

Kurashiki Student Exchange 2002 Report

By Erin Upjohn-Beatson

Leaving home wasn't too difficult. Apart from my general nervousness about going on planes, I wasn't thinking much about anything bad that could happen (but wouldn't), but more about all the good things that were going to happen. Actually I think the thing I was most worried about was not having a cat to cuddle for two whole weeks! But I decided I would survive this horrific experience and so I got on the plane.

The first thing I noticed when we arrived was that all the signs, including at MacDonalds, were written in Japanese! I was quite surprised by this (even though I was in Japan) because I was so used to everything being written in English. I would turn my head, expecting to see a *cheeseburger*, but instead I would see a *cheezubaagaa!*

Just after I first met my host family, we were in the car, with a forty-five minute drive back to their house. I was about to drop to sleep, but I knew when I met them that the next two weeks would be awesome!

Japan just got better and better as it went on, and with new things coming at me from all directions, I was kept extremely busy. Suddenly there were only a few days left!

It's hard to pick highlights of the trip because I enjoyed everything so much! But some of them would have to have been the Washuzan Highland amusement park – big thrill, even though it's not easy to make me go on the big rides; Hiroshima, which was very moving; going places with my family, e.g. the Seto-Ohashi and a Jinjya (shrine); the goodbye party that my friends threw me; and believe it or not, school.

At Ajino Junior High School I had a fantastic time. Nikki Henderson (who was also at Ajino School during the exchange) and I were given the opportunity to try many new things. These included Kendo, Karate, Ikebana and tea ceremony classes and making *Takoyaki* and *Sushi*. Thank you to everyone at Ajino

Junior High School for being so friendly and hospitable to us, and special thanks to the English teachers for being our guides and translators, and for giving us English conversation! Thank you also to Bill Goudrie and Miss Keiko Onishi for being our guides and translators, and for getting us out of messes.

Living in the Japanese culture was very interesting. Most things were very different and some were hard to remember, e.g. where to wear what shoes at school, but I enjoyed the challenge.

Despite the Japanese diet being very different from my usual diet, I really liked the food. I remember thinking at dinner one night – *yuummmmm...what is it?* I think I ate everything – from raw fish to tea-flavoured ice cream!

Communication was a mixture of English, Japanese and drama, but I got by. Before we went I was worried I wouldn't have much to laugh about because the Japanese people and I wouldn't understand each other well enough, but some things were hilarious!

Thank you to everyone who made this trip possible. This included the Christchurch and Kurashiki city councils, who subsidised and organised this exchange; Pip and Richard who were there right through from the interviews to the writing of this report, and who led us, organised and informed us as well as giving us handy shopping tips; my wonderful host family and everyone I have mentioned earlier. Also Cobham Intermediate School who let me do a sausage sizzle at their school to fundraise; the butcher wholesalers who donated me sausages; and Cadbury chocolate.

This trip really was an awesome experience!