

Kurashiki Student Exchange 2002 Report

By Nicole Wright-Marian College

When our teacher first told us about the Kurashiki Exchange I thought it sounded really awesome. I thought applying wouldn't hurt and that I might have a good chance.

Writing the essay was a good idea as it made me think hard about why I wanted to go. I figured it would be a really amazing experience and would help to improve my Japanese.

When I heard back from Richard Paton, I was really excited, even if it was only an interview, I was glad to have got that. I thought the interview went well, and it obviously did, as I made it onto the team. Three pupils applied from Marian College and we all made it onto the team. We were all really excited and couldn't wait to meet the rest of the team.

The meetings were a great idea, except myself, and my parents felt that we maybe should have gone on an outing as a group, just to get to know people better, and for Richard and Pip to find out how we behaved. I feel that if we hadn't had the weekly meetings, the trip would not have been as organised and successful as it was. I felt that Richard and Pip were great, energetic and fun leaders for this trip. They were approachable and easy to talk to and quite dare devils at the theme park too.

It was excellent how the City Council could subsidise the trip, otherwise I think most people would find it quite hard to get the money.

The subsidised cost was fair and reasonable. To get the money for myself, I applied to some local Pub Charities and to my local Community Boards, Youth Sponsorship Committee. I received \$500 from the Youth Sponsorship Committee and needed no money from the Pub Charities, as the other two girls from my school also applied to Pub Charities, and we received \$8 000 from two Charities between the three of us. I was given spending money by family and friends and also had my own savings from working.

I found our uniform, supplied by Canterbury Clothing, and funded by Pub Charities, to be smart looking and easy to wear. The colours were fine and I felt two shirts and one pair of pants were enough. Without their assistance we wouldn't have looked so good.

The night before we left, I hadn't really clicked that the next day I was going on an eleven-hour flight to Japan. When I woke up late the next morning I realised, and was really excited. I really like flying, although after so long it got kind of boring and sleeping was the only option. I had some apprehensions of course, about being able to be understood, and the toilets. I was worried because we had talked about how important it was getting on and off trains fast, and I was worried about missing them.

On arrival we were all very tired and hungry. The hostel where we spent the first night was great. Although we had a bedroom and shower to ourselves, it may have been better if it was two to a room, rather than being on our own. My own host family were great! I felt really welcome and that I could relax. I shared a room with my host sister and slept on a bed. My host family took me many places from mini golfing to temples, from apple picking to shopping (of course). I felt the trying of many different foods was hard especially as I'm not a great fan of fish. Some things I really enjoyed though. I got a bit homesick, but a call home to a friend helped and when emails from friends and family were received with news, it cheered me up.

I really really enjoyed going to school. It's really different to New Zealand. I was lucky enough to get to go to Tamashima-Kita Junior High School as we were told it was the best in Kurashiki and I agree it was. The teachers and second year students were friendly and welcoming and one student was kind enough to give me a fork when I couldn't quite use the chopsticks. I enjoyed English class and getting to help the students pronounce their English. My highlights of the trip, would have to have been school and Washuzan Highland Fun Park. I have been to amusement parks before, but haven't had the guts to go on crazy rides, but when I was with the group I had so much energy, that I did. Hiroshima was a really important day. I mean its not everyday you get to go somewhere like that. I went over to Japan to discover another culture and see another way of life and to experience that. I definitely did, and I am glad that I was chosen. I really have a much better understanding now other than just what I have learnt at school in New Zealand.

I really have to say thank-you to many people, especially all the others in the group. You were a great group of guys and girls who were easy to get along with, thanks. Pip and Richard you were great and I hope to keep in touch. In Japan, where would we have been without our guides, Miss Keiko Onishi and Mr Bill Gourdie. We probably would have got on the wrong train or something completely crazy. To the Kurashiki City Council for hosting us and providing us with meals, and the same to the Christchurch City Council for providing us with money for meals and gifts for our host families and the friends we made.

Overall I really enjoyed my trip, and it has encouraged me carry on with my Japanese studies next year at school. I would love to have the opportunity to go again some time!!

Thank-You to all involved with this trip I am extremely grateful for this experience.

Yours Faithfully,
Nicole Wright