



Jade

From

Brampton

To

Japan

“New places with new eyes”

Before I had left Canada for Japan I had zero expectations of what my life held before me for the next year, but as soon as I stepped off the plane at 10:30pm in the Komatsu airport in Ishikawa, Japan I knew I was in for the adventure of a lifetime. To get to my final destination of Komatsu airport I had to take a connecting flight from Tokyo. I remember waiting in the Narita airport in Tokyo, Japan a two hour wait until I departed to go to the place that I would call home for the next year, thinking I was in a dream, it wasn't until I got off the plane in Ishikawa I knew I wasn't dreaming and that it was reality. I was greeted at baggage claim with wide and comforting smile of my Rotary club and three of my host families, they had banners made with my name on it , I greeted them all with big hugs but learned quickly from there stunned faces that hugs aren't popular amongst Japanese citizens, I then introduced myself with my best but rough Japanese and they did there best English introductions, we took pictures and then set off on the two hour drive from the airport to our quaint little town of Kurobe.

Before I had come to Japan I had received an email from my host mother stating how we live in a traditional Japanese style house... little did she mention the fact that the house was a temple, when we pulled into the drive way my jaw dropped, I was awestruck.

My host family realized I was extremely tired because I hadn't slept in well over 24 hours, they let me go to bed and settle in, I unpacked everything that night I was so excited. The first few days of my exchange I was extremely jet legged (13 hours ahead of Canada). I spent half of my first day sleeping but quickly adjusted to their schedule

because when you live in Japan its a fast paced lifestyle and always something to do. My first host family was extremely nice and hospitable, I am the first Rotary exchange student Kurobe has hosted so everyone was adjusting just like I was which was comforting, we all became well seasoned to the exchange thing quickly.

My first host family consisted of six members, the Grandfather/Head monk (Yugaku), his wife (Yoriko), their son/monk (Tesihiro), his wife (Eiko) and their daughter (Yorika). Since they live in a temple they also live a very tradition Japanese lifestyle. At first I was thrown off because it was a completely different life style than the one I lived in Canada, but I adapted and came to love it. My first host mother spoke almost fluent English so she helped me with my Japanese which I find helped me at the start. Living in the temple also helped me learn a lot of Japanese traditions and customs, in Japan there is something new to learn about their culture everyday.

I live in a little town called Kurobe located in the Toyama prefecture. Kurobe is in a perfect spot for an outdoor adventurer like me. It is situated with the snowy peaked mountains of Tateyama on the south side and the deep blue sea of Japan to the north. On my bike ride to school I am constantly astonished by the view; I make for a very hazardous bike rider. In Kurobe there are public buses and trains that are accessible if needed, but so far my bike has satisfied my needs perfectly.

I have already been so spoiled with opportunities from my host families and Rotary club. When living with my first host family I was granted the privilege to visit the Toyama castle and Kurobe gorge. Nineteen days into my exchange was my seventeenth birthday and it was definitely unforgettable, it was celebrated with my Rotary club, it was tremendous fun, my home room class at school put together a photo album of personalized birthday cards for me, a keep sake for a life time. Being one of the only Caucasians in a small town in Japan makes you quite a celebrity I've found. In the first week of October I was asked by the Kurobe police force to be the head chief of traffic for the afternoon, I got to wear the costume and everything. So far I've experienced so much, from traditional Japanese dances to hiking up mountains only to look out at a view that would blow your mind.

School life in Japan is very different versus school life in Canada. At the beginning of each lesson we stand and bow to are teachers saying "Onigashimaus" which in English means please and at the end of every lesson we stand and bow once more and say "Arigato gozimasu" in which we are thanking the teachers for the lesson that they have just given. Respect is highly regarded in Japan and the way you present your respect to others is highly regurgitated.

My first day of school in Japan was over whelming to say the least, the day started with me giving a speech to my entire school in Japanese, and then throughout the day I received constant stares and hollers of my name then followed "KAWAII! (which means cute). Having blonde hair and green eyes I stood out like a sore thumb.

My school follows a five day schedule with seven fifty five minute classes each day with a short lunch and cleaning break; the day starts at 8:30am and ends at 4:45pm. The teachers and students are devoted and are taught hard work since kindergarten. I personally think Japanese is quite difficult but I am keeping up best that I can. I am starting to fit in more and more every day, still the stares but definitely not as many.

Throughout the year I will have four different host families, I am currently on my second. They are extremely nice and very generous. Their family is a downsize from my last host family, they're a married couple with four kids that are either studying or working in Tokyo. My host father does all the cooking which is quite unorthodox for a Japanese household as the woman usually does the cooking but I like it because it reminds me of home (sorry mom). We do a lot of hiking on the weekends which I enjoy a lot. They are both extremely musically inclined and have strung me my own guitar. Each night we sit around and sing Japanese for an hour or more.

Kurobe Rotary club meets the first two Tuesdays of each month for a luncheon. I am only allowed to miss school for one of them, at each meeting I attend I make a short speech in Japanese which I find helps me further with my Japanese. They have done so much for me already and I am so grateful for their constant support.

Originally I was constantly comparing Japan to Canada, but if you look past all of their cultural differences and beliefs it really isn't too different. I am starting to understand the Japanese culture on a deeper level and I am already so in love, time seems to be flying by too quickly. All I am going to say is that when you're looking at a new place you have to look at it with new eyes, and already I can say I am starting to see a new me.

Thank you Rotary for this opportunity,

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