



Rowan
from
Orangeville Highlands
to
Japan

'So this is it eh?'

I know I've said it a few times throughout my BeaverTales but it really is incredible how quickly time has passed throughout the duration of my exchange. Between school, friends and family, studying, and Rotary events these past 10 months of my life have felt like a blur starting August 23rd at around 11 pm when I arrived at my first host family's house. From that point up until now time has passed way faster than I'm comfortable with. It seems like every time I blink a week has passed, or I'm off on some new crazy adventure in Japan. Or I'm writing my final BeaverTale. Any concept of time I thought I knew about went straight out the window.

I'll give you an example. I wrote my previous BeaverTale right around the middle of February just a few days before I changed host families. That same day I had a preliminary speech contest to decide who would represent my Japanese Rotary district in a Japan wide speech contest during an exchange student conference that was being held in May. Between that day in February and the conference which happened last weekend (May 11th-12th) almost 80 days have passed. Within those 80 or so days I have travelled to Kyoto, went on my Rotary trip with the other exchange students in my district to Osaka and Hiroshima, and much much more. The weird part is that it's only felt like a month and a half or maybe two has passed, and now I'm getting ready to move to my final host family before I come back to Canada. Which to me feels absolutely insane. I'm sure I probably sound crazy the way I've written this but it's something I wanted to share because I know everyone travels through time differently and I felt like maybe it would be something interesting for people to read about.

In the past month or so a lot of people have started asking me questions such as “are you excited to come home?” and “have you started counting down the days?”. And well the answer is yes. Of course I’m excited to get home and see family and friends but at the same time there are lots of things I’ll be sad to leave behind, and it will most certainly be an adjustment when I get back to Canada. As an exchange student you form bonds and connection with both people and your new surroundings. At first of course there’s excitement but there’s also some unease. You’re in a completely new environment surrounded by people who don’t speak the same language as you, but slowly you get more and more used to your new environment and you make friends, you learn to navigate your new home and you finally settle in. So as much as I can’t wait to sleep in my own bed again, or be surrounded by my family. I also really don’t want to leave. I’ve made some really amazing friends, as well as a great bond with my host families and host club and it’s going to be hard to say goodbye to everyone. But for the time being I try not to think about it.

At the start of this BeaverTale I briefly talked about everything I’ve done in the past couple of months. Things such as going on my Rotary trip and the exchange student conference. And I wanted to go into a bit more detail and really talk about them now. Starting with the conference. As I mentioned earlier we had a preliminary speech contest in February to decide who got the opportunity to represent our district in Yamagata which is where the conference was held. Admittedly I didn’t do so well in the prelims but I was fine to give my support to whoever it was that won. And after deciding our preliminary winner in February we all waited in anticipation for this conference where all the exchange students from all over Japan would come to compete and represent their respective districts in this competition. Everyone had amazing speeches. Unfortunately, our district didn’t win but I think most people were less excited about the contest and more excited to meet all the other students from around Japan.

After the contest was over everyone went back to the hotel we were all staying at and we finally all got to meet each other. There were a couple other Canadians as well as some Mexicans, lots of Americans, some Aussies, and lots of Europeans from places like Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, and Estonia. We all ate together, learning about each other and discovering how different everyone's culture was from one another. After dinner all the exchange students had a party with food, drinks, and music. It was a blast. We got kicked out of the party room around 10:30 so that it could be cleaned and decided to go to the onsen (public bath) in the hotel. We were there talking, laughing, and generally just having a good time until around 12:00 when it closed. We then called it a night and woke up the next morning to have breakfast and find out the results of the speech contest before a 6 hour shinkansen ride home. Admittedly this was probably the single most fun I’ve had on my exchange, and I wish that we could have done something like this more than once.

On top of going to Yamagata for the exchange student conference I also went on my Rotary trip to Osaka and Hiroshima with the other students in my district. We started things off bright and early. I got up around 5am so that I could get to the train station for about 6am. We then hopped on the Shinkansen and took it to Kyoto before transferring to a Thunderbird to take us all the way to Hiroshima. In Hiroshima we got the amazing experience of getting to see the Island of Miyajima and everything it has to offer. On Miyajima we saw lots of deer, Miyajima Shrine and even an aquarium.

After Miyajima we went to our hotel, ate dinner and walked around Hiroshima for a while. The next day we went to The Atomic Bomb memorial and museum which was cool to see but also carried a certain weight to it. I'm a pretty big history guy and of course we are taught about the horrors of WWI and WWII but actually being in the place where the bomb was dropped and hearing the stories of people who died along with relics that survived carried a certain heaviness that I can't really put into words. After that we went and had lunch before heading to Osaka.

Once in Osaka we had dinner, explored for a bit and went to bed. The next day was amazing. Day three of our trip we went to Universal Studios Japan. At first I was kind of against going to a theme park on my trip because I felt that I would much rather see Japan and its natural beauty for all it is instead of going to a theme park, but at the end of the day I'm glad we got to go to Universal. Admittedly it wasn't the rides or the food or anything like that made it fun for me. For me it was getting to relive my childhood. My favourite part easily had to be the Harry Potter portion of the theme park. Because growing up it was one of my favourite movie and book series so actually getting to try butterbeer, visiting Diagonally, along with everything else there really just made it an amazing day. After a long day at USJ we called it a night and woke up the next day to go to Osaka Castle, the final destination of our trip. Getting to see Osaka castle was quite the spectacle. The architecture is absolutely gorgeous and it's extremely rich in history. Inside was a ten or so story museum filled with information on the castle history and much much more. After spending some time there we headed home for some much needed rest.

Throughout my time in Japan I have been able to experience things I would only have been able to dream about years ago. And I still really haven't wrapped my head around the fact that I've been living in one of the most amazing countries in the world for almost 11 months now. It really is quite incredible. And just as this Beaver Tale is coming to an end, so is my time in Japan. So before I sign off for the final time I would like to give a huge thanks to everyone that has made this possible for me. To my friends and family for supporting and encouraging me to do this, to the Orangeville Highlands rotary club for sponsoring me, and District 7080 for training me and making sure I was ready to conquer this challenge head on. You have all given me a great deal of support and I can't thank you all enough for making this possible for me. And with that being said I'm signing off.

I'll see you all when I return,

Sayonara,

Rowan.

[pictures below]



