

Tasuku Asada

I am a rather shy person. During the study session before this trip, I didn't talk to other students much and I was very nervous to leave Japan. However, I became close to all students and I think I changed a lot during the trip.

There are so many things that impressed me. One of the most memorable things is friendliness of the people in US. My host family members were Tom, the dad, Lisa the mom, and Nick, the son. We went to see the USS Constitution on Host Family Day. I was surprised that Lisa asked many questions even to the strangers. The tour guide joked a lot and people laughed together a lot. It seemed to be easy to become friends with American people.

Another thing was that people were so kind. My host family always made sure that I was all right and they taught me a lot about American life. And everyone else – people at the shops and stores, teachers and students of Bishop Elementary School, Ottoson Middle School, and Arlington High School – was extremely kind as well.

Lastly, I was surprised at American food. The boxes of cereal for breakfast filled the shelves and they serve huge dinner!

Also, I think our group is the best. We understand each other, share our joy and sorrow, and take care of each other. I would love to visit Arlington again with the same group of teachers and students.

Ayako Asai

There are so many wonderful memories from this trip to Arlington. The best one was the Cherry Blossom Festival and the dance party afterwards.

So many people came to festival, both young and old. We performed Naruko-dance, Nagaokakyo dance, and the songs we had practiced in Japan. I was nervous, but people liked it so much and I was happy.

When I entered the Dance Party, I was surprised by the volume of music. The students of Arlington were already dancing happily and they invited me into their circle. I enjoyed it right away. Some Japanese students, who are usually quiet and shy, were dancing wildly as if they were different people!

Host Family Day was another great memory. We went to the restaurants, shopping, and enjoyed BBQ with other host families. It was so much fun.

I couldn't help crying at the Farewell Party, thinking about wonderful host family whom I spent ten days with and many other kind people whom we met. When I think of Arlington now, I still feel like crying, because I miss them.

I also treasure the friendship with the other members of this group. I would love to study at Arlington High School for a year in the future. Thank you so much!

Ayaka Fukui

Those ten days in Arlington was extremely exciting. I spoke English using a lot of expressions I had learned before the trip and made many friends. When I met my host family, I wasn't sure how I should say hello to them and if I would be able to communicate well with them. May, the ten years old girl in the family, asked me many questions on the way home. Some questions were difficult for me to understand. She took out the small white board and wrote down question for me. She always listened to my answer with patience and I could take time. Thanks to her, I learned the joy of speaking English!

They bought me a sweater and other stuff on the host family day. They took such good care of me, too. My heart was filled with gratitude for their kindness and hospitality. I will study English even harder, so that next time I go to Arlington, they will see my improvement. I am so grateful to my host family, my twenty fellow Nagaokakyo students who made this trip so much fun, and the teachers who helped us study and prepare for this trip. Thank you very much!

Mao Hasegawa

This ten-day trip to Arlington was an extremely rich and stimulating experience. Food was different and the town looks so much different from that of Japan.

The biggest difference was school. Teachers don't write much on the board and students were taking notes in their own ways. Students also speak up a lot during the class and they are very active and lively.

Everyone I met in Arlington – host family, neighbors, and all people of Arlington – were kind and friendly. Despite my worry that if I'd be able to converse with them, their friendliness relaxed me eventually and I was able to enjoy talking to them. Of course, there were many things I didn't understand. But they used gestures and such to make me understand. I really enjoyed talking with them.

They took such good care of us that I am very grateful to the people of Arlington. And the best legacy of this trip is the friendship with the entire member of our students group. We visited places and experienced many things together. I don't think I could have done so many things if it hadn't been for the support from them. I will always treasure this friendship and would love to visit Arlington with them again.

I am certain that this experience will affect my future. I would love to do the kind of work that enables me to travel all around the world. I will keep challenging myself to push the limit!

Misaki Katayama

I lived with Arlington family from April 25th to May 5th. My host family lived in such a big house that I couldn't believe that there were only five family members. The house was three-story and there was even a basement.

The family was very kind. When we talked, they were patient and allowed us to take time. They also took us shopping. The 8 years old son showed us around the house and 14 years old daughter played with us using Wii. She was so cute that she was on US magazine "Seventeen"! When we visited Ottoson Middle School, she introduced us to many of her friends, took us to classrooms, and stayed with us whole day.

I met many people in US and they were all very kind. When we went through immigration at the airport, I had thought the officers looked stern and scary, but they were actually very nice. People at schools were also very supportive and kind. Store clerks helped us with smiles and I thought Americans are such kind people. They are open-minded and friendly. I hope to be someone like that myself from now on.

Mako Kawakami

There are so many things I learned in Arlington and I want to write about two of them.

First, you can be family and friends even if your English is not good. My host family took me to the folk dance party on the Host Family Day. I met five girls of my age there. All I could say was “yeah” and I didn’t understand most of what they were saying. However, I had so much fun with them. They said I was their friend and one of them even said I was her best friend. Now we are keeping in touch. We couldn’t communicate with language, but still had wonderful time.

Second, I learned the importance of individuality. I was surprised very much during school visits. Each student was very unique. Some have their nails painted, some wear pierces and other jewelry. They also dress differently. I thought they all looked great. It’s not only how they look. They were all very different and unique, yet get along well with each other. Different dresses, different personalities and still in harmony. I liked the fact that they understand and respect each other.

I learned many other valuable lessons from this trip and I grew as a person. I am so glad I participated in this program. I want to thank people who run this program, my parents, the friends who shared this trip, and all kind people I met in US!

Kiko Kawase

The ten days we spent in Arlington were filled with so many memories. I had been very nervous on my very first trip abroad. However, the moment my host mother called my name upon our arrival at Arlington, all my nervousness disappeared.

Everything I saw and I did in Arlington was new discovery. I learned so much from middle school students in our group as well. My host family was the nicest people, who took such a good care of me despite their busy schedule. I cherish the memories with them – going to the amusement park, the walk with Cody, shopping, etc. Sometimes we had a language barrier, but I used the words I knew and we managed to communicate.

At the departure, I could not stop crying. When my host family gave me hugs, I was so grateful to them and I wished I could tell them exactly how I felt. If only my English had been better! I learned the importance of being positive and open and they gave us so many memories. Now I regard English as the real tool to communicate, not just academic subject. My experiences are so precious that I cannot even express with words.

Ayu Kimura

This is the third time I applied this program. Finally I made it! I am so glad I didn't give up. I always wanted to visit Arlington. So it wasn't hard for me to talk to many people there. Everyone was friendly and open. I loved them all so much.

The school visits were very interesting. There were so many differences from Japanese schools and I enjoyed them very much.

I got many “Kizuna” in Arlington, (Rieko's note: Kizuna means “bond” and it became a slogan for the recovery and rebuilding effort after 2011 Earthquake for the entire nation) which I will always cherish. I will never forget my gratitude to my host family. I also want to thank everyone who are involved this program. I wish more people learn about this program. Thank you so much for the opportunity!

Tomoki Kude

Among many things I learned in Arlington, the most important thing was the connection with people. On the sixth day in Arlington, I stepped on my digital camera and broke it. I got very upset, though my friends took photos with their cameras for me. Next day, three cameras were delivered to me! I learned that my host mother had sent out an email, asking for camera I could borrow. I used one of them for the rest of the stay. The camera was better than my own and I got better photos. I really appreciated the kindness of everybody who responded to her email.

The most enjoyable memory was that I made many friends by playing sports. I played basketball at Ottoson Middle School. Everyone was kind and supportive. I would love to play with them again. Sports really connect us quickly and it is a part of communication.

Since we started the study session, the entire six months have gone very quickly. I learned so many new things and it was sometimes overwhelming. But I overcame everything because I had all these wonderful friends who shared all experienced together. Thank you so much for giving us this precious opportunity. I am so lucky to have such wonderful 20 comrades! Thank you!

Akiho Maeda

I had two objectives of this trip; To talk to as many people in Arlington as possible and to make as many new friends as possible. However, I had been a little sick when we left Nagaokakyo. The dry air in the airplane didn't help, either. When we arrived Arlington, I had no voice to speak.

My host mother gave me cough drops and told me to eat them every two hours. I was touched by her kindness and also excited about the fact that I could understand her words. My voice came back on the third day. I was getting used to this new environment and now that I was healthy, I wanted to talk to more people.

During the elementary and middle school visit, I felt shy at the beginning because I was nervous about my English ability. But once I started, everyone listened intently with smiled to my English with a lot of gestures. Even the students who didn't know us at all gave us high fives. It made me very happy.

When I tried my best to communicate my thoughts and wills, the others tried to understand me as well and I made many new friends. This made me want to improve my English more.

And I really liked my fellow students from Nagaokakyo. Everyone was positive, supportive, and so cheerful. Our team spirit was great. I would love to visit Arlington again with this group.

Lastly, but not the least, thank you so much for everyone who supported this program!

Hatsune Nakakoji

The people in US were big and their hearts were kind and friendly. My host family was three-member. I felt nervous, but they welcomed me with open arms. I was glad they liked my gifts. They took me to the museum of modern arts on the host family day. We took the buses and subways, so I got to enjoy exploring the city of US.

During the shadowing at Ottoson, I was surprised that students move from a classroom to another between each class. The hallway was very noisy during that time, but many students said hi to me and I thought it was very nice of them. They also talked me a lot during the class and I felt the differences between the classes of Japan and US. I enjoyed the entire day.

Though we stayed in Arlington for only eight days, the welcome we received was so warm and we enjoyed all communication and exchanges. My heart is filled with gratitude.

Megumi Nakamura

I set a goal before the trip. My goal was to be actively communicate with others during the trip. I managed to get close to the fellow members of the students group from Nagaokakyo during our study session and felt I could do the same in Arlington.

When I arrived there, I couldn't understand most of other people's English. But I didn't want to be passive. I tried hard to talk a lot with my host family even though I wasn't sure if I could make myself understood. They all listened to me very intently and I really appreciated it. And I realized how much fun to communicate using English.

We visited schools and sat in classes. American students wouldn't hesitate to ask questions if they had something to ask. I was surprised by their boldness. I think I succeeded about 80% of my goal in Arlington. I think I will try to achieve the rest of 20% in Japan, now that I learned that attitude in US. Arlington gave me so many wonderful memories. I am so grateful to my host family, teachers, friends, and many people who have been involved in this program. Thank you all so much!

Soichiro Nakamura

I love US! All Americans we met were very friendly. During the Ottoson Middle School visit, many students came and talked me, which helped me to get over my nervousness. They taught me so much. They introduced me to more friends, saying “This is my Japanese friend!” and I got more and more friends. I felt ashamed of Japanese lack of interest to the others. This friendliness must be the strength of US, “The Land of The Free”.

I shared so many wonderful things with this wonderful group of Nagaokakyo students. I would be afraid of nothing if I’m with them! Though I don’t know if this group will be all together again in the future, I am so happy to be a part of such a great group.

Thank you, teachers and family who supported us throughout this program, the kind people on Arlington, and all friends!

Ayumi Ogawa

This trip has changed me. Before it, I had been shy and could not lead the conversation with others. I wanted to have real cultural exchange with the people whom I have never met in the foreign country with different language and culture. So my goal was to be strong and be active.

Thought I had thought I would get more nervous when the departure came close, I found myself rather excited than nervous. I think it was due to the study session we had for six months. It wasn't just English we studied, but also the courage I got from the friends who are all going together. That friendship had been nurtured during those six months.

Once we arrived, I tried hard. I used a hundred phrases I learned in the conversation and became more talkative later. I made new friends and my host family always tried hard to understand me. Their kindness really touched my heart. I was happy to have courage to talk!

My another goal was to spread the culture of Japan in Arlington. I brought Uchiwas (fan) with the names of host family members in Chinese characters, the scrapbook about myself and Japanese seasons and traditions, which I made, as gifts. Host family liked them and they showed a lot of interest in Japanese culture. Lilian, my host sister also made me a scrapbook as a surprise! I absolutely treasure it.

I am so grateful to everyone supported this program, Host family, friends, my family. I will keep in touch with new friends and my host family. I will be back to Arlington, I promise!

Takeshi Ohmura

What would you do if you are at a class or a meeting and asked if there are questions?

Americans and Japanese would react very differently. Ottoson students asked a lot of questions and I learned that it was a very common to do so in US. However, Japanese students would hardly do so because they would feel shy and the atmosphere is not very encouraging.

There are so many things that surprised me in daily life; they don't take bath daily and they wear shoes inside their homes. Under those circumstances, I tried just to accept it, rather than understand. I didn't understand many things during the stay in US. It would have been much less pleasant to live there if I had tried to understand everything. I felt like that at the beginning, but once I accepted the things that I didn't understand, I felt so much more comfortable to live there and I learned more.

I believe you can apply that kind of attitude everywhere, not just abroad. When your classmate seems to be very different and hard to understand, it would be much better if you just accept his personality rather than avoiding him. Our school life would be more diverse and more fun.

I also believe that this way of thinking broadens my perception and capacity in the future when I am out of school. In that regard, the experiences in Arlington are extremely precious and I am grateful to the City of Nagaokakyo and teachers who helped me to visit Arlington. Thank you so very much!

Seira Okuma

I had looked forward this visit to Arlington. And I had so many experiences during the 10 days. Every day went by so quickly since there were new discoveries and surprises.

My host family was five-member. They were all very cheerful, always singing and dancing. I danced with them and loved it. I found singing and dancing to be great tools to get close to them, since I had difficulty expressing myself with English.

Fashion was another communication tool. There were two girls in family, thirteen years old and fourteen years old. We went to shopping together and did our nails together. I got especially close to the younger girl, Bella. She taught me many things, played game with me, and we talked a lot.

But the departure came too soon. I could not part myself from Bella. I promised to come to see her again when my English improve a lot more. That now is my goal. This visit to Arlington gave me a new motivation and also it has changed me. The memory of this trip is my treasure. Thank you so very much!

Momoka Sakaguchi

I felt a lot of warmth from students and teachers of Ottoson Middle School. When we were walking hallway, many students said hi even though we didn't know each other at all. I don't think we would say hi to American visitors at our middle school. I thought it was quite normal, but now I think we are too shy. I want to be more friendly like American students.

Also I thought there wasn't barrier between male students and female students. At the industrial design class, I saw a girl couldn't drill a hole on the wood board. Next moment, many students, both girls and boys went to help her. I saw many similar scenes throughout the day and I was very impressed.

The class format was very different from that of Japan. It looks like a discussion rather than a lecture. No one was asleep and many students were commenting actively. The classes seem to be a lot of fun. I wish Japanese classes were like that.

It was great to experience the school life with my own eyes.

Chiharu Tsuchida

The first opportunity to use English was at immigration check at San Francisco Airport. We were questioned by scary looking officers, but I managed to answer their questions. I felt then that our trip had really started. My host family was very kind and I was glad when I managed conversation with them in English.

I learned a lot through many experience in Arlington. Among all, I treasure the bond that I developed with other students of Nagaokakyo. Throughout the six months of English lessons and dance rehearsals, our team spirit has become very strong. As a group, there were always laughter and smiles. I hope our friendship will last forever. Thank you so very much.

Yumina Uchida

I chose Nishi-Otokuni High School because of this exchange program with Arlington. However, it wasn't that I had particular interest in English language. I just liked music and movies of US and English was a part of them. And I applied this program. The study session begun in October and finally we spent ten days in Arlington. So much to feel and think! Above all, the kindness and warmth of people touched me profoundly, not to mention the power of smiles.

Though I often felt frustrated with lack of my ability to speak English, the people in Arlington removed my negative feelings by their smiles and effort to communicate with me. My thoughts turned around toward the opposite direction and I felt more motivation to learn English, so that I could talk with them more.

The other thing I learned is that music is the universal language. What a gift! We can connect our hearts through music. That was an extremely valuable lesson I learned through this trip.

Including the study session before the trip, everything was an amazing experience. I would love to visit more countries and meet many people. I would like to get inspired as much as inspiring others. I will make an effort to be worthy!

Sae Urakawa

This was my first trip abroad and I left Japan filled with anxiety. It was hard enough to sit alone on the plane, apart from other students to begin with. I didn't know what to do and felt panic. The foreigner next seat kindly helped me, but my TV monitor didn't work and I slept through most of the flight. It wasn't a good start.

And the very different life had started. To tell you the truth, I didn't enjoy it at all until Host Family Day. The language barrier and different food made me homesick. On the Host Family Day, we went to the beach and I picked sea glass. And we danced together that night. Finally, I felt comfortable and close with my host family members.

After that, time just went flying. The Farewell party came too soon.

All Nagaokakyo students were such good friends that we bought the same sunglasses together. When our leader gave a speech at the Farewell party, I realized our trip is close to the end and I couldn't stop crying. I also cried when we said good bye to our host families.

After all, I got close enough to my host family so I cried at the departure. I hadn't understood when the students of previous years had told me what great experienced they had. Now I know!

I am now proud to say that I got friends for life and this trip was an amazing, filled with so many new experiences.

Asahi Yoshida

I saw, felt, and learned many things during this trip. The thing that impressed me the most was classes at schools. Each class was unique and memorable. For an example, I really enjoyed the Latin language class at Ottoson Middle School. The students listened to the story told by the teacher and they drew cartoon to express the story in twelve scenes. I've never seen such a class and I was extremely impressed by the method. In the other class, they just read books. In another, they had a short quiz and then just read books. I didn't see any teacher who was writing on the board, even once. After sitting in those classes, I thought it would be fun to have classes like that in Japan. At the same time, I wondered if I could focus on studying if all classes are such fun.

I learned the different country has different style of education. There were so many surprised in finding those differenced. I would love to learn about other countries' education styles, too.