

Takaoka June 2015 Report

This report shall be the impression of my personal experience gained from the Takaoka Sister Cities and Chapman Fund exchange program. A preface that I'd like to make is the deep gratitude I offer to all of the people and the program that made this trip possible for my friends and I. I have gained memories from my stay in Japan that I don't believe I will ever forget. It may not be entirely possible to relay with simply words all of what I encountered, but I shall do my best to summarize and review.

This adventure started for us at the Fort Wayne airport. Our original flight was delayed so we'd had plenty of time to meet up. When the time finally came, the group of us boarded a plane bound for Detroit and eventually Narita airport in Japan. When we finally arrived in the country we were pretty tired (12 hours of flight!). It may seem odd, but one of the first things I truly experienced in Japan was a vending machine (自動販売機). Those vending machines are something to marvel at, I fell in love with them all that first day and never stopped loving them after that. We had our first night stay at the Shinagawa Prince Hotel, which was a lovely hotel. The next day after an awakening, breakfast, and Shinkansen ride, we finally arrived in Takaoka. Some of the great people we met there in that station I will remember fondly for quite some time. Most notably Nick Lavin and Ms. Kubota; they were amazing guides and friends for us during our entire stay there. After introductions we were taken to a welcoming ceremony where we performed our group dance and met our host families for the first time. It was odd at first since we were all slightly disoriented, but gradually everyone became rather personable. My host family was the Yoshikuni family. They were a welcoming group of three and I will always remember the kindness they showed me on a daily basis, above and beyond simply allowing me to stay in their home. I have their contact information and plan to keep in touch with them long after this experience.

All points following reference specific aspects of the trip that I think are important.

Food:

For me, food was one of the best parts of the experience. I absolutely love trying all kinds of new food and there wasn't really anything in Japan I wasn't willing to give a try. Not only did I consume a large amount of unusual food, it was (from what I understand) very healthy. I had (starting an incomplete list): fried squid, raw squid, dried squid, squid ink, fermented soybeans, raw eggs, sushi, てまきずし, cold iced black coffee, boiled jellied seaweed, assorted fried tempura foods, a Japanese

Nathan Yorio

variety of pumpkin, delicious curry and curry udon, udon, miso soup, home grown nameko mushrooms, and the list goes on and on. I really did try all of that (just ask my host parents!). All of the food I ate I quite enjoyed and I'd love any day to go back and try more! I learned in that two weeks that there's a whole culinary adventure to explore in Japan and I only broke the surface. I'd go back without a second thought any day.

Events:

While we were on our stay in Takaoka there were many different events planned for the group of us to go on and I quite enjoyed them all. The barbecue we went to was more of a "fry" by American terms, but it was all delicious. I personally visited more than one temple (with my host family and sister cities organized) and we went to sightsee a large Buddha statue in Toyama, it was pretty impressive. Moreover, the group was taken to a national heritage site, Shirakawa-go, where we witnessed a beautiful mountain view and a traditional Japanese village. Non-planned events were great too, I loved just going shopping at assorted places in Takaoka with my host family and some of the random stores I wandered into were some of my favorites. Furthermore, the exchange group participated in a harvest festival called Goinsai. All of the things we were able to do and experience were very memorable.

School:

Going to school at Takaoka Nishi High (高岡西校) was quite an experience personally. I didn't know enough Japanese to always understand subject matter, but I could almost always tell what kind of class I was in. I attended English, Biology, Japanese History, Japanese Literature, Gym, and Physics. Gym was the best, actually, I really enjoyed playing soccer at school. Often the whole group of exchange students would go to different clubs and events within the school. It was always very fun and the people were endlessly friendly, especially the students. We were nearly celebrities when we attended school there and people were always greeting us with the utmost kindness. I appreciated every single person that recognized us, it was so pleasant. Aside from Nishi High, we'd also travelled to a middle/primary school and Kogei (the sister high school). Kogei was a very nice school, only we weren't there for much longer than 40 or 50 minutes, so we didn't get to experience it fully unfortunately. The middle/primary school was great though, we were there for a while and had a bunch of fun with all of the kids. They followed us around and were entirely fascinated by us. We got to see all of their classrooms and have a gym class with them. They were always so excited and we had a wonderful time.

Nathan Yorio

Host Family:

The host family situation was completely amazing. The differences between American and (really) modern Japanese home life aren't entirely as apparent as one might think. I didn't actually have any trouble with customs or think that anything was very incredibly different from American culture in many ways (at the core of it all, aside from a general deeper respect for everything). I believe that guides and books paint a picture of Japanese home life that's more exaggerated on differences (an us and them sort of portrayal) than those that truly exist in the modern household. I absolutely enjoyed my family very much. They showed me a pretty much infinite amount of kindness that I can't even begin to fathom financially. The language barrier was less of an issue for me, but I know the other group members (without Japanese experience) did have a little trouble getting their communications across from time to time. Phone dictionaries are an essential tool. My family always was very understanding and always made me feel at home. They were always worried about making sure I was happy and I have a deep level of gratitude to them for all of the places they took me, food they gave me, and a home they allowed me to stay in. I will never forget them.