

2006 Kurashiki Sister City Exchange.

At the start of term two 2006 my Japanese teacher told me I had the chance to be part of the 2006 Kurashiki Sister City Exchange and I thought it would be a great opportunity and so I wrote a letter to go along with my application form. I wasn't sure whether I would get it or not but after a nervous interview and two nervous weeks of waiting I received a letter that told me I was accepted I was so excited and nervous at the same time as I did not know whether the others from my school had been chosen but as it turned out they did.

On a Sunday afternoon 14 nervous students along with our parents went to David and Junko Bolam Smiths house for our first meeting and afternoon tea. From then on until the day we left we had an orientation meeting one Sunday every month which was very helpful as we got to know the people on our trip better and to find out what we were in for when we went to Japan. At the orientation meeting we were given team t-shirts and a lot of paper work for our parents to read.

Also in the lead up to our departure we had to organise and perform to perform in Japan. We eventually decided on the national anthem two verses in Maori and two verses in English. Amy performed a tap dance, Kristie performed Kapa haka and I did a Irish dance, we practised our performance every Sunday at Sophie Cunningham's house for about 5 weeks we also had to perform at the Japanese consular office in town and at the Christchurch city council.

Before we knew it we were sitting at a Japanese restaurant in Gloucester Street for some of us our first time experiencing yummy Japanese food and also being filmed for Canterbury Television (CTV)

Getting up at 3.00 am in the morning in the middle of the school holidays is not something I do on a regular basis but it was Friday 29th of September and we were off to Japan that morning. We met at 4.30 at Christchurch Domestic terminal for a 5.50 am flight to Auckland. When we were all there we lined up in the group departure to see if we were over weight or not. then it was some teary good byes and we had to go to our departure gate, we had a very quick flight compared to the flight we about to have to Osaka Japan - 11 hours and 15 minutes.

We were finally in Japan and rather tired. We took three trains and 2 and a half hours with our heavy luggage to get to Kurashiki where we were met by people from Kurashiki city hall to take us to our hotel where we were spending our first night in Japan.

The next morning we were met at city hall by our host families for the next two weeks or in my case I was lucky enough to be hosted by two host families The Ito Family and the Katayama Family so I would have a week with each family and they were both there to greet me.

We then spent the first weekend sight seeing with our family and also getting to know them and they way Japanese live. I was a little home sick for the first few days but I think it was also to do with the big language barrier, but we got by.

Our first week was spent with our host brothers and sisters attending their schools this was very different but fun we participated in classes, eat school lunch, clean the classrooms and my Native English Teacher set up cultural activities for me to do aswell. Going to school was a great experience I will never forget.

The middle weekend I moved host families and participated in a traditional autumn festival it was very hot and exhausting.

Our Final week was spent as a group sight seeing we visited Okayama Castle, Korekuen Gardens, Daruma Making class, Mitsubishi Motor Plant, traditional restaurants, Hiroshima Peace park(a very sad but cool place), Miyajima Island(with a famous shrine and deer), Washuhan Brazilian Highland amusement park, Seito ohashi bridge, Aeon shopping centre, official welcome but the Mayor of Kurashiki City and we also attend a Japanese language workshop where we were each assigned a English speaking Japanese person and we talked about new Zealand also practised some Japanese.

This was a very fun week and really got to see what great sights there are to see in Japan and experience some more Japanese food.

The end of our trip came so fast and before I knew it, it was Saturday 14th of October and I was in my room packing my bag before we headed off to the train station. At the train station we had about 30 minutes before our train was ready to leave so we said our teary goodbyes and had to hop in the train once on the train all our host families crowded by the window and more tears started to flow it was very hard to say goodbye as we had, had a wonderful time with our host families.

Three trains later we arrived at Osaka airport and checked in our luggage. After some seat rearrangements so we could sit by ours friends we took off back to New Zealand even though many of us did not want to leave Japan (including me) it was nice to be back in cold Christchurch and see our Families again.

This was an experience of a life time and one I will surely not forget.

Thank you David and Junko Bolam Simth for giving me and the rest of the group this wonderful experience.

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