



**Victoria**  
from  
**Oakville Trafalgar**  
to  
**Japan**

*“Memories That I Will Always keep With Me”*

It's been another three months since my last Rotary BeaverTale and I can't believe that it is already my final report. I have a little under two months until I go back to Canada and it's hard to believe that I am at the last part of my exchange. Over the past few months, I have been very busy with lots of traveling, trying to improve my Japanese and just enjoying my time.

Over the past three months I have had three changes of host families. Recently, I have moved to my fifth and final host family. With my new family now, there are two host siblings, but only one of them is living at home. My host sister is 20 and she is living in Tokyo, and my host brother is 18 and he is living at home with me. Both of my host siblings have gone on exchanges to Australia, so they understand what it is like being an exchange student.

The Japanese school year is a little different from Canadian schools. The school year goes from April to March, with short breaks throughout the year. Also, you get put in a home room class and stay with the same class for most of the time throughout the day. High school in Japan only lasts for three years. From April, I am now a third year which means I am the oldest of the school. Also, it means that I am now with a new homeroom class, so it has been nice getting to know other kids at my school and making new friends that I hadn't talked to much before.

In March, I had the opportunity to go to Tokyo two different times. I had been to Tokyo once before, but it was nice to visit new parts that I had not seen on my previous trip. One of my trips was with my first host sisters as we had the trip planned since I was living at their house until November. My second trip was with my fourth host mom. Over those two trips I went to Harajuku (which is where all the Japanese teen fashion is located), Tokyo Tower and Mount Fuji. Mount Fuji has been something that I have always wanted to see up close and something that one day I hope to climb. It was lots of fun being in Tokyo and definitely reminded me of how much I enjoy big cities.

During my school break, I had my Rotary trip with all the other exchange students in my district. There are only nine of us in the district which is smaller compared to some other districts but we still had lots of fun on our trip. Our trip included Hiroshima, Himeji and Osaka. During our time in Hiroshima, we visited the places where the atomic bomb happened and it was very eye opening, yet sad visiting those places. Also, we visited Miyajima, which is an island that is near Hiroshima. We also saw "Tori gate", which is out in the water and visited Itsukushima Shrine. In Himeji, we visited Himeji Castle; it is said to be one of the most beautiful castles in Japan. In Osaka, we were able to go to Universal Studios and visit Osaka castle. The trip was lots of fun and all of the exchange students were sad that it had to come to an end.

In Japan, during the first week of May, most people get a few days off from work and school to celebrate a holiday called "Golden Week." During the holiday, my host family and I went to Osaka, Kyoto and Kobe, where we saw a baseball game. It was my first time visiting Kyoto. My host family was so nice to let me chose everywhere we went, so I had a big list of places I wanted to visit. In Kyoto, we saw Arashiyama (which is a bamboo forest), Fushimi Inari Shrine and Kinkakuji Temple (which is a Buddhist temple covered in gold). In Osaka, we went to the shopping district which I enjoyed.

Over the past eight and a half months, I have been trying to study Japanese as much as I can and to get the most out of the language as I can. Studying Japanese has not been an easy task but day by day, working on the language, I am very proud of how far I have come. I remember coming here and really not understanding anything. People around me would say jokes, and I would just sit there in silence as I really had no idea what they were saying. Now I am picking up on some jokes and I am able to laugh together with everyone.

Before I came to Japan, I was so excited, yet so nervous for my upcoming year. I didn't know exactly what the culture would be like, if I would enjoy the food and what I would get out of this year. Now, looking back over my time here, I couldn't be happier with everything that I have done: everything I have experienced, everyone I have met and memories that I will always keep with me. I would like to thank everyone in Canada that helped me to be in Japan and everyone in Japan. Without Rotary, I would not be here and I can never thank Rotary and my family enough for everything that they have done for me.

*Victoria*