

A Reflection of My Time in Japan

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Studying the language and culture of Japan in Kyoto this past summer was truly an enriching experience that will continue to affect my personal, academic, and professional future. I gained a more complete understanding of the Japanese way of life and made huge leaps in my study of the Japanese language. My four weeks in Kyoto were marked by rich and insightful experiences that left me with a deeper desire to continue my study of Japanese.

A large part of my participation in the Kobe College Corporation Essay Contest was attending the Kyoto Japanese Language School (KJLS), which helped me make a significant leap in my Japanese skills. Full-immersion, small classes, and a variety of teachers were key features of the KJLS Japanese program. I enjoyed having classmates from around the globe including China, France, and Thailand. Language barriers were easily broken through laughter and camaraderie. By the end of the program, the class had become one large, multi-cultural family. Our teachers were always kind and helpful. They carefully corrected our imperfect grammar, but applauded our valiant efforts nonetheless. Thanks to KJLS, I was able to skip from Japanese II as a sophomore to college-level, AP Japanese as a junior--a two-year leap in my high school's Japanese curriculum.

Probably the most important part of my stay in Japan was living with a host family. By the end of my time in Japan, however, the word 'host family' had been replaced by 'family', both in my speech and thinking. Some of my favorite memories involved clustering around the kitchen table with my host sisters

to watch anything from soccer to ghost-hunting television shows over dinner. On the weekends we went everywhere from festivals to rotating sushi restaurants. One of my favorite experiences was coaching an elementary school soccer team with my host father.

My host family was always attentive to my needs, from providing extra blankets to cooking vegetarian meals. My host sisters were always kind. They shared their favorite bands, movie stars, and television shows. They asked endless questions about my own interests and hobbies. My time at home never felt awkward or forced. My family was genuinely caring and conscientious. I am grateful for their generosity and support throughout my time in Kyoto.

My classes at KJLS concluded at noon each day, giving me several hours to explore Kyoto. The number one after-school priority was food. We were never without options. From the cute *udon/somen* shops that dotted the surrounding area, to the busy ramen stands near the Imperial Palace, an inexpensive and delicious lunch was never more than a few blocks away. In particular, I grew fond of cold *soba* noodles, which took the edge off of the summer heat.

After lunch, my afternoons were dominated by visits to temples, shrines, markets, and museums. I was amazed by the number of exquisite temples in a seemingly modern city such as Kyoto. After stepping through the *Tori*, the atmosphere immediately shifted to peace and serenity. The natural beauty of the surroundings mixed with the architecture of the shrines themselves to create what the Japanese call *wabi-sabi*. Visiting temples like Ginkakuji was almost like stepping back in time. On a day uncrowded by tourists, it was easy to believe you were back in the Heian period with Kyoto as the country's all-important capital. I also enjoyed my visits to the impressive Imperial Palace. And no day was complete

without a stop at the brightly colored Nishiki Market. With energy to spare at the end of a busy day, the adjoining Teramachi-dori was an amazing place to shop for anything from the latest fashions to sports gear. My new cleats will be put to good use in the upcoming soccer season.

The end of the KJLS program did not mark the end of my time in Japan. I traveled from Kyoto to Tokyo, where I met my mother. For two weeks we traveled the country together. I was able to visit famous places like the Peace Memorial Park and Museum in Hiroshima, Tsukiji Fish Market and Harajuku-dori in Tokyo, and even attend a concert at Universal Studios in Osaka. Another highlight was introducing my mother to my host family during our stay in Kyoto.

My time in Japan left me with new language skills and cultural insights that I never could have achieved in an American classroom. Apart from skipping several levels of Japanese classes at my high school, I have also created a Japan Bowl team to allow my classmates to compete with their knowledge of Japan. I look forward to helping other students learn about Japanese culture as I have. I am so grateful to Kobe College Corporation for giving me such an incredible opportunity.