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## **2023 STYEP AMERICAN STUDENT JOURNALS**

- Today we left Osaka to our first homestay, but first we went to Nara to see the deer park and many historic places. It was really interesting hearing about the history of the buddha statue and many others. I was also able to fit through the hole that is supposed to remove any bad luck. After that we saw probably about 100 deer in the park. All of them started chasing us and biting but they were cute so it's ok. After we went to dinner to meet our host families, I was nervous at first but after arriving home and meeting their daughters I felt less nervous. They're very nice and Noa, their youngest played games with me (I lost every time) and I laughed so hard I cried. They also had cats!!They licked both of our faces. I'm really excited for the rest of this homestay.
- Today we woke up and ate breakfast that consisted of green grapes and cereal. My host family and my roommate and I went shopping yesterday and picked out foods for snacks and breakfast. After we left the house around 10 am to go to an udon noodles class! I learned a lot about noodles. First I learned that you have to fluff up the flour before you add the water in. When you pour the water in you have to wait and pour it in little by little. Then you knead the dough for 5 minutes then put it in a plastic bag and step on it with your feet. Then you take it out roll it flat and fold it in quarters then cut thin strips for the noodles. For lunch we ate the noodles and had shrimp tempura and rice cakes. This was the first time I ate raw eggs on top of noodles. Although it was good I still can't get over the fact that it is raw egg. Then we went back home and got dressed in a robe called the kimono. Mine was pink with flowers. The aunts and grandma helped dress us. We drove to a garden close by. There we walked around looking at water lilies and lotus flowers. In the middle of the park was a cafe and we had really fancy ice cream and plum soda. After we met up with 2 other students. We walked around the park and fed koi fish and snapping turtles. All the fish swarmed the bread we tossed in. We then left and went to a grocery store to buy meats and food for a BBQ. We met 2 students from our team at their host family house. At the BBQ I made a recipe I know from America. I made grilled asparagus with lemon and pepper. My roommate and I made real American barbecue sauce which we put onto the raw chicken and grilled it. Everyone said yoshi! That means very good in Japanese. At the end of the day we did fireworks and sparklers; it was very fun and a great memory. I learned after I got back to the house that they were having the BBQ because of the fourth of July which is in 2 days.

- Sadly, today was the day we had to leave our first homestay in Kagawa to visit Mainland Japan. Our four days with our homestay in Takamatsu felt like a month, if not more. My roommate and I are both looking forward to visiting them again in the future when we get the chance. After saying our goodbyes, we left for Himeji City, a city in the Kansai region home to a castle dating back to the feudal period, which was between the 9th and 17th century. The Himeji Castle was built in 1333 with the help of Akamatsu Norimura, a samurai who had political control in parts of Japan at the time. The Himeji Castle acted as a fortified base designed to hold back enemy forces from gaining control of the city. The paths were designed to be exposed for samurai and archers to form sneak attacks and prevent them from moving farther into the Castle. Afterwards, we spent time eating at a hotel near the Himeji station. The lunch was buffet-styled, meaning that we could take whatever we wanted ranging from Indonesian fried rice to matcha ice cream. On our trip to Kurashiki City, we visited the Bukan district, an area that was preserved to highlight an older part of Japan and part of Shogun's path. Unfortunately, the boat rides sold out, so we visited a Shiba Cafe and the Ivy Square, which was covered in vines. Our ride to our hotel took a little under 30 minutes, and it is completely separated from the center of Kurashiki. Located near the beaches, the Kurashiki Seaside Hotel offers guests a pool and an onsen. The pool ended up being closed which was poor timing. I'm looking forward to our visit to Hiroshima.
  - Today, we went to Hiroshima's bomb museum. It put into perspective how devastating the bomb was. People even into their 70s were still affected by the bomb's radiation. It was such a tragic event that I will never take lightly.
  - Seeing the Hiroshima Peace Museum was more eye-opening than any experience I could have gotten in a classroom. To learn about the tragedy in almost the exact place where the bomb detonated was a somber experience.
  - Yesterday we went to the Hiroshima memorial. I thought it was not going to be too bad but as soon as we went in, we saw the horrible history that took place in the city full of people just like us.
  - Today, three of my team members and I went to Japanese High School to play volleyball. It was really interesting to change shoes depending on what building you were going into, but all of the floors were really clean. The girls on our volleyball team were all very sweet and wanted pictures with us. We were drenched in sweat because the gym didn't have AC and it was really hot out. The volleyball match lasted four full hours and everyone was really tired and sweaty. After volleyball, we went shopping in a superstore which seemed like if someone tried to fit all of Costco inside of a DSW but it was really cool. After that we had Japanese shaved ice which is totally delicious, and America is missing out big time. For dinner we went out for authentic sushi which was just a piece of fish on rice and I kept breaking it in my chopsticks so they told me it's okay to use my hands which was embarrassing but it worked out from then on. After dinner we were so tired we fell asleep at 8pm with the lights on.
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- Japan is a beautiful country. That is a well known fact. But our day of traveling from Kochi Prefecture to Tokushima has made that fact even more evident. Today we sat in a bus for three hours which many people slept or talked through. The bus was large, yet the leg space was lacking compared to that of the other buses. But the leg space was forgotten when we saw the scenery. I can't believe it took me 16 years to realize that mountains are easily my favorite geographic feature of our planet because people do not understand what they are missing out on. All through the bus ride I took pictures. I was jumping around from side to side of the bus trying to get the perfect picture. I LOVE JAPAN. This entry is due in 4 minutes so I'm going to wrap it up. Our host family was so late my roommate and I thought we were being abandoned. Anyways my roommate and I (turns out) were not abandoned and an older couple came to pick us up. They took us to an Awa dance museum. We saw a real-life performance which included everyone dancing. Turns out there was supposed to be a winner and I didn't realize until AFTER I was picked. So good for me. I got a certificate and the leader asked me questions in front of everyone. The whole time I was super confused but turns out I'm a pro Awa dancer. HAHAHA. And then we went to an indigo dye shop and made indigo dyed towels. YAY!
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- We started the day with a delicious breakfast of eggs, vegetables, bread, sausage, and hashed browns. We then went to a nearby shopping center to buy some souvenirs. While we were there, we went to Daiso, a Japanese 100 yen store, and I got some barbecue flavored chips. We also got strawberry shortcake. After we returned home, we had omurice for lunch. Omurice is an omelet laid overtop a bed of fried rice and topped with ketchup and mayonnaise. It was delicious! We also shared the shortcake we got at the shopping center. At around 1 pm, we went to a nearby high school. While there, we participated in a calligraphy class where we drew our favorite Japanese words on fans. I chose the word for peach, もも, which is my favorite fruit. We then moved on to our next activity, which was observing a kendo club practice session. It was incredible seeing the talented students practice such a complex sport. Even though I also play a sport with swords, fencing, kendo seemed so difficult. My roommate completely outshone me! Finally, we ended the day by attending a Rotary Club welcome party. The partygoers were so welcoming and kind and did everything in their power to make my roommate and I feel comfortable. It was great to be able to interact with more Japanese members of Rotary and to express my gratitude in organizing this program. I also was able to interact with the assistant English teacher at the high school that I had visited earlier that day. She had come to Japan through something called the JET program. She gave me her contact information and told me to reach out to her if I ever wanted to teach English in Japan. It was a great day!
- Today was the farewell party and it was an emotional experience. When i walked into the venue i saw familiar faces that have been with us ever since our arrival. At that moment i realized how many memories I've made with mostly everyone in that

room. My favorite part of the exchange was the excitement of meeting new people since it was a mutual feeling, but that feeling was no longer there because I felt comfortable around these people whom I had never met before this trip. The farewell dinner continued with conversations accompanied with laughter and kids running around, even when people were giving speeches, literally. The dinner was coming to an end with kids showing off their amazing talents and funny acts, and the amazing performance of the Awa Odori Dance which gave me chills when they hit the drums. Everyone was part of something this night which made us feel welcomed to the Japanese culture. Getting to know someone from all the way across the world and being part of their own world is a remarkable experience.

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