

KURASHIKI STUDENT EXCHANGE 2002

By Nicola Henderson

I first heard about the exchange from my Japanese teacher, Ms Collins, at Burnside High School. I applied because I thought being able to experience Japan first-hand would be a great experience. I tried to say as much in my application essay. An essay is a great way to select people because it gives an opportunity to prove how much the applicant wants to do something.

After an interview, when I received the letter telling me I was 'in' I was ecstatic! Looking back, all I seemed to say was 'I'm going to Japan!'

The build-up programme for the group was a great idea. We met fortnightly on Tuesdays and it gave us all a chance to get to know one another a bit better, and told us what to expect and what to do should a problem arise.

Fundraising played a bit part in my build-up. To cover the cost of \$2,650 required for the trip I sold chocolates, held barbeques and worked at two jobs. My extended family was also really supportive. My thanks go to Canterbury Clothing and Pub Charities whose support meant we got the great looking uniform for no extra cost.

After what seemed like years of waiting, the day we departed was finally there. We all met at the airport at 5 am to get our bags checked in and a few departure photos taken. The plane trip was fine, but I felt restless and exhausted from the long confinement. But just being in Japan was worth suffering the legendary plane meals.

Our schedule in Japan was excellent, with our own group activities spread amongst the days spent at school. We had culture eg the Bikan Historic Centre and fun at the amusement park. And by the end of my stay I was quite proficient at manoeuvring my suitcase on and off the train in short time!

When we arrived in Kurashiki we met with the Mayor, Mr Nakada. I would like to thank him for taking a break in his busy schedule to welcome us to his wonderful city. Also special thanks go to Bill Gourdie and Keiko Onishi for helping us so much – without their help we would have been completely lost.

I enjoyed staying with my host families very much. I stayed with two families, a week with one, then the second week with the other. At first I was a bit apprehensive about the change but it went smoothly and I am grateful I had such wonderful and friendly families to stay with. I was lucky too, in that both my host mothers spoke excellent English. I thank both families for taking me so many places in Kurashiki.

Believe it or not, I actually enjoyed going to school. Ajino Junior High School was a great school to attend, and the students were very friendly. I thank the principal and the staff for giving Erin and I such a wonderful schedule. I would especially like to thank Mr Kaslav, who helped us out and made our stay even more enjoyable. Thanks for being a great school, Ajino Junior High!

I have recommended this exchange, and/or a visit to Japan, especially Kurashiki, to everyone I know. My friends often tell me, "Yes, Nikki, you've told us this 3 times before!" But I thoroughly enjoyed my trip and can't stop talking about it.

The highlight of the trip for me would have to be the trip to Hiroshima Peace Park. It is a magnificent place with a magnificent purpose.

I would like to thank again the Kurashiki City Council, Christchurch City Council, Mayor Nakada, Bill Gourdie, Keiko Onishi, Ajino Jnr High School, Mr Kaslav, Richard and Pip and, of course my host families, the Takahashi's and Nakamuras, for their help, support and friendliness which made the trip such a success experience. Thank you all so very much!

I hope the Sister City link stays strong for many years to come, so others can enjoy the experience I have been so fortunate to have.

Thanks guys!

Nikki H