

## The Old in the New

Skyscrapers, busy streets, and a population of over 2 million people; there's no denying that Osaka is as metropolitan as they come. During my stay in Osaka, there were countless times where I was in awe of the sheer size and modernization of the city. With its super-efficient subway lines and many shopping districts, at first glance Osaka looks like a city without a touch of anything considered old or outdated. But, this isn't true at all. Living as a temporary resident of Osaka has shown me that within this ultra-metropolitan city, there's still a sense of traditionalism that still survives today.

One of the first things I noticed about Osaka was the buildings; amazingly tall skyscrapers that seemed to go on forever into the sky, and many new ones being built. Buildings like the Umeda Sky Building are architectural and technological feats – 173 floors to the top, which has a breath-taking view of the entire city; it kind of feels like you're in the sky! However, that's mainly in the commercial areas. Once you start entering the more residential areas, it's like stepping into a different area.

And while the houses are still very Westernized, there's none of the smooth and sharp lines and angles that are quite popular with commercial buildings. Besides the difference in building structures, there's also a difference in atmosphere between residential and commercial districts: with the tall buildings and flashy signs, there seems to be a higher noise and activity level, compared to the peaceful quiet of the residential areas. It's kind of hard to believe that it was still the same city!

I really liked that about Osaka; after a fun-filled day of exploring the city, it was really relaxing to get off the bus at Ujichō and take a short walk through the neighborhood *jinja* to my host family's home. Of all the things I've done in Osaka, I think that short walk is what I will remember the most – it's

almost as if it's forever seared into my memories. I'm pretty sure if I were to go back in 5, 10, or even in 15 years, I could still find my way from the Ujicho bus stop to the front gate of my host family's house.

Another thing that really surprised me in Osaka was my host family's lifestyle. I assumed that since Osaka was a high-powered city that all of its residents would behave similarly. Boy, was I wrong! My host family is very traditional; they place a lot of value in family and connecting with others. My host mother especially – she teaches Tea Ceremony and was always imparting others with little pearls of wisdom. Not to mention that every morning at around 7am my host father would pray in their own little temple they built for their house – it takes up a whole room and is very beautiful and grand. As many people surge forward in the Age of Modernization, it was interesting to learn that there are still others who place value in tradition.

In addition, this summer in Osaka was a very hot one, and many young girls, and some boys, could be seen wearing yukata, traditional Japanese summer clothes, but with a modern twist. These yukata weren't just being worn for comfort, but there was an obvious fashion appeal to them too. Many of the girls would wear yukata in fashionable colors and designs and everything would match. From their geta to their obi to their meticulously styled hair, nothing clashed or looked out of place.

Moreover, one of the scheduled activities the I-House had planned for us was to watch bunraku, or the traditional Japanese puppet show. After learning about it in my high school Japanese class, I wanted to watch a performance, and when I learned that we would, I became very excited and I thought I would be the only young person who would be!

Before the performance, Hayano-san (who worked at the I-House), Tracey (the other student ambassador) and I looked around the mini museum exhibits they had within the theater, and I noticed that there were many kids there with their families. At first I thought that they were just dragged there by their families and were probably bored out of their minds.

Back tracking a bit: since my host parents and their friends, who also hold strong traditional values, are of the older generations, it's safe to think that it's only the older generations who have these values, right? Not in the slightest! It wasn't until we were in our seats waiting for the bunraku performances to begin, that it became apparent that none of the kids seemed bored at all. In fact, the excitement in the air was almost palpable. And after the show, there was a huge and positive response from the audience. I think it was a nice change to the American stereotype that young people don't appreciate anything from older times.

Osaka has really shown a balance between modernization and tradition. From architecture, lifestyle, fashion, and entertainment, it's not surprising that Osaka has been able to take these things to the forefront of modernization. But it's amazing how the same city has been able to keep these things, imbued with traditionalism, alive in such a high-paced society.