

“Sumimasen”

2024 Student Ambassador

Jessa Ramos Lara

09/08

Having the opportunity to go to Japan was one of the best things that's ever happened in my life. Not only was the trip a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but it was also an honor and a privilege. I am extremely grateful that my passion for studying the Japanese language paid off when I finally achieved my dream of visiting Japan. One of the many lessons my Japanese teacher has taught me over the past three years was how extremely hospitable Japanese people can be. It is no secret that Japanese people are among the most welcoming people in the world. This recurring topic of discussion has stuck with me ever since I was in Japanese 1 to the present day. Living in Osaka for 3 weeks has proven to me how generous Japanese people can be, and I am very glad I got to witness their amazing personalities myself.

During my first couple of days in Osaka, I was quite lucky to explore many different places. The Teranishis were near so many convenient stores that Maggie and I visited one every morning for breakfast and towards the end of our day to grab a quick dessert. “Konbinis” were essential for my trip; even when I was with the high school students, they always asked if we were hungry and invited us to walk to the nearest convenience store. One particular day still sticks with me; after visiting Osaka Castle with Higashi students, we were exhausted. I recommended we grab a quick snack, then sit and rest at 711. My favorite items that I would buy every single day were the smoothies they sold; they were so delicious, and during certain parts of my day, I would go out of my way to purchase them. I pick my flavor and go to the machine to blend my smoothie. Time goes by and it's still not ready, so I go see what's

happening. Suddenly, the machine shuts off, and before I can react, one of the store employees shows me a typed-up sentence in Google Translate saying, "You forgot to take off the lid, and the machine broke." "Sumimasen!" I repeated loudly and kept on repeating because of how embarrassed I felt. The employee then reassured me that everything was okay and I was extremely shocked by how well the employees reacted. It was inconvenient for them to fix the machine, but they did not seem angry with me. I guess I'm just so used to being scolded back here in America by workers that I just expected the worst. Konbini employees are, for sure, very kind towards foreigners.

Visiting the two different high schools was my most memorable experience during the three-week trip. I was very anxious about stepping into the school for the first time. I thought that the students were going to judge me since I'm a foreigner and might not make me feel welcome. I was completely wrong. As I stepped into the classroom, all I could hear was the class saying "ohh" and "ahh" as they were in some sort of trance and shocked they were in the same room as an American high school student. I sat down in my seat, and immediately the girls in the class came up to me and spoke with me. Their English wasn't the best, and neither was my Japanese, but they still tried everything they could to have a conversation. They showed so much interest and attention to anything I was saying to them. I would say something as simple as my favorite music artist, and if they knew that artist, they would react by screaming with lots of excitement. Even during PE when we would play sports, I wasn't as talented as them in volleyball, but the whole team still cheered me on just because I laid my hand on the ball. They didn't make me feel as if I were an outsider who was part of the classroom; they made me feel welcomed, and I appreciated that so much. Although at times there would be big language barriers, both the students and I had a friendly connection during classes that I will never forget.

Members from SOYNET most definitely made my trip more enjoyable. I felt so safe and cared for by the people from Osaka who organized the program. During the end-of-trip farewell party, many of the members attended to hear about all the fun different activities we did during our stay. Mrs. Teranishi created a speech and summarized her favorite parts. One topic of discussion that will forever be in my mind and probably the number one takeaway I will remember from this trip was when she pulled out our receipt from a revolving sushi restaurant and then proceeded to announce how much money we spent. "9000 yen" Every single member sat up, absolutely appalled by the price. For the next hour, that was all we talked about. How absurd it was that we paid that much money and were trying to figure out how they could fix this expensive mistake. Many of the members took their valuable time to analyze the receipt and even to the extent of calling the restaurant. I didn't think it was such a big deal, but they made sure we had no trouble during this whole trip, so they made our problem their problem in the nicest way possible.

A couple of months after my trip ended, I gained many new perspectives about Japanese culture as a student ambassador, which caused me to have more of an open mind for the rest of my life. The affable interactions between the many friends and role models I've made along the way, I will forever cherish them and have those memories influence how I live. I am extremely empathetic to the people who get to live in such a beautiful city that is surrounded by such kind-hearted people. It makes me jealous in a way that my first impressions were overjoyed simply because of the unconditional generosity I was surrounded by that I don't get to experience back here in America. I am honored to have the opportunity to connect Osaka and San Francisco and experience the differences that make these two places have their unique personalities, as well as make them sister cities.