

Hayley Cottrell

I met Hinari and her mum, at the airport, and I was extremely tired due to my lack of sleep on the plane, so my Japanese on my first day was very limited. Fortunately, both of my families had lived in Australia before, and so they were extremely understanding and helpful.

Hinari and her mum live in a country town called Yatomi, which is famous for breeding gold fish. Their house was surrounded by rice fields and those narrow Japanese roads that you see in classic Japanese animations you watch in class. In fact, despite her house not being traditional, I had to pay attention to the customs that are shown in the movies, such as taking your shoes off when you enter a home.

I spilt my time between two host families, who both wanted to show me as much of Nagoya and Japan as possible. On my weekend with Hinari, it snowed. This was my first time ever seeing snow, and Hinari and her mum could not understand why I would be so excited at the possibility of sub-zero degrees temperatures. However, I was not let down. It was magical.

Life at my other exchange sisters house, who is called Shiori, was very different as she lived much closer to school. I lived there with her mum, dad and dog. There, I took my first Japanese bath, called ofuro, which became my favourite time of day. The entire family shares the same water, so you must wash yourself before you enter the bath so that the water stays relatively clean. I know it sounds strange, and I was extremely hesitant, but as the guest I was offered to take a bath first so I always had the cleanest water.

Shiori's mum only spoke Japanese to me, which was extremely hard but I know it has made a huge improvement in my hearing. In fact a lot of my Japanese skills have improved, even though I did not realise it until I arrived back in Melbourne. For any exchange program that you might go on, this the best advice I can give you: Take every opportunity you can get, because you will never have another experience like it.

Madeleine O'Brien

At Shukutoku there is a large variety of after school clubs that nearly every student joins and from what I have seen, most girls are very dedicated to them. Because of this, most girls leave school by 6.0pm every day at the earliest but some clubs even stay as late as 9.00pm and then also practice all day on weekends. A lot of the clubs are training for very large competitions and following a very strict practice schedule.

While I was there, I was lucky enough to join some of their after school clubs for their rehearsals such as baton twirling club, this club also competed at a national level. Some of the girls there were showing me how to do some of the more basic tricks in baton twirling, but I will admit, however that I nearly hit myself in the face with the baton more than a few times. I was also able to experience Kendo Club. Kendo is a traditional Japanese sport that is similar to fencing, which from what I saw was also very competitive. This was a really fun club to try but was however pretty intimidating as there were girls covered in full body armour yelling and running at me with the kendo stick.

When we were there, we also joined the choir competitions which was a competition between all of the classes in their year level where they had to prepare two songs to sing to their year level. The girls worked very hard to perfect their songs so we had to come to school an hour early to rehearse and then stay over an hour after school every day for weeks. My exchanges class ended up coming in second place for this competition so the girls were pretty excited by that.

To all the girls thinking about continuing with Japanese into VCE Hayley and I seriously think you should consider doing an exchange because it is a very good way to improve your Japanese and a really fun experience. It is also not as daunting as you may think, most of the people I met there, were pretty understanding when I found it hard to speak and would usually just yell Kawaii. For girls preparing to go I think my advice would be go over vocabulary before you go and to remember to speak as much Japanese as possible to really make sure you gain as much as you can from this exchange.