



Serena

from
Kitchener
to
Japan

“See the glass half full, then make it overflow.”

Taking “see the glass half full, then fill it the rest of the way” one step further.

Introduction:

The world I used to say was so unfamiliar is becoming very familiar. Familiar to a point I don't use my phone map to go between cities and travel to hangout with friends. Familiar to a point I don't struggle doing up my school uniform buttons anymore in the morning. Familiar to a point where I have to be extra aware of not falling into the cycle of lacking motivation. Although, changing host families helps with this, another reason why Rotary is so great. Despite all this, I do still keep encountering cultural differences, some almost getting me into trouble!

Last report, back in November, I was anxious, and dead tired from studying hard for my Japanese Language Proficiency Test (N4/second level). Well good news... I passed! I was really surprised by myself, and it has boosted my confidence a lot with speaking. My new goal is studying for the N3 test at the end of my exchange. Wish me luck because it requires learning 400 more Kanjis!

I have done a lot of things during December, January, and even more in the first half of February! So let's dive into more about my Japan adventures. Starting from my host families, new places, learning new traditions over the holidays, saying goodbye to friends, and ending with birthday celebrations and Valentine's Day.

This is very long because I love to write. SORRY. I also have separated it into sections, so you don't get lost, enjoy!

Host Families

Currently, I am at my 3rd host family, a wonderful family. But since last BeaverTale I also started and completed my stay at my 2nd host family. While I was staying there we did many fun things, and I have good memories. I hung out with my friends almost everyday, helped with dinner, improved my Japanese conversations, and so on. I've had some ups and downs since being here but overall, I am at a point now where I can communicate my needs to my host family and we have been teaching each other about our cultures often.



Changing host families on February 3rd ushered in new experiences. They threw a welcome BBQ with many relatives over, it felt very homey and was lovely. My first week at their house I had a lot of stress on my body from long school days and some hard time falling asleep, and I actually ended up developing Shingles. Luckily I caught it early and healed in a week, and they were very caring and helpful while I healed. I have already done so many things with them. Like going to a steam herb onsen, baking cake pops for Valentine's, going to watch traditional Japanese drumming, exploring Butsushari-tou (a Peace Pagoda nestled in the heart of Beppu), and a surprise party for my 17th birthday! I also got an Ocarina as a present and can't wait to learn how to play it. Every evening, we gather

around the TV to watch either game shows, YouTube videos, or review my homework to study Japanese. I have pretty good knowledge of the language, and can understand plenty, yet speaking (the forming sentences part) is the most difficult. I've been told that it's normal, I won't get discouraged. I'm only at this host family's house for 2 months, February and March, so I will make the most of it to form good memories until I move into my 4th host family's house.

Rotary and Presentations (and advice for future Exchange Students)

Next, is Rotary. I have been doing many presentations recently. They are 30 minutes long and so far, all the same introduction slideshow, just at different Rotary clubs. If you are like me, terrified or worried about giving speeches, then you came to the right place. I am always scared I will butcher the pronunciation, or forget what I practiced, or that I wouldn't appear confident enough. Even after improving this a lot, I still feel all these emotions when presenting. If this is a worry for you, know you are not alone. You may be jealous of others who seem to not care and can present like it's no big deal but remember that those nervous emotions show that you really care about how you present yourself and your country to the world. People are people and no matter what country you are in, making mistakes is a normal thing. So don't care too much, but just enough to succeed.

Unforgettable Memories

School Clubs:

I decided to check out other clubs in my school and was so surprised at the different clubs they offer. They have calligraphy, band, archery, many sports (no hockey), English, cooking, and more. I went to see the Yotto-bu (Sailing Club) in action and it was very cold, but I couldn't believe the determination the students had. Straight after school ended, we ran in a big group down to the ocean (about 20 mins running) to get changed and prepare the sailboats. I didn't sail but I got to go on the boat with the teacher and watch as they practiced.



I truly admire the determination Japanese students have for their clubs. I also went to check out the Japanese traditional archery club (Kyuudo).

Kagoshima:

During my study trip to Kagoshima, we engaged in a variety of activities. We had lively conversations and had the opportunity to meet students from other districts (including two other Canadians!). We also explored a private museum, although I'm unable to share pictures from our visit. Then we went to a sand bath on the side of the ocean, it was so cool, but not at all in the temperature way. I thought my back was gonna burn off, but totally worth it! One memorable moment was when my Rotary sponsor bought me fried chicken while everyone else enjoyed fancy sushi; I sampled the sushi but couldn't finish it.



Additionally, we enjoyed karaoke sessions, light night convenience store run, and stayed up late at the hotel engrossed in conversation learning about each others lives and different cultures. I also had the chance to craft matching resin pendants with friends and participate in traditional archery. Much of our time was spent by Rotarians, taking pictures of everyone and our flags in front of beautiful mountains. We also spent hours immersing ourselves in history at various museums and later indulged in sweet potato ice cream. On a humorous note, I improvised by writing my name with a Sharpie on some of the district's T-shirts, as it wasn't included on the name list :(.

Furthermore, my Italian friend purchased a stuffed bear from IKEA named Jungie, and

we even created an Instagram account to document his adventures in Japan. Eventually, it was time to bid farewell to the unforgettable experiences and cherished friendships formed during my stay.



Fav things recently:

Crepes, karaoke, ramen, going to pet the cats at YouMe town (my town's mall), stray cats, Starbucks special drinks, etc.



December:



Firstly, I tackled the JLPT exam. My second host family took me to a towering 173-meter-tall Kokonoe Yume suspension bridge, where I bravely held a white snake (picture) and indulged in blueberry ice cream. Socially, I joined in the festive spirit at an English club Christmas party, and we also had a school volleyball tournament. The Rotary Christmas party featured a delightful duet performance and I received a Canadian Costco Tuxedo cake, my favourite! Lastly, I attended a mind-blowing brass concert.

My host family decorated the house with Christmas lights, and I had the chance to visit my first host family again. Attending Christmas Fantasia which is a celebration with performances by famous singers, candy apples, and fireworks. On Christmas Day, my host dad and I visited Jigoku Meguri while wearing my fuzzy pajamas, making sure not to break my personal tradition (picture on the right). Despite the distance, I cherished the tradition of calling my family to open their gifts. Exploring Kitsuki with my host dad was memorable, especially visiting a castle with almost no people in sight. I also picked up my host family's daughter from the airport for New Year's.



January:

On New Year's Day, we ate traditional Japanese food called Osechi-ryori, visited shrines (picture), got fortune papers, and when we returned home and turned on the TV the earthquakes and tsunamis were all over the news. Luckily my area was completely unaffected, but some of my friends in other areas felt the quake. It was very surreal seeing it in real time.



For the rest of the winter break, I ventured to the zoo, pet the bunnies, and cut bangs! With my friend from Brazil, we spent hours at a renowned onsen, eating almost the whole menu at an American food restaurant, and going shopping lots before she had to go back to Brazil.

Returning to school after the break, I hurried to complete my Canadian art project with Oceane (the other exchange student in the same school) before she left. At school, we had many celebrations ensued for Oceane's return, marked by creative 'goodbye video' edits, making potato donuts from scratch, and attending her going away party. I also experienced wearing a kimono for the first time while making matcha. Shopping in Yufuin, a cute city near Beppu, led to whimsical encounters, including a cat-themed store, a Snoopy cafe, and a (Shiba) Dog cafe!



Goals and Conclusion

I saw the quote recently "see the glass half full, then fill it the rest of the way", which I related to since the 2023-2024 exchange year is now halfway over. Then I thought, *Why stop there?*, because I knew I was gonna *make my cup Overflow!* Can't wait to share more adventures with the world.

As I mentioned above (somewhere), I am still studying hard and holding on to motivation in order to reach my goal of N3 level Japanese. But first I have to go clean my room and then I can figure out how I'm gonna balance everything I want to do in Japan before I return home! Keep me in your prayers <3

みんな頑張ろう! (Minna Ganbarou)

Let's all do our best!

Serena (セリーナ・ガレスピー)



School Brass Band Concert. It was spectacular! So much talent.

Calligraphy club members practicing to perfect their skills. There are papers all over the floor and they fully clean it up afterwards!



Visiting Castles with no people around and such beautiful views.

Me and Oceane's Canadian themed art project!



Jungie's Instagram Account!

@jungie_the_bear

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