

# REPORT from Hannah McDOUGALL of Burnside High School

My time in Japan was definitely a memorable experience. Before I left I could not anticipate much past the excitement of going, but as I arrived, and became surrounded by the culture and language, I realized the big impact that this trip would have on my expectations and opinions of Japan.

The first thing that I have taken away from the trip would be that myths have been dispelled. I had been taught a little about Japanese culture but I came to understand that is changing, especially school life.

Before I went to school in Japan I expected the schooling to be almost Victorian, with very strict expectations of behaviour and achievement. I had a picture of a stereotypical Japanese student. I soon saw that they are not so different to New Zealand students after all. They dislike certain subjects, do not do homework sometimes, and behave like any normal teenager. The teachers are dedicated to providing a balanced education that will prepare their students for life in a modern world.

Some of the best memories I have of the trip would be seeing both a traditional Japan and a modern Japan, which is evolving more and more. We spent a whole day at a temple, learning and experiencing very traditional ceremonies, such as tea and meditation. I can appreciate these customs better now that I have experienced them first hand. At the cultural festival I particularly enjoyed trying on kimono and have my photo taken by perfect strangers!

I also spent some days shopping with girls my age, in Okinawa. I loved observing all the fashion and mannerisms of teenagers there. It was so different to what I had anticipated. It opened my eyes to what Japan is like now-a-days.

This exchanged has benefited me because my concept of Japan has completely changed and I have a better appreciation of it now. I do not think I would have been able to fully gain an understanding of true Japanese culture if I did not travel to Japan and witness it for myself. I hope that I may return one day in the not-so-distant future.

Hannah McDougall

