

## **Adventure to the Far East – Japan Journal**

July 31<sup>st</sup>

Finally arrived at the hotel after dropping my little brother and sister off at camp. Everyone is really nice. Had an amazing dinner, and ran around to everyone's rooms to eat snacks and watch TV. I'm very excited.

August 1<sup>st</sup> / 2<sup>nd</sup>

Hurray! Got a surprise at breakfast. It's my birthday, so they put a sparkler in my fruit salad, and sang me happy birthday! At the airport it took me a while to learn how to steer my luggage trolley. I learned how to apologise in Japanese REALLY fast. Japanese airplanes are really nice. There are mini TVs in the backs of the seats, and the flight attendants are very attentive. I spent the plane ride watching movies and drinking green tea. When we arrived in Tokyo we caught a bus to Yokohama. In Yokohama I was met by Yukiji Ietaka. I'd be staying at her house for two days. There are two younger girls, Nana and Natski. They live in a little apartment by a university. I'm sleeping on a futon bed on the floor in a little room off of the living room. It has tatami flooring.

August 3<sup>rd</sup>

Japan's really, really, really hot! For breakfast I had egg, fish cakes, rice, miso soup, and little dried eel thingies. We caught a ride with Yuki's friend to a welcoming party put on by the Yokohama Girl Scouts. Their uniforms are much more suited for the heat than ours. They made speeches, sang songs, and welcomed us. We visited the mayor's office, and got to meet the deputy mayor of Yokohama. Their city hall is a lot fancier than Whistler's. When we arrived back at the welcome party it was lunchtime. We got to eat a Japanese lunch. It was very yummy. We made pancakes for all the Japanese people. They were a big hit. After lunch I got to try on one of Yuki's yukatas. I felt very glamorous. Sadly, I had to take it off when we left to go on a walking tour of Yokohama. We visited Yokohama port, an old brick warehouse building, and rode a London Eye-esque ferris wheel. Then we visited a mall. Japanese fashion is very, very different from Canadian fashion. Then Yuki picked me up and took me back to the apartment.

August 4<sup>th</sup>

Today Yuki took me shopping at a very large mall. I visited a wedding kimono shop, lots of fun little boutiques, and several department stores. For lunch we went to a Japanese style place that had little plastic models of food

in the window. Sort of like a visual menu. After lunch we continued shopping. It was Yuki's husband's birthday today, so we went to the sweets market and bought him a very expensive little cake. Shopping in Japan is very expensive. We took a taxi home. Taxi drivers over here are dressed very formally, complete with white formal gloves. I can feel myself getting heat stroke just looking at them!

### August 5<sup>th</sup>

Got driven to the train station. Yuki, Nana, and Natski gave me a going away present. Natski drew me a picture. Awww... We took a really fast train from Yokohama to Nagoya, where our camp was. Once in Nagoya, we had to walk from the train station to the bus. We took a very crowded bus from there to our campsite. We checked in, and sat through the opening ceremonies, which were very long. I met some girls who I think were from Malaysia. Turns out we're sleeping in a building! I felt hot and gross after the train ride, so I had a Japanese style shower. Then Erica and I filled up the giant bathing pool with ice cold water. That certainly surprised some of the Japanese girls when they got in! They hopped in, and then hopped right back out! Oh well. It's too hot and humid for a warm bath.

### August 6<sup>th</sup>

Woke up early today. Had another shower, and walked around signing up for my free day activities. Had breakfast in the dining hall. It was....interesting.... It consisted of cold eggs, cold sausage, rice, and cold tea. Today was a free day, so we planned our exhibit for tomorrow. All the countries and different Japanese groups are going to have an exhibition about their country or prefecture. After our preparations were completed some of us took our books and sat in a nice, cold bath for *hours!* We got some very odd looks. After dinner we all got to try on yukatas. It was great fun. We all walked around, and people kept taking pictures of us. I felt like a movie star! Then we had a campfire-less campfire outside on the stage. The leaders all had to do a dance, and some Japanese girls did a drumming routine.

### August 7<sup>th</sup>

Sandwiches for breakfast. We went down and set up our Canadian booth. We had a bit of excitement when our frying pan wouldn't work for pancakes. Turns out a fuse had blown. Eventually people started coming, and I started (temporary) tattooing people. Later I ducked out to walk around all of the other exhibits. I participated in a tea ceremony, made a Japanese

craft, and met lots of people. After the exhibition was over, Theresa, Lindsay, and I did the ropes course. As we were doing this we had to keep a look out for the vipers that lived around the camp. Yikes!

### August 8<sup>th</sup>

Went to Expo today. Got up early, and had to stand in lines for the bus. Ate rice and fish wrapped in seaweed for breakfast. Same as lunch yesterday. Maybe it's the Japanese version of a sandwich? Expo was practically deserted when we got there. Turns out we're volunteering for a "Peace Ring". We walk up to people, ask them to join our peace ring, and then we all are supposed to hold hands and wish for peace. They showed us where we're supposed to stand for the ring, and then they took us back to the Girl Guide tent and told us what to do. This took a while, because they kept repeating themselves, and all of this had to be translated. We got put into groups, and told to be back at 5:00. Free at last! Expo was a lot more crowded now. We walked around to the Oceania compound, and the North and South American compounds. Then we had lunch. I had chicken nuggets and French fries. Word of caution! If you haven't eaten more than a bit of rice and fruit in a couple of days, don't pig out on junk! After lunch we visited the Asian compound, the Commercial compound, and the European compound. We didn't do much at the European and Commercial compounds, because most of the line ups were 3 hours long.

Eventually it was time to gather for the Peace Ring. We were given a T-shirt to wear and souvenirs, glow sticks, and leaflets to hand out. I went and got dinner from a little French shop right by my station. Turns out that there was one complication in this plan of me asking people to join the Peace Ring. I DON'T SPEAK JAPANESE! And not many people spoke English well enough for me to explain. Oh well. Eventually it was time for the Peace Ring. It was a very profound experience, with everyone all wishing for the same thing at the same time. After it was over we all hiked back up to the meeting spot, and we started showing everybody what we bought for souvenirs. Joanne liked an engraved coin that I had bought, so we ran DOWN the hill and back UP the hill to buy some for her family. It was fun! Then we all got on the buses to go back to camp. It was very late by the time I had a shower and found my sleeping bag.

### August 9<sup>th</sup>

A group of university students came and did a talk about peace. It lasted all day, and my bum was very numb by the end of it. Once that was over we

were told that we were moving to tents for the last two nights. So we packed up all our stuff and moved to the tents.

### August 10<sup>th</sup>

Today I went on my day trip to Sanage spa. First our bus took us to a Japanese cemetery, which we walked through on our way to a traditional Japanese house. At this house we had tea and Japanese sweets. Then we explored the house. All the rooms seem very austere. After everyone was done their tea we left to go have lunch. We went to a funky restaurant down the hill from our spa. It was sort of like a fondue place. There were platters of cut up food on the table, and you put them in a big pot of boiling liquid until they were cooked. In the meantime you could do karaoke. I did "All That Jazz" from Chicago. It was great fun. My favourite part was the cooked tofu. It was yummy!

At the bathhouse a man gave us two towels and a locker key. We went into the change rooms, and were told to strip. It took me a while to get into the bathing room because I kept trying to bring in the wrong things. First, I tried to walk in with my towel wrapped around me, but they didn't like that too much. Next, the lady pointed at the yukatas (summer kimonos), so I thought I was supposed to wear one of those. They didn't like that either. Eventually I figured out that I was just allowed to bring in a facecloth. Once we were inside we had to shower and wash our hair. Then we hopped into boiling hot tubs of water. There was one very large pool inside, and a smaller one outside in a walled garden. As well as hot tubs, there was a very, very hot sauna with a small tub of cold water with buckets so you could dump water on yourself to cool off with afterwards. I think that Karis and I may have broken a few rules by climbing into that tub!

Eventually it was time to leave the bathhouse part of the spa. We put on the bathrobe style yukatas and walked outside to the gardens. We had pictures taken of us, and the leaders bought us ice cream. After a brief incident involving spilled ice cream, sinks, blow-dryers, and eventually borrowed shorts, it was time to get back on the bus. The bus ride back to camp was much shorter than the bus ride to the spa. All in all, I do believe that this daytrip was one of the highlights of the camp.

Later that night we had a going away campfire out on the stage. Michelle was chosen to participate in a torch lighting ceremony. We got outside, and we see her holding a great big flaming stick! She was lucky. The tip of one of the other girl's stick fell right off onto the pavement. Each country/prefecture gave a little talk on what the camp meant to them, and some of them led songs or said thank-you to various people. Once

everybody had said their piece we stood in a circle and sang taps. We said goodbye to everybody, and went to our tents to pack.

### August 11<sup>th</sup>

As soon as we had gotten all our stuff from our tents the leaders told us they had found a shed viper skin on the tent next to ours. We got a ride in some of the organizer's cars to the train station. We took the bullet train from Nagoya to Kyoto. It took us 1/3 of the time it normally would have taken us. Then we took taxis from the train station to the youth hostel. We checked our bags and went to have lunch while we were waiting for it to be check in time.

After lunch we came back and checked into our rooms. The women's quarters were full, so our room was in a sectioned off end of the men's quarters. It's fairly tiny, but we all fit. There's a computer, ping pong, and a Japanese TV downstairs. We stayed up very late drinking Coke out of glass bottles and writing in our journals.

### August 12<sup>th</sup>

We visited multiple temples, the Golden Pavilion, and the Imperial palace today. The architecture of the buildings here are absolutely amazing! After lunch (McDonalds here is exactly the same as in Canada, only with smaller portions.) we visited the Kyoto Handicrafts Centre. I bought a yukata, an obi, souvenirs, and gifts. For dinner we visited a little Italian restaurant. One thing that's very different about Japan is that people are allowed to smoke in restaurants. We got back to the youth hostel very late, and confirmed that all our large luggage bags to be taken by courier to the ryokan tomorrow.

### August 13<sup>th</sup>

It actually rained today when we left to catch the train to Hiroshima. We checked our extra daypacks in lockers, and went to a Japanese version of Starbucks for lunch. Then we caught the train to Hiroshima. It was very crowded, and I ended up sleeping in the space between two seat backs. When we arrived in Hiroshima we saw an old bombed building that had been preserved and visited the Hiroshima Memorial Museum. It was very sad. We caught the train back to Kyoto, and this time we sat in seats. We ended up wandering around downtown Kyoto and eventually had to call taxis to take us to the youth hostel. Our beds are little futons on the floor, and they're actually surprisingly comfortable.

### August 14<sup>th</sup>

Today we went to a large temple that had lots of pretty statues inside. For lunch we went to a traditional sashimi place. Let's just say that raw fish is ... different. Afterwards we visited Gion Corner, a shopping district, and looked around. Then we went back to the Kyoto Handicraft Center. Karis, Joanne, Michelle, and I went to a cute little boutique across the street. We bought lots of clothes. We went back to the same part of town as our youth hostel to have dinner. We went to a reasonably fancy restaurant, and we all got lots of food. I got some very good mac and cheese.

### August 15<sup>th</sup>

We caught 3 taxis to take us to the airport. We caught a domestic flight from Kyoto to Tokyo. The domestic flight was very short. I swear, the bus ride to the International terminal at the other side of Tokyo took longer than the flight. We checked in and had a delicious dinner. We went through security and they checked our water bottles for poisonous liquids and gases. I think that airport security is much tighter here than in Canada. Eventually, water bottles cleared, we got on the plane. I watched movies, and actually managed to sleep a little. It was very sad saying goodbye to everybody.