

Growing up right outside of Philadelphia, I have come to appreciate the quiet atmosphere of my suburban town tucked away behind the big city. Surrounded by vegetation, I spend my free time walking or biking through the forests and along the creeks and rivers, where I find the most peace and tranquility. I have always had an admiration for nature, especially the areas that are more unknown to me. At a young age, my first exposure to the scenery of Japan was through watching Studio Ghibli movies with my sister. I fell in love with the countryside Totoro roams through and the village by the sea in *Ponyo*. As I grew older and developed stronger passions for the world, nature, and environmental justice, *Princess Mononoke* became my favorite of the films since it addresses greed in humans and how we cause destruction to nature. I was enchanted by the forest in the movie, which is filled with moss-covered rocks and trees inhabited by the kodama tree spirits. Ever since seeing *Princess Mononoke*, I have had the desire to visit the Shiratani Unsuikyo Ravine on Yakushima Island, known for its wildlife and Yakusugi cedar trees, which was an inspiration for the magical woodland in the movie.

On the island, there are trails for hiking with waterfalls alongside them and countless cedar trees across the island. Yakushima's largest cedar, Jomon Sugi, is estimated to be around 2,000 to 7,000 years old and is another beautiful aspect of the island that I would love to see.

In Japan, there is a term, *shinrin-yoku*, for the practice of forest bathing and spending time in nature, which has many health benefits such as lowering stress and increasing overall well-being. With everything that has been happening in the United States, including increased gun violence, climate instability, and political corruption, there is a constant level of fear coursing through the country. The practice of forest bathing brings peace and mindfulness to people in Japan and others around the world, which is something that many Americans would benefit from doing.

As someone with a passion for nature and who strives for a peaceful life amidst the challenges around me, I dream of seeing the Earth in a new location and a new light. To have the chance to visit the Shiratani Unsuikyo Ravine would be healing and bring me relaxation and comfort by connecting me to the ground, water, and Earth, through shinrin-yoku. It would also give me the opportunity to walk through trees and on rocks just as San and Ashitaka do in *Princess Mononoke* and allow me to re-experience the joy and inspiration I felt when watching it for the first time. The beauty of this island, which cannot be found anywhere near Philadelphia, will also open my eyes even further to the diversity and power of nature.