

## Report from Japan

It was the second time that I went to Japan, but the happiness and joy that I felt remained in my heart from the previous journey. I was on cloud nine when I took my first step on Japanese land and I felt nostalgic when I could breathe in the unvariably humid air.

As my first experience, I noticed that every organiser belonging to this programme was speaking in English. It was a surprise for me, I thought that we are going to be told everything in Japanese, but it turned out, that almost sixty percent of the exchange students there couldn't speak Japanese.

After two hours spent in the bus we arrived at our hotel, the NYC, which was a well-equipped, cosy place, and everyone found it nice.

During the days we spent there, we had several Japanese courses, lectures about the Japanese lifestyle, how Japanese people behave, we also learned something about their way of thinking. These facts that we managed to learn played an important part in our home stay, and the vocabulary that we studied carefully during the lessons turned out to be extremely useful.

We stayed in Tokyo for a week and one day we visited the city's most important sights. First we went to the Edo museum, which pictures the development of Tokyo from old times until nowadays. We could see the difference in the structure of the buildings, the most conspicuous changes in the lifestyle, clothing and hairstyle of the people.

Later we visited the biggest shrine in Tokyo, Asakusa. We walked along the shops, bought some cute souvenirs, were amused by the colours, shapes, and beauty of the goods. We also prayed in front of the shrine. In my case, I do not really pray in Protestant churches (although I am Protestant), but I love praying at shrines and Buddhist temples. The nature that encircles the religious building, the wood of the shrine that beams harmony, the calm peace and tranquility that I can feel in my heart, is a unique feeling that I can experience only in Japan.

The next destination was Odaiba, an entertaining centre. There – first time during our stay – we had some free time, so that we could shop around, make some purikura and enjoy a good coffee, that my Swiss friend, Isabella and me drank at Tully's Café.

After our first week, we were sent to certain prefectures in Japan, and I was sent to Yamaguchi. I have never been there before, but the journey by the train was fun because I was together with a lot of exchange students until Osaka. From Osaka I had to go on my own, but it wasn't as difficult as I expected.

My host family was really nice. I can tell that they did everything for me to feel better, and to feel like home. We were watching TV after dinner for hours and we were talking about several things concerning Hungary and Japan. We went together to a festival, which was extremely spectacular, and we visited a shrine and a church in Yamaguchi-shi, which is the main city of the prefecture.

I went to school by bicycle, which took thirty minutes every morning and every afternoon, when I went home. It was a perfect exercise, and I enjoyed it very much, though it was unbelievably hot those days.

I had some expectations concerning my school, but experiencing that there were boys in the school... it was amazing. In Tokyo I went to a single-sex high school, so I had no chance to see Japanese school-boys inside the institute itself. Now, I was a little bit surprised and also frustrated, but the boys were also nice, and they smiled at me a lot of times, so I had no bad experience.

The scenery that I saw when I was biking home, was just amazing. Until this time I had almost no idea, how a countryside in Japan looks like, and beside the skyscrapers, neonlights, and beautifully composed parks, I knew only a very few things about the smaller cities.

Kudamatsu was gorgeous. I saw plenty of rice-fields, instead of flats, I could see detached houses, there was a light traffic, and only one department store existed in the city. It was though enormous, seven times bigger than the department store in Miskolc, in spite of the fact, that the population of Kudamatsu was the third of that in Miskolc.

When I went there, I always bought magazines and some mangas, and once I tried matcha ice, which is made of traditional japanese green tea. It was the most delicious thing that I have ever eaten!

In my class, the students were kind and helpful, we were talking and laughing a lot. I also improved my japanese skills by learning the basic expressions and differences of the dialect there. It was understandable for me, but very different from the way people speak in Tokyo. It was an interesting experience though.

I wanted to recall my memories concerning tea ceremony as I attended a course in Tokyo for a year. In Kudamatsu the style was a little bit different, but the main points were the same and I could absorb the missing knowledge again. Tea ceremony is the scene of tranquility combined with strict discipline. You cannot raise your hand without being defined how you should do it. Your steps, movements, look, motion of fingers, everything is settled and you need a very clear and good sense of concentration, as well as patience to be able to do the tea ceremony.

I also watched my host sister performing in drama club and I enjoyed it to the full. They were talented and they did very well. Concerning the problems (from which I couldn't recognise any), a professional was invited to correct them.

As the last week of my stay came, I needed to go back to Tokyo. I couldn't wait to see the others again, and to be in the center of Japan again. At that time it was unmercifully hot, but the fact that in Osaka at the station I could meet my friends made me forget about the swelter. We visited Hakone and Kamakura with the group, and I could enjoy the trips again. We made countless photographs in front of the Big Buddah, were afraid of the huge butterflies, and were longing for water or tea in the hot weather.

In Hakone we stayed at a japanese style hotel, ryokan, and we were wearing yukata, and had a traditional japanese dinner. During dinner, one of the organisers, Oka san arranged a karaoke machine for us, and were singing for hours. At the beginning only a few people had the courage to go the stage and sing in front of everyone, but as they realised that it's not about good and bad voice, only about enjoying the fun of singing, more and more students came out, to get the microphone.

We spent two more days in Tokyo, and we also had some freetime, but as everybody had spent most of his/her money, we didn't go to shopping centers. We just enjoyed walking in the humid city, the noise of the cicada, and felt like home. At nights we looked out of the window of the hotel, admired Tokyo and made a lot of photographs.

On the last day, we had a meeting with all members of the IFA, and we had to make a speech about our stay. I was surprised about the fact, that many people did it in English. Of course, there were numerous students who did it in Japanese, but still there was a surprising number of them who didn't.

Afterwards there was a 'question time', where we could ask some questions about things that we experienced, about what we couldn't fully understand, or anything that we were interested in. I was shocked about the questions. I don't want to write about them, but the students just questioned the necessity of uniforms, they criticised the japanese school system, they seemed to have unbelievably meaningless thoughts.

All I can ask from the students, who want to be an exchange student in Japan is to be grateful and respect every aspect of Japanese life. You should obey the rules, no matter how causeless they seem, just think about it carefully and try to find an answer yourself. Let the Japanese lifestyle absorb you, and go to the depths of the culture, try to understand it. It is the best you can do, and you can enjoy your stay without a single moment of worry.

