

Kurashiki Exchange Group

2002 Report

By Kate Hamill

My introduction to the exchange began back in May. I read through the requirements and thought why not give it a shot. I submitted my essay and soon after was successful in obtaining an interview. Shortly after the interview I was thrilled to find out I had been selected as part of the team. Most Tuesdays, after selection, leading up to the trip we, as a group, met at the City Council in one of the meeting rooms to discuss what needed to be done before departure. As time grew nearer to departure the excitement and anticipation rose.

Departure day was an early start. We flew out at 6.30am. I was very excited with this being my first international flight. Time dragged by ever so slowly on the plane as we were so excited. As we neared Japan my apprehension grew. When we landed in Japan and stepped off the plane it was like hopping into an oven. The heat was oppressive. After two and a half hours on the bullet train we finally arrived in Okayama where we were able to get our first impressions of Japan. It was hot, busy and crowded. Also the roads were a lot narrower than ours back home.

During my time in Japan I attended Shimotsui Junior High School for 5 days and was quite surprised by my first impressions. Prior to going to Japan I had this idea that all Japanese schools were really strict. I was in for a huge shock. When I arrived on the first day I saw 13,14 and 15 year olds smoking in the corridors and if the students didn't want to be in class they'd just walk on out! Very different to what I was expecting. The AET Justin was really cool. He helped Michael and I out a lot by translating and just showing us the sights around Shimotsui.

My host family was lovely and made me feel right at home. They took me so many wonderful places such as temples, shrines, art museums, historic Japanese houses and out to traditional Japanese restaurants. I was embarrassed by their generosity. Unfortunately my host sister was very busy with athletics while I was there so i didn't get to spend a lot of time with her. My host mother spoke very good English which was extremely helpful. I didn't feel homesick the first week but in the second week I began to miss home especially because it was my Mum's birthday. To cope with homesickness I just had to sit down and think I'm only here for two weeks I've got to make the most of it.

For me the highlight of the trip was visiting Hiroshima. We went to the Peace Museum and I couldn't believe how horrific it was. The only thing that I found was that we didn't have enough time there. We only had an hour and there was so much to read and see.

Lastly I would like to thank Bill Gourdie and Miss Keiko Onishi for all they did for us. You were wonderful tour guides. I would also like to thank the Kurashiki City Council for all their organisation and funding and also the Christchurch City Council for their funding and support. Finally I would

like to thank Richard and Pip, our team leaders, for all they did. I had an awesome time with you guys and i would recommend this trip to anyone as I had such an awesome time.