

REPORT from Sarah PETERS of Avonside Girls High

I was one of the lucky 14 who were chosen to be part of the 2007 Student Exchange to Kurashiki. I went along with 13 others and haven't ever had such a great experience overseas before. The trip meant getting up VERY early on a Saturday morning but it was worth it. We flew via Auckland to Kansai Airport in Japan. It took 11 hrs which wasn't great for me, as I can't sleep on planes. When we arrived at Kansai, we were escorted to Okayama where we spent the night, but I couldn't sleep. I was too excited about being there. The next morning we met our homestay hosts and their family. It was very exciting as everyone in Japan was so nice and kind to us. I was greeted by my host mum and dad and my two host sisters and a host brother. There were also a host grandmother and grandfather too in the house.

I attended the High school with my host sister at Kita Junior High School. I was not used to a mixed school and this was new for me. I did feel like someone famous arriving as everyone wanted to see me. I was the only foreign person in the school. We did trips to City Hall, Okayama Castle, and Korakuen Gardens. One day we went to Tamashima Elementary School. It was fun working and playing with the 6th graders that spoke very good English. They helped me with my Japanese.

We also had a very good day at the Entsuji Temple where we tried many Japanese Cultural activities, like Koto, Fan Dance, Tea Ceremony, Flower arranging and ZEN Meditation.

On the weekend, I was taken by my homestay family to Tivoli Park which was an amazing theme fun park. We participated in the International Festival and did our NZ Anthem and Maori Poi Dance. I also went to a Sushi Train restaurant with all the meals travelling on a belt around the restaurant. I enjoyed the shopping at Aeon Centre and attended the luncheon where we were all asked to speak unprepared, in front of the crowd That was scary.

I did enjoy the day visit to Washuzen Fun Park and the Trip to Hiroshima Peace Park. It was a very peaceful place. On the last day at my school they presented me with a plaque which I now have on my wall at home.

We left very early from Kurashiki to stop off at Universal Studios for a quick visit and that was awesome. On the flight home to NZ, it only took me 5 mins to miss my time in Kurashiki and want to return.

I do hope I can return to Japan and meet my homestay family again. Thank you for all who helped make my trip possible.

Sarah Peters.

