

## Five months in Japan

We are traveling to Budapest. My parents, sister, brother and me, with two suitcases. I'm full with hope, waiting and of course I'm very excited. In 2 hours it's going to start one of my biggest and greatest adventures in my life.

I'm sitting to the airplane. First Paris, next Tokyo. Means European students and friendships ever and forever. But how has it started?

When I got into the Grammar School (Secondary Grammar School of Tancsics Mihaly, Kaposvar), I got the possibility to learn Japanese language and the culture, as my second language. I was very glad about it, and I started to learn Japanese immediately. While I was learning, it became not only my favourite subject, but also I have already known that I have to go to Japan at least once in my life, as to get to become it a great experience, a part of my life and my personality.

Someday my teacher Nami-san showed us the scholarship advertisement, only one person from Hungary is able to spend half a year in the country of the rising sun, as it said. I did not wait just for a while or thought about why not to go. I just raised my hand.

In 2 weeks I was called to take an interview, and on the same day I got to know that I have the fortune to go. I was traveling on the train, when the cellphone rang. The people around me just could not understand the reason of my happiness, when the rain was falling, and inside the train is everything so grey. What did I think about then? I thought about the wonderful culture, I will be able to see, the Japanese, whom I can meet. What does my host family like, and how could be me so lucky.

I traveled to Japan with an organisation, called Japan-European-Students-Exchange-Program. I had never thought about what I would like from this program, because anything is happen it's still Japan, it's my dream and it must to be beautiful.

As I arrived to Paris I had met other European students, from Poland, Czech Republic and Slovenia, in Tokyo I met everyone. So we were 29 and our two leaders all together. From here our life has been tying to each other.

The first four days we spent together in the building of New Womens Education Centre downtown of Tokyo, and the nearest places. We made Japanese paper, did calligraphy and took part in a Japanese traditional tea ceremony. The team which was membered of different countries people perfectly could understand each other, and could find the same voice. For this 4 days we had grown very close to each other, and when we hardly could say Goodbye, we hoped the bests and success not only for ourselves but to each other.

On the fifth day everyone got to own host family. Some of us with plan, with bus, or as I did it, with Shinkansen. When I had learnt from the Shinkansen, the

train which runs 300 km/h, in my school, in Hungary, I was crazy about it, so in Japan I simply could not believe that I travel with it. I just smiled out of the window during the journey with it. I got off in Nagoya, where my host family had already waited for me. To tell the truth I had another impression from them as I waited for.

From a European eye, I had already known that Japan is an extremely cultured and tradition safer country, and we have been hearing about the high-technological equipments and buildings, but to imagine that both live together is a sort of unbelievable. For me the cultural side of it was stronger. If I thought about Japan, I imagine a country of kimonos and samurajs, the empire of politeness and bowing, the world of books and the art of kanji writing (calligraphy). Now I have already known that it's true, but also much more.

Well, the first impression...it wasn't worse, or better, as I expected before. Like... When you see a Japanese girl, wearing kimono in Tokyo, staying near a high-technological building, playing in her mobile phone. So, try to imagine, it was the feeling when I met with my host family on the Sinkansen Station of Nagoya.

There were two teenager girls in my family, as me. In that 5 months which I spent with them, it grew a special and strong string between us, like a mixture of friendship and sisterhood. For now still keeping touch, and I'm hoping that once we can meet again..

There still left a week to the begining of schoollife. On 26<sup>th</sup> of August we were wearing yukata, which is a traditional summer wearing, and went to see a firework wich lasted 90 minutes.

On the first schoolday, I got on my uniform, and in the school opening ceremony I took a speech in front of everyone in Japanese. Everyone was so kind and everyone was happy about meet with me. To tell the truth, when I introduced myself to my class, they don't show much interest, when I talked about Hungary, in English, but about my hair and eye colour. I think, it was my first cultural shock, the second one was when I got back to Hungary. However when I took my farewell speech, everyone became very shy and quiet, and they kept their eyes on me so strongly. I feel, that I could win theirs simpaty, likness and possibly theirs respect to.

As the only European in the school and in the small town, where I lived (Kawashima), everyone was very interested in me, everybody bowed, greeted me, smiled at and asked several questions. It was such a good feeling and made me happy instead of I woke up with left leg.

Slowly I breathed inside the Japanese culture and it became natural the using of "thank you" everytime, to bow and great anyone.

Everyday I had 6 lessons. After the 4<sup>th</sup> we had a lunch break, I spent with friends, I have already made. 40 minutes, sometimes enought, but most of the time was too short to spend with friends and to eat the meal, I brought from

home in “Obento”, which covered the rice, fish, vegetables and meat, almost everytime with the japanese type of orange the “mikan”. I had several English lessons, 3 times maths lessons, P.E., music(with another class), art, calligraphy and with a private teacher two Japanese lessons a week.

At the first time it was so difficult, to understand, and make myself understood, because of my poor Japanese, and most of my classmates were not willing to speak in English. But in another hand, in this way I was forced to learn as many japanese as possible.

In the first month we had a cultural- and sport festival. It was so great, as I have never seen a student organisation before. I ran in this festival, and my team became the winner. The whole school cheered me, instead of were the same team or not.

To say Goodbye was very difficult for me... From class ,the 1-7, after my speach, while I tried to not cry, 2 girls stepped to me to give my farewell presents, which were a messeage board and a neckles, they had been criing, and so did I.

One of the messeages was the following: You will be the member of 1-7 forever. I made friends not only within my class, but also in others. I got several letters, presents, but the biggest present was for me theirs honest likness.

I had school from Monday to Friday, at the weekends I went several trips with my host family. I saw “kabuki” which is an original type of playing in japan.Plenty of Festivals and ceremonies.The best trip for me was the journey to Nara, which is an old and beautiful town of Japan. I saw deers near the temples, walking around us, freely and peacefully.

Japan...the country of peace.

Once we went to take a hike,which is my hobby, by the way. They didn't like hiking, but they knew that it's an important activity for me. It was so beautiful. If once I had told them something, which I alredy forgot, they didn't, and made me some special surprises monthes later.

I had a host grandmother to. She was such a modern grandma'. She danced and sang with the TV commercial.

Finally... What did I get from Japan?

Before I went to Japan, I hoped that I would be able to get to know why the culture is so different in the not just in kilometres far away East from the culture of mine, what it is means to think in another part of brain, what is that different thinking, to be able to see the things whole, not in pieces. Cover the feelings, to bow in front of someone. See not only the differences, but also the similar things. We are Europeans and Asians, but not only Europeans and Asians, we have to not just get to know each other, but to respect others thinking and feelings too.

Thank you very much Japan and Hungary, everything I got, that is not lasted only for 5 months, but forever.

Szonja Kravinszkaja, from Siofok, Hungary