

Josephine Kwok

Japan Reflection

After arriving back home from my summer in Kyoto, I immediately started thinking about when I would be able to return. Having not traveled outside the country in over 10 years, it made the overseas trip all the more memorable and gave me lasting memories that I will forever be fond of.

Starting off, my host family was hospitable, caring, and inclusive, and I hope to see them and keep in contact with them in the future! My host family told me they have been hosting international students for years, and I'm grateful to be one of them. They cooked me meals when I was home, were respectful to me, and made strong efforts to understand what I wanted to say even if I did not have the vocabulary/Japanese level to articulate it. I enjoyed practicing my Japanese with them and being immersed into their lifestyle and local community. I had dinners with many of their friends who were excited to meet me, played ping pong with other moms at my host parents' son's elementary school nearby, and went to local shops around their home. I am also thankful for them helping me navigate transportation in Kyoto and get a proper commuter pass for the month which I would not have been able to figure out alone. I also borrowed their bikes a couple times when going to school or hanging out with friends.

Classes at the Kyoto Language School were fast-paced but super helpful in having me learn phrases that I could immediately use once I left the classroom. For someone who had not been actively studying Japanese for a year (my trip was postponed into college), refamiliarizing myself with the language at school went by smoothly. The teachers were all incredibly sweet, and all students were given a workbook that the course was structured around. The book was helpful in understanding concepts during class, giving practice activities, and can also be used at home to study. The amount of studying done was up to me, as I had no examinations in the class. I met many interesting people at the school, half of whom were studying abroad for college credit and the other half of whom were working adults. It was very easy talking to everyone, and the school also organizes

their own events you can sign up to attend to further immerse you in the culture. Some activities that I went to which I particularly enjoyed were the calligraphy class and the Japanese sweets making class.

School only ran for 3.5 hours (9AM-12:30PM), so once class was over, the rest of the day I had free time to explore the city. Most days I spent with Payten and Eilis (previous contest winners) because we knew we had the same schedules, had previously gotten in touch with one another, and had many similar interests in what we wanted to do in Japan. We tried many new restaurants in the area with other friends from school for lunch, and we also occasionally went out for dinner. Japan's public transportation made exploring the city very accessible, and we even traveled to Osaka a couple times as well as Nara's Deer Park. Some activities we did were shop at Nishiki Market, walk under the thousand red gates at Fushimi Inari, eat somen noodles at Kibune, and we even participated in the Gion Matsuri parades in Shijo. We also planned a couple bigger trips to Dotonbori, Nara, and the Kyocera Dome twice to watch 2 baseball games! The school also provided a pass to see some museums, gardens, and castles for free which we went to. There was always something for us to do everyday, and I hope to return to see more! KCC JEE's program was a wonderful, immersive experience, and I would highly recommend it to anyone who is eligible. Kyoto has a wide range of activities to span many different interests, and the people there are also incredibly nice! I learned so much about Japan and the culture during this trip, and it makes me want to continue traveling. The affordability, accessibility, and knowledge that KCC JEE has also made my time in Japan that much more relaxing and made me eager to explore.