

November 2014



**Madison**  
**From Mississauga**  
**to Japan**

*Meditating with Monks and Climbing Mountains*

皆さん、こんにちは。私の名前はマヂイです。カナダから来ました。わたしは17歳です。よろしくお願ひします。

Saying goodbye to everyone I love all within the span of an hour was quite possibly one of the most challenging things I have done to date. On the plane, I had a collection of about six letters to read, and I assure you, they only added to the waterworks. After an extremely long 13 hour plane ride, I set my first steps on Japanese soil at roughly 8:30 p.m on August 16th. I landed at Narita National Airport. I had a connection flight a few hours later to Komastu Airport.

Upon my arrival in Ishikawa Prefecture, which would be my home for the remaining 11 months, I had three out of my four host families waiting for

me. I was greeted with many handshakes and photos were taken. And being in Japan of course, everyone insisted that they would take my *many* bags of luggage to the car for me. When we arrived home, we were served a late dinner. My family recognized that I was tired as I had not slept in well over 24 hours. They allowed me to go upstairs and I unpacked my bags that night.

During my first week in Japan, I experienced some much expected, but luckily, short-lived culture shock. My host family, took me sightseeing around Kanazawa and I did things such as go to Omi-cho Fish Market to purchase fresh fish that would be used in the making of sushi later that night, visited Kanazawa Higashi Chaya District, strolled around Kenrokuen Gardens and I was even introduced to my first session of Karaoke. Being my first time at Karaoke, I was led to believe that it was quite intense, but since then, I have had my fair share of Karaoke sessions with the other exchange students, and I have realized that I was proven wrong.

In my first week I realized what a beautiful and scenic country Japan is. My city, Kanazawa, is bordered with beautiful mountains painted in the distance. It truly does make for an excellent view and an even more excellent sunrise. Japan is truly a place I am sure that will always make it difficult to describe in a few words.. Japan is so different from Canada, and never ceases to amazes me with new breathtaking landscapes.

As for the school aspect: I attend school 5 days a week from 8:05 - 3:55. I attend seven 50-minute classes daily, as well as a lunch break. When I first started school, it was quite an out-of-body experience. I received (and still do, but to a lesser extent) many stares and the word "kawaii" (cute) being yelled at me. I find it to be funny that I am in a 9th grade class with the students two years younger than I am, calling me cute.

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I have even had girls write down “speeches” about how they would like to be my friend and read them to me in broken English. However, I must admit, all of the attention was and still tends to be quite the confidence booster.

Japanese high school is completely different from a Canadian high school. For my first weeks attending school, I found it to be very difficult to cope and adjust. However, I assure you that I have made the transition and I am now enjoying school! (As much as a 17-year old teenager can really enjoy school, that is). At the beginning of every class, we must stand up and bow to our teacher as we say, “onegaishimasu”, meaning “please” and at the end of every lesson we must bow to our teacher as we say, “arigatou gozaimashita”, meaning “thank you”. I was quite shocked the first time this happened. At school, I study in every class and am proud to say that I only sleep in about one class per week! I find Japanese to be quite difficult. However, as I continue to study in every class from my multiple textbooks, attend Japanese lessons twice a week, and practice first-hand through communication with my friends and host parents, I am improving everyday!

The food here is truly amazing. I have a motto: “Try every food at least once. You never know if you like something until you try it! There is always a first for everything, and who knows, maybe it’s a last as well, but you don’t know until you try!” I’ve had some crazy food already in my first few months! For instance, does pickled plum candy (umeboshi ame) sound appetizing? I didn’t think so either until I tried it. I was right. But I wouldn’t have known unless I tried! Other than that, there are many delicious dishes such as okonomiyaki (savoury pancakes), yakisoba (fried noodles), yakuniku (grilled meat), and of course, sushi, tempura and sashimi.

Since being in Japan, I have already done some incredible things that I am very privileged to have gotten to experience. I have visited Osaka and Kyoto with my first host family.

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We went to many temples and Universal Studios Japan. I have done meditation with Monks at a Buddhist temple, climbed a mountain to visit a shrine, relaxed in an onsen, (naked bath) which I found to be quite rejuvenating, and many other once in a life-time experiences. I have also made the decision to become pescetarian, meaning I only eat fish. I find it to be quite easy in Japan as fish is the most commonly eaten main course. On another note, I suppose I am just trying this new thing out where I'm trying to be a better person and in hopes of finding myself in the process. I can admit that these past few months have had ups and downs, as expected, but the good days have outweighed the bad by far. I've already learned so much, and yes, believe it or not, I've already changed a ton as well. I'm growing and changing everyday and I love it. I am definitely not the same person as I was when I left Canada, and I'm going to continue to grow as a person. Get ready for me Toronto.

ありがとうございました、良い一日を。

*Madi*