

A Lifelong Dream 欢乐

Hayden Bye's Personal Account of his Student Exchange Experience in Japan

I first found out about American Sweden Exchange (ASSE) through my Guidance Counselor. I began the process of fulfilling my lifelong dream (of becoming an exchange student in Japan) by filling out a preliminary application online. The ASSE then sent me the full application. In it, I had to fill out more forms, create a photo collage and write an essay (this being for a scholarship that the ASSE offers). I won the scholarship for English Canada. It covered 90% of the program's cost – and with that off I went to Japan for a student exchange. I was in Japan from March 2008 to January 2009.

My journey to Japan began at the Winnipeg Airport. I flew from Winnipeg to Los Angeles where I met all the other North American ASSE exchange students going to Japan. We then departed together on a 15 hour flight to Narita Airport the next day. There we met up with representatives from PIEE (The Japanese end of the exchange program). We ate a meal and sent our suitcases to our Japanese homes then left for a one week orientation at the Tokyo Memorial Olympic Youth Center where we met other exchange students from all over the world; Canada, US, Australia, Finland, and Thailand. We were given a crash course on Japanese language and culture to help us prepare for the challenges of adapting to a new country and culture. We also made good friends and for a lot of us this was one of the best memories from Japan.

Over the duration of my exchange I stayed with three different families. The first, the Endos, lived in Chiba which is about 40 minutes from Tokyo. I stayed with the Endos Family from March to September. They had a son and a daughter but both were in their 30's and lived away from home. They also had a shiatsu dog. The second family I stayed with, the Hories, lived in Ichikawa which is about 20 minutes from Tokyo. I stayed with them for one week. They had three daughters. The third family I stayed with were the Hiranos who lived in Kisarazu which is about 80 minutes from Tokyo. They also had a daughter in her 30's who lived away from home. All of the families were great. They made me feel comfortable and welcomed me warmly.



Hayden and some of the other exchange students in Ashikaga



Hayden Bye during a trip to Northern Japan

The families that I stayed with taught me many things about life in Japan. One of the biggest things was language. The situation forced me to learn the language but it was still hard at first to communicate. I also taught them about Canada and Canadian culture and enjoyed cooking them food I normally eat here.

I was lucky to be placed in one of Chiba prefectures top schools – Shibuya Makuhari High School. The Shibuya Makuhari High School schedule was from Monday to Saturday with a half day on Saturday. Traveling to school took a lot longer than it does in Canada. It took me anywhere from 20 - 45 minutes to an hour and a half to get to school depending on the household I was staying at. I traveled by a combination of different methods i.e., bus, train and walking. School began at 8:20 a.m. and went until 3:20 p.m. but that wasn't the end of the school day. After school ended for the day nearly everyone stayed for a club or after school activity which could go as late as 7:00 p.m. Clubs ranged from sports teams to band, to comic clubs. You name it. I took part in the Karate club. The school taught subjects similar to ours but you didn't have the same classes every day. Class went by a weekly schedule. For example you could have chemistry at 10:00 a.m. Monday, 1:00 p.m. Wednesday and 9:00 a.m. Friday. The school also taught a very aggressive English program.



Hayden doing a speech at a school festival

In my free time, I liked to explore Japan. I went on lots of trips to Tokyo which was fairly close to all of the homes that I stayed at. I also traveled to northern Japan, near Sendai and Yamagata, with my first host mother. There I visited her family and got a taste of rural life in Japan. With my school I traveled to Nagasaki. There I got to see the city which has a very high Christian population. Some of the things I did while visiting Nagasaki was to visit the nuclear bomb memorial museum and a penguin aquarium. I also traveled to Ashikaga with PIEE with some of the exchange students. We got to go to a Japanese camp and had a home-stay with a local family. One of the coolest things that I saw there were two wild monkeys. I also attended a two-day music festival and two MMA events throughout the year. At the music festival I saw the likes of Trivium, The Sex Pistols, Bedouin Soundclash, Death Cab for Cutie and Lostprophets. The MMA events were really good and I saw some of the best fighters in the world. The second event I saw was on New Years Eve. It's called FIELDS Dynamite and is the epitome of Japanese MMA. It lasted 7 hours. Last but not least I loved Japanese food and drink. Be it from a 4 star restaurant or Japan's amazing convenience stores and vending machines. Japan was an amazing place. I loved its quirks and oddities and the warm hospitality I was met with. It left a lifelong impression on me, that I will carry with me throughout my life. I'm really glad I had this experience.



Hayden and his classmates in Nagasaki