

JAPAN EXPERIENCE

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(AFS students 2008-2009)



In the year 2008 until early 2009, I experienced ten months of cultural exchange in Japan. Under the JENESYS scholarship, my stay there was supported by AFS Japan and I lived with my host family that they selected by careful screening.

I lived in Futamatagawa, located in the Asahi ward of Yokohama which is the city of Kanagawa Prefecture. It is the second largest city by population in Japan, next to Tokyo. Since my school is located in another city, I had to travel the opposite direction of my city using the Sagami railway. Every day, I would have to walk (or run) to the bus stop for about 10 minutes. The bus journey to the station would take around 10 minutes too and depending on time, I would usually have to rush to catch my train. It is very hectic in Japan, especially during the rush hour, and trains are usually full. I had to change trains at Yamato City to Minami-Rinkan station, and from there, I would have to walk to school for 20 minutes.

Comparing the subjects I studied at Yamato-Nishi High School with Brunei, I would say that it is equivalent to 'O' Level year. My school was not an international school but their English standards were very good, so I experienced an interschool exchange with Zama High School, located in the American base. I had school trips to museums and even helped with some interschool competitions, so I enjoyed many valuable experiences as a high school student. Time as a student there is invaluable and I believe that studying there as a university student is vastly different than actually experiencing high school there.

Due to my ties with AFS, I also had many trips that would help to understand different cultures more and also had a short stay with another host family in Ibaraki. Other than that, they also organized a visit to an elementary school which further opened my eyes to the education system. I believe that was one of the more memorable trips I experienced. Children were very aware of the worldly happenings and were very concerned about wars and hunger, I was amazed. Other than field trips, AFS also sent us to summer camp and as a Bruneian, those camps are non-existent here and I appreciated that experience.

For students who want to study in Japan, presumably to attend universities, I would highly advise studying the language and culture, and if possible, the history. Learning the proper etiquette is important because you will definitely experience culture shock while being there, and being prepared is important. Learning from your friends there would be an important asset. As my experiences would be different from those who studied in Japan for years, this would be more useful for those wishing to join the cultural exchange programs. What to look out for would be transportation. I find the train system very convenient and really helpful.

In conclusion, Japan would be an ideal place to study for those who love to experience culture and foreign language, on top of the studying aspect. Experience there would be very invaluable and one of a kind.