

A Life-Changing Opportunity

My Study Abroad Experience in Akita, Japan.

By Crystal Brooks (Shepherd University)

I've been to Japan before. I've seen the sights, been to all the fun places, and have tried some of the most peculiar foods. However, one has not truly experienced Japan until they've lived there for an extended time. It's easy to dote on the country and culture as a tourist, but how will one's eyes be opened once they're able to take everything in; faults and all? My life in Akita was both a challenging and rewarding experience. It had its ups and downs but all in all I'd say it was one of the best opportunities ever presented to me. With the help of the Tanaka and Green Scholarship and my family, this all was made possible. Here is my story.

Sadly, I was only able to stay a semester in the sleepy little rural area of Akita. As opposed to more popular locations such as Tokyo or Osaka, the environment was a lot more relaxed. The school as well was quite small and every classroom was accessible within a few minutes' time. Pretty much everyone knew each other or at least knew from a friend of a friend. To city folk this sort of environment would have been a shock but I am not one of such folk. While I'm a

city girl at heart, I've been raised in a rural area similar to Akita so none of it was new to me.

I met so many great people during my stay there. Since we all were there for similar reasons, it was easy to connect with most people as many of our motivations and struggles were akin to one another. Some of the most wonderful friends I've ever had I met at that university. The teachers as well were wonderful. I must particularly dote on my Japanese language professors as it was clear they genuinely cared about the students and in their progression.

I took several other classes such as Art History, Japanese Society and more in order to fulfill not only my requirements back home but also to fulfill a deeper cultural understanding. Indeed the Japanese classroom environment is different than it is back home but not in a bad way. I honestly enjoyed going with the flow and learning to adapt and live in such a unique culture.

Of course, with my study abroad program, KEI, I was able to do some travelling as well! I went to Nara, saw Maiko perform and even got to go to the Oga Sea. It was these moments and the trips I went on with my good friends that also really made the experience so memorable.

One of the greatest things I can take away from my semester in Japan is a new-found confidence in myself. Before I've never really been sure of myself.

Going abroad for such a long time admittedly was both promising and daunting. Yet upon arriving and meeting so many kind faces, I soon felt like I was home. I can't remember a time I've felt more loved and supported in my life. All the experiences and new things I tried alongside my good friends from all around the world is what helped me become the person I am now; a better version of myself.

While I'm already looking forward to my next adventure, I can only fondly look back on the one I've already had. My confidence and direction in life have only been made clearer than before I had left. Now I feel an intense motivation to not only better myself but also my language ability in preparation for my return to the country and culture I've grown so fond of over the years.