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Paper Trails | Japan



Logan Spear (from left), Sara Onitsuka, Kelko Buckendahl, Bradley Imai and Xander Whyte in front of the dome at Hiroshima Peace Park

Four Portland 11-year-olds and their teacher, Keiko Buckendahl, took a class trip to Japan, **4,859 miles from Portland**. The children spent a week living with host families in Tokyo while attending Gotenyama elementary school with their Japanese peers. They enjoyed incredible hospitality with the Japanese families, and loved making friends at the school. They then traveled four hours by bullet train to Hiroshima, where the highlight was the Itsukushima shrine. The shrine is a uniquely serene place that stands in the water at high tide. The bullet train then took them to the Himeji Castle, one of the oldest structures in the country. The castle buildings date from 1333 and are unlike anything in the West. Another favorite was Kyoto Studio Park, a film set and theme park in one. The park features a collection of replicas of traditional Japanese buildings that are used as settings for historical movies and television dramas.

Travel tips: Research local etiquette and protocol before traveling in Japan. Important signs of respect include silencing cell phones in trains and buses and standing or walking on the left to let people get by. Travel light with small suitcases, because many places don't have escalators. Trains can be crowded, and spaces are generally small. A lot of places in Japan don't take credit cards, so travelers must carry cash or traveler's checks. And be prepared for a different bathroom experience — many Japanese bathrooms don't have Western-style toilets.