

Payten Shimizu

Opportunity in Japan

Before our trip to Kyoto, I was honestly very scared and did not know what to expect from the school or my host family. I had not been outside of the country before going to Japan and was scared to navigate around the big cities by myself. I was also afraid of the language barrier that I would have to face when doing everyday activities, such as eating at restaurants, checking out at stores, and even just making conversation with my host family. However, I soon realized that mostly everyone in Japan is extremely friendly and helpful to foreigners. When my parents and I landed in Kansai, we felt very welcomed by the airport and hotel staff. To our surprise, many people knew enough English to have basic conversations with us when we needed help translating. I was also able to communicate with my host family fairly well considering they did not speak very much English. Overall, I had a lot of fun going to classes and exploring Kyoto and other parts of Japan.

During our classes at KJLS, I felt that I improved my Japanese quite a bit since most of our teachers did not speak English; we had to constantly use Japanese when explaining our answers in class to them. For example, when we were introduced to new vocabulary, the teachers would explain the meaning of each word in simpler terms in Japanese, or ask us to give synonyms for the words. The optional after school activities also taught us a lot about the cultural aspects of Japan, and included learning to wear a *yukata*, making traditional Japanese dessert, doing calligraphy, and much more.

After school, Josephine, Eilis, and I found a variety of different things to do around Kyoto. We visited a few shrines, temples, and castles, including *Kinkakuji*,

Byodoin, *Yasaka jinja*, and *Kifune*. Each one had different historical backgrounds about the gods that are worshiped there and how to pray and show respect to them. We also did a lot of shopping in downtown *Shijo* and visited cat and pig cafes. One of the most fun day trips we had in Kyoto was to Nara Park where we fed the bowing deer that live there; before feeding them crackers, they bow to you out of respect. Another really interesting sight was in *Kibune* where we ate *nagashi somen* on the floating river there. We sat down right on the riverside and caught our servings of somen with our chopsticks that flowed down bamboo shoots. We had so much fun in Kyoto, but also got to explore parts of Osaka too.

During our trips to Osaka, we watched two baseball games at Kyocera Dome, the home stadium to the Orix Buffaloes. It was such an exciting time hearing their fans chant and scream for their team. They even had *taiko drummers* and trumpet players for their various chants in the outfield seats. It was a very different experience from American baseball games, and we had such a good time watching them. We also got to explore *Dotonbori* while we were in Osaka, where we ate lots of delicious street food and did some shopping. We even rode on the ferris wheel at Don Quijote and got to see the city from 250 feet above ground.

Overall, I had such a great time studying abroad in Japan, exploring the different cities we went to, and learning more about the culture there. I made new connections and friendships while I was there and would love to go back in the future to explore other prefectures of the country. I hope to join the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program after college to potentially live and become a teacher there. Thus, I cannot thank KCC-JEE enough for giving me this opportunity.