

2009 Nagaokakyo Students visit to Arlington - Essays by Nagaokakyo Students

Mayu Yagi (8th grade)

The visit to Arlington was filled with great experiences in which we were able to strengthen our friendship despite the differences of countries, cultures, languages. When I was nervous about my English, my host family member asked me kindly with a smile, “Are you hungry?” I felt their friendliness and kindness right away and I was able to talk more. It made me very happy to be able to communicate with each other.

At the elementary school visit, I taught the second grade students “Kendama.” (Ball and cup) Students shouted “I got it!” when they did it well and they repeatedly said “Thank you” to me. We had great time together. Also our friends in Arlington taught us great games which we enjoyed a lot. I will teach them to my friends in Nagaokakyo! Everyday was filled with fun, precious memories and I learned how wonderful and important the international communication and cultural exchange.

I would like to say thank you to those who made this trip possible for us and those who supported us throughout the trip. Thank you so very much.

Shiori Ogaito (8th grade)

My best memory of the trip was the visit to Ottoson Middle School. I shadowed my host family member, Louise. We were in Home Science, Math, Science, and English classes. I did not understand most of it, but could understand Home Science and Math, which made me feel good. I was also surprised by many differences between Japanese and American schools. Recess is very short and they start school much earlier in the morning. They have many choices in their lunch menu though the lunch time was so short that I could not finish eating. I was shocked to see students were throwing their lunch into the garbage can as if it is nothing.

At cultural exchange, I taught calligraphy. There were many students who were interested, so I enjoyed it very much. When they use the brushes with plenty ink and a little shyly, but happily wrote their names, my heart was filled with joy.

I can’t even count how many things I learned during this trip. I’ve lived only 13 years and I spent 10 long days in US, learning so much! I will never forget this trip. Teachers, and people who supported this program, thank you very much! I definitely want to visit Arlington again.

Marie Nishima (9th grade)

My favorite memory of the trip is shadowing at Ottoson. I had never met my shadowee before and I felt very shy at the beginning. However, she started the conversation with me and eventually I could talk to her. During the math class, other students also helped me to understand by drawing charts for me. They were all kind and open and I appreciated very much.

One thing surprised me was that there was no chimes at the beginning and the end of each class. We are used to hear them at our school and it felt strange to me. We had a building tour in the afternoon. When we took photos, some students of Ottoson paused for us. I taught calligraphy during our cultural exchange and was pleasantly surprised at the fact that Ottoson students did a great job! They seemed to be enjoying it as much as I was and many of them asked me the meaning of the Chinese characters they were writing.

It was only one day visit, but I felt the kindness of many students of Ottoson and also discovered so many differences between our schools and theirs. I learned so much from the students of US and would like to apply that knowledge into my daily life.

Taro Munakata (9th grade)

During this trip, I stayed with the Band family. I must admit that I had been nervous before the trip. However, they sent me some e-mails prior to the trip and we started our correspondence. By the time I left Nagaokakyo, I was sure about their warm welcome, which made me excited and eager to meet them as soon as possible.

When I applied for this trip, I wrote that I wanted to feel the difference between US and Japanese cultures with all my senses. During our stay, I truly experienced those differences through the scenery of the town, the size of houses, the taste of different foods, cooking styles, and life styles.

I enjoyed hanging out with my host families and their neighbors the most. We went shopping, played together, skateboarded on the street in front of the house, and went to Boston. Again, I was able to see the many faces of US. I also enjoyed communication with them, which I didn't have too much problem. Everyone was friendly and eager to talk to me. I really appreciated their effort to understand my English, which wasn't so good.

One thing I hadn't been used to before the trip was to make myself clear. They often asked me what I wanted to do such as if I wanted to play ping-pong or go shopping. In Japan, people would ask you "What would you like to do" rather shyly, and you would answer "Doesn't matter" or "Whatever

you want.” We would be vague and try to guess what others want to do instead of telling them what YOU want to do. In fact, I answered vaguely in Arlington as well and didn’t give clear answers.

During the stay, I slowly realized that it is actually kind and considerate to others to be clear about what you want in American way. It is easy for others to make a plan if they know what your wish is. In Japan, we consider that kind of attitude to be selfish, but I think this is the interesting difference between the cultures of Japan and US. And despite the difference, both culture value the attitude to consider others and not being selfish, which is the universal.

At the school visit, I noticed that the students in US are more active learners than us and have a strong sense that schools are really places to learn, their initiatives are respected and encouraged by the teachers, and students are willing to speak out their opinions. In the free and friendly atmosphere, each student seemed to be doing their best to work with teachers and make school a better place. I would really like to try myself to do the same at our school.

I really felt fortunate that I was able to participate in this trip and I would like to say thank you to my family, teachers, and people of Arlington from the bottom of my heart. Thank you very, very much!

Hitomi Tanaka (8th grade)

I enjoyed the Ottoson visit the most. I learned so much there! I was fortunate enough to spend the morning with my host family member as my shadowee. The middle school was very large and there were so many stairs and doors. I was barely keeping up with Olivia. But once I entered the classrooms, everyone welcomed me with big smiles. When I say hi, they all returned the greetings. Olivia introduced me to the whole class and I already felt like I was one of them. During the first period, the boy next to me borrowed my pen and the other boy asked me “Do you like foods?” which made me panic for a second, but I had great time. At the end, they all smiled at me and said goodbye. It was such a warm welcome and I really appreciated their big smile because I had been secretly afraid that people wouldn’t like to have Japanese student who suddenly showed up! I was so wrong and everyone was very kind. The whole trip was just like a dream and wonderful. I would like to thank many people who supported this trip. Thank you very much.

Mayuko Fujimoto (9th grade)

I learned not only English but also many other things through this trip. I cherish the bond that developed among us, Nagaokakyo students through the ten days in the foreign country. At the beginning, we had many disagreements and the difference of grades became our barriers. There were

some arguments and bad feelings among us and some of us felt terrible. However, we did our best to make things better and at the end of the trip, we shared the tears of gratitude for this trip as a united group. We, the sixteen students learned to solve the problem between ourselves and now we have so many fond memories.

My host family and the people of Arlington always listened attentively to my English with smiles. My host mother told kindly me to come back again when we said goodbye. I will never forget the warm smiles of hers and all other people in Arlington. My host family had been so kind and sweet from the very, very beginning. The memories of this ten-day trip is the best of my life and it will have a huge impact on my future.

Arisa Tsuji (9th)

I had to wait for two years to participate in this trip. When finally I became the member of the group, I was so excited with anticipation. I had no worry, filled with hope. We arrived at Arlington safely and met our host families. My host family was very kind, making sure that I was comfortable. First couple days were a little bit difficult because of language. But the anxiety about language barrier disappeared quickly because my host family members were always attentive to my effort to speak and always smiled at me. I wanted to stay with them forever! I really, really, didn't want to go back to Japan. I am filled with gratitude to my host family, who made me feel that way. I also would like to say thank you to many people who supported us in many different ways.

This visit is not over. I will grow and come back to Arlington. I want to show the people of Arlington how I grew and improved. I feel that this trip was the first big step towards my dream. Thank you so much for allowing me to go on this trip!

Takuma Ogawa (9th grade)

My best memory is the communication with the people of Arlington. At the beginning of the stay, I didn't know what to say when people talked to me. But I gradually got used to it and my anxiety changed into joy. I tried to make a joke, developed the subject, and did my best to make our conversation more fun.

My host family was so kind. If I looked tired or down, my host mother always came to me and stayed with me until I felt better. After I came back to Japan, she sent me an e-mail which said "When you come back to Arlington, our home is my home. I almost cried when I read that.

At the farewell party, many students cried. I was almost cried myself, but I wanted to enjoy the moment and held back my tears. This trip became the best memory of my entire life. I will apply what I learned into my every day life. And I know that I was able to enjoy this trip because so many people helped us and supported us. Thank you!

Hina Shidei (8th grade)

“The happy days like a beautiful dream” That’s how I describe the time I spent in Arlington. My experience there was so much fun and almost too precious.

When we stepped out of the airport, the streets of US seemed unreal. There were so many things that surprised me during my stay with the host family. Also, at first I couldn’t understand so many words they are speaking. They told me “Never mind” and I felt really bad. I didn’t know what to do. Other students seemed to be communicating with their host families much better and I felt frustrated with my own inability.

However, I realized eventually that I had been trying to use big words and not making much sense. I learned it is much better to use the words you know well and make a plain sentence. That worked much better and I started enjoying each day. And suddenly I realized that the days were going too quickly! Before I knew it, it was the last day. Many emotions went through my mind.

I met so many people and was touched by so many people’s hearts. I learned and felt many, many things. I am so lucky to have such an experience in this young age and I will do my best to use my experience to make my life better and to improve myself.

Takuya Oimatsu (8th grade)

I can’t even choose what to write here since everything in Arlington was so wonderful! But I can say one thing – Whale watching on a stormy day is really rough!

Anyway, host family day was probably my best memory. My host family took me to Diablo Glass School in Boston. I had never tried any glass craft before and it was a lot of fun in spite of very hot temperature in the lab. It was much more difficult that it looked – the metal bar was heavy and you had to keep it circulating while making your glass work. But I enjoyed every minute of it. There are so many other things I enjoyed tremendously. This trip taught me so many customs and way of living in this foreign country,

Kanami Kuno (9th grade)

Before I left for Arlington, many people told me about US. American people are rough, they don't eat vegetables, they don't do laundry, you won't be able to take bath, etc, etc. I didn't know if they were all true, but anyway they were all negative comments. So I left Nagaokakyo with that kind of image.

So let me conclude – yes, they were true! For me, a neurotic Japanese girl, every day was filled with surprises! My host family was so kind that they planned so many things for me and took me to many places. On the first day, they took me to an ice cream shop at 10pm and their ice cream was as big as my fist! I hesitated because I watch what I eat very carefully! But guess what? I end up eating it all. Also it was true that they don't eat vegetable! I found a little bit of veggies in sandwich and that was it. American table seemed to be the parade of rich food! We took shower instead of taking bath, but at least we could do so every day. Landry was done once during our stay. I was surprised to see they don't do hung dry!

There were so many things surprised me, but oh, what fun it was! Every day, every second was filled with wonderful, precious memories and I cannot tell all here! And that is because of the support of my parents, many adults both in Nagaokakyo and Arlington, not to mention our host families, and my group members. I cannot thank all of them enough.

Before going to Arlington, I was very, very proud to be Japanese. I was proud of our culture that values humility and respect for others. And I loved the concept of cleanness which we value so much. But this trip made me look at those qualities from different angles. The human relationship in Japan is so complicated. At schools, we face bullying all the time as well as talking behind people's back and seniorities and such. We use text message when we could very well talk in person, we play so much video games and spend many hours at juku (cram school). We don't spend enough time interacting with real people!

In Arlington, cell phone is to make a phone call. School ends much earlier and they get more homework. They do homework in the living room or the kitchen, not in their bedrooms. Kids go to bedroom only when they go to bed. Yes, I said US is rough. But then, what about Japan? We are too neurotic! For the first time, I thought “Well, I don't care about diet! Life is short and why shouldn't I enjoy the great food?”

It was such a joy to talk to anyone in Arlington. They are all so unique and friendly. I had heard about cranky shop clerks and yes, I encountered them. But once I started to talk to them in my

bad English, their faces all turned into smiles! My most precious memory from this trip is interaction with so many people in many different ways, which I had almost forgotten in Japan. And I realized that my image of ideal Japan is the thing of the past...I wish I could have talked about this with my host family.

When we left Arlington, my host family gave me a lucky penny and told me to give it back to them when I return to Arlington again. I will definitely come back! I will study English hard. I will grow up as a person and I will come back to return this penny! And I hope that I'll be able to tell them how we, Japanese treasure interaction between people as well as they do in Arlington. My memories are huge, and warm and so many. I know I sound corny, but this trip really made me grow! And I got new friends and another my own family in US. Ten days filled with smiles and tears.

Thank you for everyone who made this trip possible. Thank you, Arlington, the wonderful town!

Ruri Okuda (9th grade)

In Arlington, I enjoyed meeting the students there from Elementary school to High School. At high school, we enjoyed the conversation with the “bridge builders” who gave us tours at High School. At elementary school, I taught origami to the students and they seemed to be very happy. It was difficult to communicate, but when we understood each other, it was wonderful. I also became good friend with the Ottoson student whom I spent whole morning with. She helped me a lot during our cultural exchange as well. Other Ottoson students were also very friendly, too. That was my favorite memory.

Chikara Ogawa (8th grade)

I waited for this trip with such anticipation since last October when I was chosen. The night before the trip, I was too excited to sleep. When we arrived at Arlington, my host family was so kind. I was impressed by the fact that their neighbors were very friendly and help each other all the time. Also, I really enjoyed the visit to Ottoson School, where I made good friends, which was one of my goals during this trip. Teachers at school were funny and friendly, too.

If I hadn't applied this trip, I wouldn't have learned how to make myself understood clearly. I always feel a little shy to express myself even though I want to. I had known that the people in US like others to be open and straightforward and I liked it, too. I think Japanese should do so sometimes, when times and place are right. I will try to do so in the right occasion from now on.

Kaoru Kizu (9th grade)

I was struck by the so many cultural differences during this trip. From the small things in our daily lives to the unimaginable things, there were so many surprises. The biggest shock was language. I studied so hard for 6 months before the trip, but it wasn't enough. I sometimes felt frustrated. Native speakers' pronunciation and their use of the words were so different.

I was also impressed by the sheer size of land in US. Roads, schools, and houses, they were all built large and the whole town was very spacious. I hardly saw bikes and I guessed the land is so large that bikes as transportation might not be practical. Also there were many trees in town and therefore there were wild animals in residential area, such as squirrels. This would be impossible in Japan.

At homes, I was surprised that most houses have basement. That is another thing we never see in Japan. They can also place glasses on a high shelf because there is no earthquake here and I wish we could do that in Japan.

One thing shocked me is that they waste food with no qualm. They dump the food to garbage can without hesitation. If you do that in Japan, you would be admonished by people around you. We don't waste food that way. Since US is a big country and they might have plenty food, but I still don't think people should waste food in such manner.

I learned both good and bad sides of US through this trip and that helped me to look at Japan from different view as well. I saw the part of the world I hadn't known before and it really broadened my horizons.

Mina Takeuchi (9th grade)

I enjoyed the elementary and middle school visit the most. Before the trip, I had been curious how those schools would be different from ours. At Ottoson, we were able to experience the real classes by shadowing students there. I had never met with my shadowee student before and was nervous at first. However, she was very friendly and introduced me to her classmates and teachers as well as talking to me a lot. That made me relaxed eventually and we enjoyed our conversation. By the end of shadowing period, we became good friends.

I was impressed with Ottoson students were active participants in their learning process. I think Japanese students are afraid of being wrong and tend to be passive. Ottoson students were eager to speak out. This was almost a sensational discovery to me. Many other things were different. Each

student has individual schedule, they move from one classroom to another, lunch time is in the middle of class hour, etc. It was fascinating.

At Stratton Elementary School, I taught calligraphy during cultural exchange. Stratton students were also very friendly and spoke to me a lot. “What does this letter mean?” “How am I doing?” Sometimes I was overwhelmed by their English, but I tried with my gestures and we had wonderful time communicating.

I have been thinking a lot since our Ottoson visit. Why people in US are so much more enterprising, especially compared to Japanese? Now I think it comes from their education at young age. When we observed classes at Stratton, I saw that young students were already participating in lively discussion at the class rooms. I think they have been trained to speak their mind from very young age and that really shows in the difference with our culture.

This 10-day trip was very meaningful to me, There was a language barrier, but we used a lot of gestures and games to communicate. I learned we can overcome our language barriers to connect with others.

Also, I learned to value the importance of meeting new people. Our host families, other people in Arlington, and my fellow students in the group. I learned a lot from them and grew through those experiences. Also I learned my preconceived image of America was only my own image and nothing more. There are so many things you can learn only by really being there. I would like to share my experiences with as many people as possible and become a bridge between two countries.

Thank you so very much to everyone who supported and helped me for this trip.

Teppey Deguchi (9th grade)

The best thing in Arlington was that I could make myself understood. I had been very worried about my English before I go there. But as soon as I arrived, everyone started talking to me in such a friendly manner and I felt comfortable. They also tried very hard to listen to me. It wasn't easy to speak. I used all the words I knew and sometimes it took long time to come up with a sentence. But when people understood me, I felt so good.

My host family was so kind to me. When I said goodbye to them, suddenly all the memories came back to me and I felt like crying. What a wonderful 10 days, filled with so much fun! I will never forget this trip. Thank you for giving me this great opportunity.