

Report - Michael Jones

The reason I applied was because it was such a great chance to go to a completely different country and really feel how the culture works from the inside. In first applying I didn't think I had much chance of actually getting through to the final team. Another reason for applying was the low money cost. Our school trips for Burnside are quite high priced because it is more tourism type travelling.

At the interview I was really nervous but I tried to answer the questions to the best of my ability.

When I received the letter I was so excited and it took a very long time for it really to sink in where I was going.

Our build up period was quite good getting to meet the rest of our group and make new friends and the council building is really relaxing which made the mood lighter.

Near the last few weeks I would of liked a meeting every week or maybe one more meeting, but in the end it all worked out. Pip and Richard were really good and helped my every need and it helped living a block away from them. We were really disappointed not to have gone to the Japanese style restaurant, as that would have been a great lead in. I was happy with all the information given out and nothing was left to really concern me.

My fundraising worked out really well and in the end I raised about \$2000 through fundraising ideas, Lions and Trust funds, as well as a \$500 grant from the Riccarton Youth Trust. Having to not pay for the uniforms was also great and now I have more clothes thanks to the Pub Charity for that help.

As the time became closer I was getting a bit nervous about leaving home for two weeks and living and relying on strangers for everyday living. I was scared of the communication factor and the food factor, as before the trip I wasn't a great fan of white rice. Now I quite like it and can even eat it with chopsticks. All these fears were found to be okay with the first night an exception. Flying on the plane for 11 hours is very long and there were patches where I wanted to get up and run around but our group was great and we got through it alright.

When I arrived in Japan I was really excited to finally be here. Although it was only a 10 week wait it had been a very long time. And we all know what happened to me at the airport, I lost my passport. We then took two trains (the speedy Shinkansen) to Okayama. We dragged (well Kate and I dragged) our suitcases to our hostel. We took the train to Kurashiki, looked around and met our Host families.

The main things I did in Japan were.....

Went to school for five days which was really fun but the Japanese slippers are to small.....

Went to A Calligraphy class and Karate class.

Went to two Elementary schools where we did exciting things like dodge ball and dancing.

Went to Washuzan Highland (Theme Park) and became sick after the crazy rides.

Between all of this I was doing shopping, shopping and more shopping.

One of my highlights was our visit to Hiroshima. It was a very emotional day....

Comparing New Zealand school to Japanese school is hard but I think the New Zealand schools are more strict and there is more teacher pupil respect.

My homestay family was perfect and in the end I had to leave some of their gifts in Japan. They were very giving and accommodating people and we had some funny moments together and now we have friends in Japan. The Japanese culture is different but I enjoyed it and I wasn't homesick other than the night when I went to bed early to cope with it.

Like I said my highlights were the Hiroshima visit, New Zealand group outings together and just sitting in my homestay's house playing board games and laughing. I fully recommend it to anyone even remotely interested in the Japanese life style. I now understand how difficult it is for Asians and other foreigners who don't speak English to survive and get along.

I wish to thank all involved in getting me and the rest of the group to Japan and around Japan and a special note to Pip and Richard who were awesome.

I also wish to thank the two City Councils and their employees and especially Bill Gourdie and Miss Keiko Onishi for helping me out and getting my new passport. Thank you to Mayor Nakada for having us and also the Volunteer helpers and Shimotsui Junior High School for having me for five days.

Lastly I want to thank my Homestay family for being so.....great!

**CHRISTCHURCH / KURASHIKI
YOUTH EXCHANGE**

2002

OUTBOUND GROUP

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□ Letter from Mayor of Hiroshima