

Essay Contest Reflection: Atticus Lee 2026 Essay Contest Winner

I am grateful to the Kobe College Corporation Japan Education Exchange for gifting me the experience of my past month in Japan. During my time in Osaka and Kyoto, I was able to experience many sights and experiences I otherwise would not have had. My host family was kind and provided me with a look into the normals of day-to-day life I wouldn't see if I were just visiting for vacation.

One of my favorite parts was being able to explore Osaka and Kyoto by myself. It was incredibly freeing to walk through Osaka and see the buildings, busy streets, vibrant neon lights, and atmosphere of the city around me. Living in such a different environment made everyday life exciting and inspiring. Early mornings and late evenings left me aspiring to my own future. It made me want to work toward having a life where I can travel and experience new places, people, and culture. Even the music I already listen to felt more captivating because of the wonder of the cities, turning even ordinary experiences like the morning train and konbini into something alive.

Another notable aspect of the experience was the cultural exchange, or the sort of lack thereof; not to say I didn't learn or meet new people. During classes at the language school, I met many different people from all over the world. I made friends with people from countries including France, Italy, and Portugal, as well as other parts of Europe. While we were all from different places in the world, I found that, funny enough, they were all kinda the same as those I already know. We all had, for the most part, similar hobbies and interests, as if I was just talking to another friend from the States. Even the music and trends from the States transcended global barriers as we made the same jokes and listened to the same music despite being from across the globe. This is not to say I didn't experience any new cultural aspects while in Japan; aspects of Japanese norms and traditions were different from those in the States. Whether it was the reliable and abundant public transport, spotless taxis, or the quieter personality of most, but not all, Japanese people. It was also funny to note that many aspects from the States bled into Japan. Almost all the big stores and brands in Japan, such as Starbucks and McDonald's, were also common and popular in Japan.

Looking back on my time in Japan, I feel I came home with more than just improved Japanese and memories of the places that I visited. I gained a greater sense of independence and inspiration to work towards a future life where I can again feel and experience similar and new experiences. At the same time, meeting so many new people from all over the globe made me realize that although we all come from different places, we can still have so much in common. I am incredibly grateful to the Kobe College Corporation Japan Education Exchange for giving me the opportunity to experience Japan, and I hope this is only the beginning of many more experiences like it.