



# Victoria

from  
Oakville Trafalgar  
to  
Japan

## “Adjusting to the culture of Japan has presented its challenges”

こんにちは

After saying all my goodbyes to all my family and friends in Canada on August 20th, I boarded my flight to Japan, had a layover in Tokyo and arrived at the Komatsu airport. I was greeted by members of my first and second host family, the president of my Rotary club, my counselor and two other exchange students, one who had just completed her exchange in Canada. It was a long day of traveling and I was exhausted! They had made a large sign that said “Welcome to Kanazawa” which is the city I am living in.

My host family has two daughters, one who is my age and one who is two years older than me. They have been super sweet to me and have shown me around. They have introduced me to so many different types of traditional Japanese cuisine. My favourite foods here are unagi, okonomiyaki and udon (eel sushi, savory pancake and noodles). My two host sisters speak fluent English as they both went on exchanges to America and they have helped me a ton with my Japanese. Also, it has made it a lot easier settling in.

Before arriving to Japan, I was little nervous about the food and wondering if I would like most of it. Most of the food that I have eaten has been really good and there have only been a few things that I haven't enjoyed.

Kanazawa is in the Ishikawa Prefecture. It is on the west coast of the Japan, right next to the Sea of Japan. There are many tourists from around the world who visit the city, but when I wear my school uniform, I always get lots of stares. At this stage, I have done most of the touristy stuff in my city, such as Kenrokuen Gardens, Kanazawa Castle, the Higashi Chaya District and the Omi-Cho Market.

School here is fairly different from in Canada. I start at 8:30 am and it goes to 3:15 pm. During the day, I have six classes and a lunch break. At the end of most school days all the students break apart into small groups and we clean the school. I have cleaned many different parts of the school including the bathrooms, classrooms and hallways. Before coming to Japan, I heard that we had to clean the school and I thought it was going to be much worse than it is. Cleaning takes no longer than fifteen minutes and I clean with lots of my friends, which actually makes it fun! At school, I have joined the calligraphy club which has helped me learn lots of new Japanese symbols and it has helped me meet many new friends.

My first day of school here in Japan is definitely a day I will remember forever. I had to give three speeches in Japanese: one to my homeroom class, one to all the staff members and one to the entire school. My school has had many exchange students in the past but when I first arrived everyone went crazy. Everywhere I went I had people shouting my name and calling me cute in Japanese; I had girls touching my hair and hands and staring at me in shock. It was somewhat overwhelming but it was lots of fun getting all the attention!

At the beginning and end of each class we must bow to our teachers. The students stay in the same class all day and the teachers move from class to class. I have been lucky enough to be placed in classes with students from more than one grade in my school, so that I am able to move around, interact with students from all three grades and not have to sit in the same spot all day like everyone else. When I first started school here everyday was slightly overwhelming but now I am getting used to it. I attend Japanese language classes twice a week and everyday I am studying the language as much as possible. My Japanese has improved but I still have lots of room for improvement. I am now able to say sentences but I am better at understanding when other people are talking than I am at speaking Japanese myself. I studied Japanese before my arrival in Japan, but once coming here I realized how little I did know.

In Japan, I am hosted by the Rotary Club of Kanazawa-East. I attend Rotary meetings once a month and give a short speech in Japanese about what I have been doing. About a month ago, my Rotary club took me on a trip to Nagano, which is another prefecture in Japan. I was able to try new foods and go sightseeing.

Within my first couple weeks here I had a Rotary event where I dressed in a Yukata, which is a traditional Japanese summer kimono. I have been in Japan for almost three months now and I have done so many things: I have been to many different festivals and even participated in one; I have been in an onsen (public bath), gone rice picking and rode the bullet train.

Next week with my school I am going to Okinawa, which is a part of the south islands of Japan. It looks absolutely beautiful and I am so excited!

Adjusting to the culture of Japan has presented its challenges but I am adapting well and taking advantage of this amazing opportunity. I have only been here since August and I have already done so much.

Without Rotary, I would not be having this wonderful experience, living here in Japan, learning a new culture and language. I would like to thank the Rotary Club of Oakville Trafalgar and the Rotary Club of Kanazawa East as well as all the Rotarians who have helped with this program.

ありがとうございました

*Victoria*