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My Study Abroad Experience in Japan

Thinking back on my wonderful time studying in Japan, I cannot believe that it is over as I wish I could have extended my stay indefinitely. I would like to thank the Japan-American Society's Scholarship Committee for choosing me to receive the Tanaka and Green Academic Scholarship to study at Nanzan University for one semester. My time in Japan has been one, if not the best experience, of my life. Even though it was just for one semester, I feel that it has changed my life and broadened my perspectives on how I view Japan as a culture and a society.

When I first arrived in Japan I was, of course, very excited, but also very nervous. It was my first time traveling so far away on my own and living away from my family, so I was a mix of many different feelings. I stayed with my aunt, her family, and my grandmother in Okazaki, Aichi-ken, about an hour away from Nagoya. Living with family gave me a bit more peace of mind. It was great to be able to spend so much time with them because my last time in Japan was five years ago, and whenever I go to Japan to visit it is only for two weeks at most. Also, none of them were able to speak English so it forced me to use my Japanese and as a result, quickly improve. I was elated to be able to experience Japanese home life as well. But, with their home being an hour and fifteen minutes away from Nanzan University, and having never taken Japanese trains or subways on my own before, I was nervous again. This apprehension was completely alleviated once I went to and from Nagoya a couple times with my aunt. I found the Japanese transportation system to be very precise, punctual, and easy to use; a nice change from the car based commuting I usually did back home. Now that things had settled, the day of orientation grew near and so did my excitement. Finally being able to speak to peers interested in Japan and Japanese culture was what I had been looking forward to most in this experience.

The first day of orientation was very eventful because the first thing everyone did was take a placement test that would affect which level of Japanese each student would take. Being around students from so many different countries was an amazing experience because everyone was likeminded in that they all had an interest in Japan. After orientation, with all the paperwork and placement done, I found that the students, teachers, and organizers at the program were very kind, helpful, and easy to speak with. This greatly added to the enjoyment of my time at Nanzan because I was able to travel, practice Japanese, and experience Japanese life and culture first hand with fellow exchange students and other Japanese students as well. The Japanese program was very well set up because it allowed me to learn Japanese at the level that was most suited to my skill level. It also taught me many useful grammar points and vocabulary words needed for daily life. There were also times every week where we could speak and ask questions to Japanese students, along with special events and field trips meant for the exchange students to meet with and

mingle with Japanese students. This was very helpful because the program helped to close the gap between the foreigners and the Japanese students to really make most out of the experience. Many people's goals were to make Japanese friends in order to practice speaking with a native speaker. Also, it was so much fun to speak and hear the opinions of the Japanese students on foreigners in Japan, and their views on foreign culture.

The classes offered at the program were also very interesting and informative. I took Japanese economy, Japanese culture and art, translation, *sumie* (ink painting), and a reading and grammar Japanese class. They were well taught and each class, besides *sumie* and Japanese, were taught in English. It was much like a lecture based class that I was used to at my home university so it was comfortable in that aspect. Each Japanese class became a sort of family because we would meet every day of the week and regularly practice speaking together. At the end of the program as a goodbye party, everyone in my Japanese class went to an izakaya together which was probably one of the most fun experiences I had with my classmates. I really became close to everyone in the class, and was grateful that everyone was kind and supportive of one another. As Japanese class was not as easy as everyone expected, it was nice to know that we could all depend on one another. I was also able to visit a Japanese elementary school's afterschool program in Nagoya to speak with children and teach them about English and American culture. This was just like the Japan-in-a-suitcase program that I participated in during the summer before I left for Japan. Except, it was reversed as America-in-a-backpack. My time volunteering for JASWDC really helped prepare me for this.

While in Japan one of my favorite things to do was travel. Because my trips to Japan in the past only last for at most two weeks at a time, I was never able to really travel and see the sights at once. In the one semester I was there, I traveled to Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Gifu, all around Nagoya city and Okazaki city, Inuyama, and Mie to see Ise Shrine. In Japan, it was so easy and reasonable to travel because of the amazing public transportation system. I had never done this on my own so it was an exciting and liberating experience. Taking a night bus to Tokyo, a shinkansen to Osaka, and a train to Inuyama, I felt like the ultimate traveler even though it is how everyone travels in Japan. Also, being with my exchange student friends, and Japanese friends really made it enjoyable. I was able to see so many things I had never seen before like Sky Tree in Tokyo, Arashiyama in Kyoto, and Dotonbori in Osaka. Some mishaps of course were present when traveling, like missing a bus and having to spend a night in a manga café, but it was all a learning experience for future travels. It was also my first time making travel plans and booking accommodations on my own. Probably my favorite trip was to Kyoto with three exchange students from America, Taiwan, and Germany, and two Japanese students. It was so nice bonding with everyone, and we spoke in Japanese the whole time which was great practice. Because I was never able to communicate with my mother in Japanese much at home, having to use it all the time for conversation without English to fall back on was a great

opportunity to improve my speaking skills. I learned more Japanese in my four months abroad than I did with my seven years learning Japanese in the States.

Overall, my time studying abroad in Japan has to be the best and most influential time of my life so far because of all the people I was able to meet and get close with. In this time I improved my Japanese reading and speaking skills and also gained so many life experiences. Before coming to Japan I never imagined I could have so many friends and be so busy experiencing so many different things. This really changed my life and I hope to go back to Japan again for graduate school because I enjoyed my time immensely, and would love to work in a Japan related field in the future. While I am back in my home university I will continue taking Japanese and culture classes, and hopefully find an internship dealing with Japan. My time in Japan, I believe, has really deepened my connection and interest to the country and culture. I am really grateful to be able to have gotten this chance and will definitely return to Japan to continue learning.