



Emma

from
Burlington and
Burlington Lakeshore
to
Japan

運と変化

A little over a year ago in late October, I was running late for school due to a cold. In fact, I almost didn't attend school at all that day. However, I'm glad I did, as that day changed my life. That day, a Rotary member gave a presentation to the grade ten and elevens about Rotary Youth Exchange. At the time, I knew absolutely nothing about it. Yet, after that presentation, I kept thinking about the prospect of traveling to a different country and spent the remainder of the day chatting with my friends and imagining "what if." I knew I wanted to travel, possibly go on an exchange, but an entire year? I was nervous and unsure, but I came to the conclusion that this was what I wanted. I was determined to get a place in the program. One year later? Here I am—in Japan! It may sound overused, sappy, and cliché, but despite the impact this has had on my life, there's nowhere I'd rather be. One year ago, I had no idea I would be on this incredible journey nor did I know where my future lay, yet, here I am.



Since arriving in Japan I've been learning to adapt to the culture. Everyone here is very polite and encouraging whenever they see a foreigner attempting to learn Japanese. It's always reassuring to know that when I'm trying to practice new vocabulary, I won't get made fun of for any mistakes I might make. Respect is a very large part of the culture and while it can be a little challenging at times, especially when you're unaware of the expectations set for you (this can sometimes lead to awkward situations), it's definitely worth it. Each stumble, and every misstep is a new learning opportunity. Surprisingly, it has been the small differences in language and culture that have been the strangest to adapt to. For example, on more than one occasion, I've attempted to translate a common Canadian greeting or phrase only to have confused faces greet me back. From "how are you" to "have a nice day" I was really surprised to see how much these otherwise common little things are expressed differently.

I haven't traveled very far in Japan yet, but I'm looking forward to my many adventures to come. I have a short bucket list for my time in Japan and the more I hear about all the interesting and exciting things to do around here the bigger it gets. Traveling, owl cafes, bullet trains, and kimonos, there is definitely no shortage of things to do. I may not get to do everything I have planned, but I'm still going to do as much of it as physically possible (I can't wait to go paragliding off a mountain!).

I have gone to Kanazawa and a few other places many times during my stay here so far, and I've gotten pretty good with the public transit. And, where it's easier to travel, travel will happen more often. Even when I'm not going up to meet with friends or do anything specific I still find it fun to just ride the train to see where it takes me. Through this, I've found a lot of fun and beautiful spots to eat, have fun, or just sit and admire the view (sometimes with a little ukulele playing). As nice as it can be to have a plan and know where you're going, I've found that it can also be fun to simply see where the wind takes you.



The fact that this exchange was even possible, let alone having it happen to me is by far the luckiest I've ever been, and one of the best decisions I've even made. While I've always known I wanted to travel, I never thought something this perfect, even the opportunity for it, would come to be. That's not to say it's been easy, or without its own troubles, but I made it. I'm here in Japan and doing something that I've always wanted to do, something that makes me immeasurably grateful. I don't think I will ever be able to find the words to express my gratitude for this life. I never knew this was what I needed, but I know that every day I am here, be it good, bad, or what's come to be 'normal', in the back of my mind in every second is the excitement and ecstatic happiness that I'm able to experience it at all. So thank you, every single one of you, for helping me on my way and making my life what it is today.

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ソーラ・エマ / *Emma Soler*