busy month for me. In the second week of December I went on a school trip to Tokyo. On the first day in Tokyo we went to Tokyo Skytree (pretty much the same thing as the CN tower but well..it's in Tokyo) and it was quite cool to see the sky line of Tokyo. After Tokyo Skytree we went and visited Tokyo University. Since it was a school trip we visited two different universities because the students in my grade are applying to University next year and they are looking at different universities to apply to. On the second day of the trip we spent the day at Tokyo Disney Sea, it was amazingly decorated because we visited close to Christmas. The trip was spectacular, I got to spend time and get to know and connect with the students in my class, also since I am living in a smaller town it was great to see such modern and fast pace place.

Christmas in Japan was definitely different, as it was my first Christmas away from home it was a bit of a challenge to be away from my family BUT I pulled through (I mean there really isn't anything the right amount of Karaoke can't fix!). In Japan on

Christmas it is a popular tradition to order KFC, but I should say pre-order because of the high demand and nothing goes hand in hand with KFC like a Christmas cake (a cake Christmas themed), my host father at the time is really quite the kitchen savvy chef so he handmade our fried chicken and made are our Christmas cake and it was delicious! December was fast paced and a ton of fun all together.

New Year in Japan was an experience of a life time. At 11:30pm on New Year's Eve I went to my first host family house because they also run and own a temple in my town. Depending on your religion there are different traditions. Since my old host family owns a Buddhist temple the tradition is you bang a big bell and do some prayers, by doing this you are cleansing yourself for the New Year. So at 12' o'clock midnight I took my turn and stuck the bell claiming the New Year! In Japanese tradition they give Otoshidama which is money that grandparents, parents and family members give to the younger members of the family, it is their equivalent to Christmas presents, my host family was kind enough to gift me an Otoshidama. With the money I bought a ukulele and have been practicing everyday, I love it. Japanese New Year is quite exciting and I am so glad I was able to be a part of such an experience.

I was very sad to depart from my second host family I have made such a great connection with them; they really are my second parents. I have now moved in with my third host family out of the four I will be having throughout the year. They are a very busy family. The family consists of five members, the grandmother, her son (the dad), his wife and their two children, one boy and a girl. The boy is my age and the girl is one year older. Everybody in the house follows their own weekly schedule that is very busy. My host father doesn't arrive home from work until very late at night during the week but on every weekend he goes skiing, he is an instructor of a ski team, he has been very kind to take me with them a few times and I have been so pleased because I love to ski and you can't say no to a nice day of skiing in the Northern Japanese alps.

Because I am home alone a lot during the week I have created my own schedule to keep busy. Ever Monday after school I go to the local gym where I swim and workout in their facilities provided, on Tuesdays I meet up with my first host mom and she helps me study my Japanese and calligraphy, Wednesdays I go to my second host family's house where they make me dinner and is followed by a guitar lesson (it's really just an excuse to get together once a week), and on Fridays I go to KUMON for Japanese calligraphy, it is extremely difficult because I am left handed and to do calligraphy you must do it with your right hand, so it is taking some getting used to. My Rotary is kindly funding me for my KUMON class and so far it has been great.

It seems that everybody had already gone on their exchange trip or will be going on it in the upcoming month. My districts trip is next month. I am super excited because I have yet to see much of Japan. We will be going to Hiroshima, Meishima and Osaka, it will be a three day trip. I have created myself a sort of "Japan Bucket list" and I am dying to get some places crossed off that list, so I am hoping for a little bit more travel in my second half of my exchange, but if it is not possible it won't effect me the slightest because I have already been so privileged.

My language has improved immensely in the last few months. I study every day and I am pleased with my results so far. I am no where near fluent yet, to be fluent takes dedication and lots of hard work, but I am slowly but surely making my way towards it. Since my Japanese has improved it had helped me with my school life, I have made many friends because I am now able to communicate with them better. I am really starting to live the lifestyle here as if this was my mother country.

I have become so accustomed to living the Japanese life style. I love this country as if it were Canada. Before Japan was nothing but a foreign land that ate a lot of fish, but now I call this place a second home and I too look at myself as someone who eats a lot of fish. I know that the time will come when I have to pack up and change again but if there's one thing I learned as a Rotary exchange student it is that nothing lasts forever, being a Rotary exchange student has helped me learn to accept that, because it only means we must enjoy everything while it lasts! I can't explain how grateful I am for this exchange. I feel as if I am a new person, this exchange has taught me a lot about myself. Toronto better be ready for a new me upon my arrival because I am coming in hot! Thank you Rotary!

Yoroshiku!

Jade