



Katy

from Milton
to
Japan

こんにちは (konnichiwa)

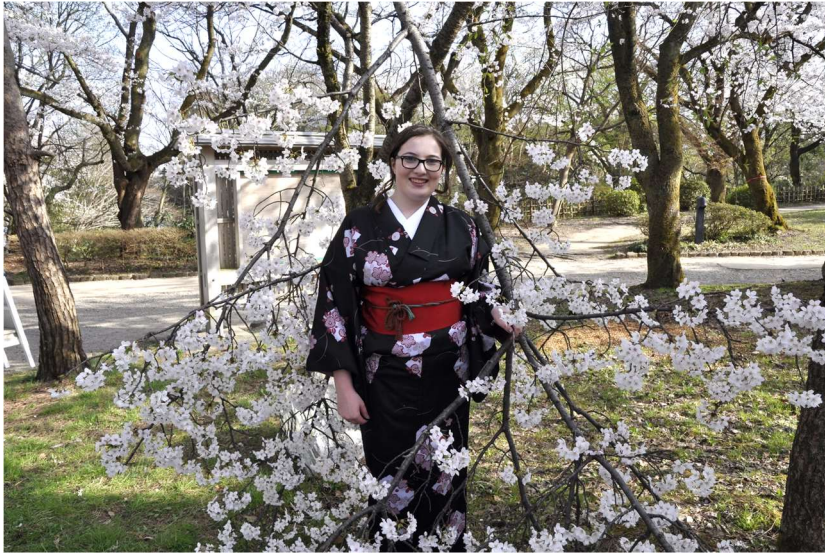
It's hard to believe that my time in Japan is almost over, I am still in denial. It has been nine months since I arrived in Japan and I have a month and half left. It has gone by so fast it feels as though time itself has sped up. Over the past nine months I have created friendships with so many different people, learned everything I could and took every opportunity that came my way. Many people came into my life this year and I couldn't thank each and every one of them enough, from host families to teachers, my friends at school, or other exchange students and Rotary members. Coming to Japan opened my eyes to a new culture, language and new people, I couldn't imagine spending my exchange year anywhere else.

Since the last BeaverTale I've gone on a few trips with both my host families and Rotary, as well as experience a new school year which started at the beginning of spring. Over the past months my red jacket got heavier I met new people and made even more friends.

Last time I wrote was in February, right after writing that BeaverTale I went on a trip with my host mom to meet up with my host brother in Kyoto and then to be joined by my host sister. We were on a three day, two night trip to Kyoto and Osaka. The first day we spent exploring Kyoto, we went to Kinkakuji, a golden temple and to Nijo castle a castle that was opened in 1601. The second day we went to Universal Studios Japan, that was just my host mom, my host sister and I, we spent the day walking around, going on rides, and just having a fun time. The last day we spent exploring Osaka the four of us, going to Osaka Castle and Old Osaka before my host mom and I headed back to Toyama and my host siblings went back to their homes.

At the end of February I was able to go skiing with my Rotary Club at a Ski Hill an hour away from Toyama City. We spent the day on the hill going up the gondola and talking. It was a really fun day with some of the members of my host club.

At the beginning of March I was able to spend a day with a few of the other exchange students, and some of our host moms. We went to Kanazawa and to Kenrokuen, a park in the middle of Kanazawa City. The park has six flowers that bloom throughout the year and we were hoping to see plum blossoms but unfortunately they were late blooming this year so we only saw a few. We also went to Kanazawa castle to and learned how they built castles in Japan. We finished off the day spending it in the old part of Kanazawa on a beautiful lookout over Kanazawa city.



A couple of days after being in Kanazawa I got the amazing opportunity to go and buy a Kimono, It was a reused store that sold certain used Kimonos for around 1000 yen (Ten Dollars Canadian). It was an unbelievable opportunity! I had help trying it on from people who didn't even work at the store. One lady was a Kimono teacher and she

helped me pick out what Obi (Kimono belt) I wanted. I had the opportunity to wear the my Kimono during cherry blossom season in April. I am so excited to bring it home.

At the end of March I was able to go on a four day three night trip Rotary trip to Hiroshima and Osaka. The first day we spent the morning travelling to Hiroshima, once we arrived we were able to explore around the station for a bit before going to Miyajima. Miyajima is an island just off of Hiroshima that has a beautiful shrine called Itsukushima and little town on it. The shrine has a torii gate just off of the beach and at low tide it is easy to walk out to it and during high tide it looks as if it floating on the water.



On the island was also the first glance we had of cherry blossoms. We then made our way back into Hiroshima for the rest of the night.

The second day we went to the atomic bomb museum and dome. It was really sad to see all the destruction caused by the nuclear bombs that were dropped in both Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War Two. It was also inspiring to see how Japan made it through the tragedy. I was always interested in history so it was really interesting to me but still very hard to read some of the outcomes. We also visited the children's memorial, it is a memorial with a little girl holding an origami crane over her head to represent all the children that were affected by the bomb when it was dropped and for the years to come. The crane represents Japanese tradition. The tradition states that if you make a thousand cranes, you will be granted a wish. After spending the morning at the museum and memorials we went to the train station to head to Osaka. We had the rest of the night to relax and spend time with each other. The next day we spent at Universal Studios Japan, it was a busy day being that spring break had just started but we had such fun. The group I was with decided to play Heads Up on one of the girls phones while we were in line to pass the time. It was a fun day spent with the other exchange students. The next and final day to our trip we went to Osaka Castle and Shinsaibashi, a huge shopping center in order to do some shopping. Too soon it was over and we headed back to our host cities and our host families. It was a really fun adventure and one I will always have treasured memories.

The next major thing to happen in Japan was cherry blossom season. The whole season lasts only seven to ten days but I was able to go to a couple of different parks to get pictures. Another exchange students also purchased a Kimonos and were able to go together to get some really amazing and fun photos. In total during cherry blossom season in Toyama City I was able to get around seven hundred photos!!! In Japan going to see the cherry blossoms is called "Ohanami", in Japanese it translates into flower watching. At all the parks people were just playing or having picnics or walking around, it was fun and beautiful to see.

Another place I went was to the base of Mt.Fuji on a trip with my host mom,



her friend and the Australian exchange student she was hosting. We went to Nagano and Yamanashi prefectures, it was a three day two night trip. We went to Suwa City in Nagano for the first day and night before taking the next morning to get to the base of Mt.Fuji. We spent that afternoon exploring, we went to a park with a beautiful look out that you could get to after a four hundred stair climb. The view was so worth it.

At the top they had a beautiful shrine called Arakura Sengen along with the shrine was a five story Pagoda surrounded by cherry trees in blossom.

At the base of Mt. Fuji there are two caves we entered that were created by a volcanic eruption around 1707. The caves hold ice almost year round and they were used as natural refrigerators, the first one went twenty one meters down and most times we had to duck so we wouldn't hit our heads. Our final day we went to Kawaguchiko, or lake Kawaguchi to see Mt.Fuji one last time before we headed home. On the way home we stopped at Matsumoto castle in Nagano before making it back to Toyama City.

With that trip over I got ready to head back to school after the two week spring break. Japan's school year runs April to March, meaning that when I got back to school I moved up a grade. Going from second to third year I was able to stay in a class with some of my friends but it also gave me the opportunity to meet new people and have some new teachers. Going back to school we also changed principals so we welcomed the new principal and the new teachers at the opening ceremony the first day back.

The week after I started school I switched to my fourth and final host family. My new host family has two children. My host sister is fifteen and in first year of high school and my host brother is seventeen and in Australia on exchange. A few days after I moved in with them I got the opportunity to meet my host mom's friend that is from Japan but lives in Australia and were here with two of their friends visiting Toyama. The group of us got to learn how to make Soba a thin noodle made out of buckwheat flower. We learned from my host mom's cousin who has been making soba for ten years. It was a really cool opportunity.

Since moving in with this host family I have been able to go strawberry picking, to a rice cracker factory, I got to paint a clay dog, and went up to Tateyama.

It has been a busy past few months and I wouldn't trade any of it. I have so much more coming in the next few months, including ziplining, a thirty minute presentation, and a couple more little day trips.

Being on exchange has opened my eyes to a new part of the world and I couldn't be more thankful. It is sad to think that in a month and a half I will be completely saying goodbye to the city I have called home for the past nine months and the people who have come to be a second family. This whole experience has been amazing and I can never find the words that explain it perfectly. Through this exchange I figured out what I want my future to be and how I want to spend it. It has taught me to live in the moment, and showed me that pictures can capture the best moments of your life and bring a memory to you every time you look at them. I have learned and found that the bonds I have with international friends is crazy strong. I have learnt, tried, and experienced many things, I have laughed till it hurt, smiled at almost everything but I have also shed a few tears. I know when leaving it won't be a goodbye because I could never truly say goodbye to this city, the people or the memories. Thanks to each and every Rotarian that has made this opportunity possible.

さようなら (Sayonara), *Katy*