

Kurashiki Student Exchange 2002 Report

By Alisi Moceiwai

1. I was told about a Japanese exchange by some girls at my school who are now 5th Form but were lucky enough to be part of the sister city exchange the year before. They came back to school with a lot of photos and stories of their experiences and it all sounded like a lot of fun, so when my Japanese teacher mentioned to the class that they were doing another exchange this year, I had no trouble with putting my name forward. We then filled out an application and wrote an essay about why we want to go and why we should be part of the exchange group. The application including the essay was sent through, then a selection of people were chosen to meet Richard for an interview. Finally after a lot of picking and choosing a group of 14 students from all over Christchurch was chosen to take part in the Sister City Exchange with Kurashiki. After receiving the letter which told me I made it to the group it was all very overwhelming and exciting to think I would be able to travel to a country I always wanted to visit.
2. From then on the whole group of students including the parents and leaders Pip and Richard, would meet at the Christchurch City Council at 5.00p.m., on Tuesday every second week. That was the place and time where we would ask questions, make comments and get to know everyone and make a lot of new friends. I thought Pip and Richard were very patient and respectful to each of the group members. My parents felt very comfortable with Pip and Richard being the leaders and were happy with the way they dealt with problems or issues that came upon the group.
3. My parents were happy in paying for my trip to Japan but to help them along I decided to do some fundraising. Rolleston Lions Club and the Selwyn District were very generous in giving me money to help with the costs. I also did a Kati, which is a type of Fijian Raffle. I was lucky enough to raise just under \$500 – it was a great success. The group was lucky enough to have uniforms provided by Canterbury Clothing. They turned out to be comfortable and easy to wear.
4. It was the first real experience I had staying away from my family and I was surprised that I found it very easy. At the start I was nervous and was re-thinking about leaving, but I am glad I didn't change my mind! I felt a little upset leaving at the airport when we first left, but I soon got over it while laughing and talking on the plane with the group. The hours on the plane seemed to drag on forever, but I came prepared with mags, games and I managed to sleep for about 1-2hrs on the way back.
5. When arriving in Japan, it didn't really sink in to me until about a couple of days later that I'm over in a completely different country. It was great; McDonalds was the first meal I had in Japan and the last. The accommodation wasn't too bad, we each got our own room and bathroom which was a bonus and I didn't feel at all scared or worried. My school was great! A bit different to Villa Maria, but I adjusted quickly to the new environment. I had great fun with the classes, especially English. I also made

a lot of new friends who I hope to see again. The group activities were: Washuzan Highland Amusement Park, Hiroshima, Okayama Castle, Aeon Plaza shopping, Sugou Elementary school visit, Korakuen Gardens. We got to see the culture, history and have lots of fun at the same time.

My host family was so generous and kind to me. I didn't feel homesick or upset because I had so much fun staying with them. The father could speak English very well and so could my student, Mana, her English was improving each day. They did a lot for me by giving me some English food and making me feel right at home. I am very thankful for what they have all done for me and I miss them very much.

6. I really enjoyed the Amusement Park and I thought that was a big highlight of the trip. There are so many things that I did and they all were enjoyable in different ways, it is hard to choose the best. I also really liked going out with my family because it was really relaxing and there wasn't such a tight schedule. While in the group it was fun catching up with the other members and hearing their stories. Because I was in a school by myself it was good to talk to them. The whole trip was really fantastic!!
7. I would really like to thank both the Kurashiki Committee and Christchurch City Council for their organisation, funding and support they gave everyone and they did an excellent job on the exchange and everything was perfect. I would also like to thank the leaders Pip and Richard for their support. Bill Gourdie and Miss Keiko Onishi who were just so friendly and helpful to us. They did so much work in the background that we didn't see and if it wasn't for that we would not have had such a successful time over there. It was a trip of a lifetime and I will never forget it.