

2017 Kurashiki Student Ambassador Essay: Kaitlin Langton

First off, I want to say how grateful I am for everyone's collaborative effort to make our trip to Japan possible. As a first-time international traveler and as a student ambassador at that, without everyone's help and guidance, I would not have been able to have the greatest experience of my life. Thanks to Patty Woods, who booked our flights and saw us back to our families when we got back to Kansas City from Japan. And thanks to Jan Conard, who interviewed and helped prepare us for going through international airports. Also, Fran Lemery was kind enough to give us yen currency before our trip. Hideko Schackmann also helped by editing the PowerPoint I worked on for the fun dance practice with the other Japanese students for the farewell party.

Now, as for during the trip in Japan, I would like to thank Koji Shirakawa and James Benson. These two wonderful people made sure we were taken care of and safe. For example, Koji-san was there when we arrived at Kansai International Airport. After we went through customs, we got our baggage and met up with Koji-san. He helped us exchange currency and ship our bags to our host families' homes.

As for James Benson, he was a person who I am super-grateful for. While I was sick, he helped arrange for a bed to make me more comfortable so I could rest and get better. Traveling internationally was very hard and I became ill upon arriving in Japan. But Mr. Benson and Patty made sure that I was well taken care of in that aspect. So, I am very grateful that they helped me recover as quickly as possible so I could happily experience Japan with my wonderful host families and the friendly group of Japanese citizens, and represent JAS and Kansas City. In all, I thank all of those that contributed

in any way to getting all of us student ambassadors to Japan and back. It is very much appreciated.

The preparations for the trip seemed as if they dragged on forever, but as time flew by, it came to the time when all four of us student ambassadors had to get on a flight to San Francisco. I am almost one hundred percent confident that none of us got any good sleep that night before the flight early the next morning. My best friend Bri stayed the night to see me off in the morning; she was shocked to hear me whisper when my alarm went off, "I got no sleep, bro." She just told me I would strongly regret it later. That morning was very early; we all woke up around 3:30 a.m. Once we got to the Kansas City airport, Patty rounded us up and helped us check our baggage. Once that was done, we took some pictures and then got in line for security and to board our flight.

Throughout the flight I did a variety of things, such as take part in the free snacks that the flight attendants provided. I also played some Japanese rhythms games on my DS.

Once we got off the flight we had to wait a few hours to get on the flight to Osaka. It was hard to just wait, but it gave us time to talk and eat.

We got on the flight and we got super-excited that we were finally on the flight to our favorite country: Japan. Our eleven-hour flight felt so long, but once we got there we were very grateful, as well as tired. We took a little rail-train, a couple escalators, went through customs and met up with Koji-san.

Once we sorted out currency and mailing our baggage, we took a bunch of subways and trains. After riding all transportation available, we arrived at our final

destination. After we walked a bit away from the train, we all saw our host families holding up a banner that read, "Welcome to Kurashiki." I was so excited, happy, and a bit nervous when I finally talked with them for the first time. All of my host family (the Sato family) was there except for my host dad, Kenji. I later found out he was at work.

When I met my first host family, we went to the supermarket to get ingredients and food for the next day's breakfast. I was so surprised with all of the questions about what I wanted for breakfast. It was a little overwhelming. At the same time, it made me feel really special. One of the things that I enjoyed most about my first host family was my host mom's ability to cook amazingly delicious food.

When it came to be what we called "Mayor Day," I became very anxious and a bit sad as well. I felt that way because I was in a foreign country with hardly anyone I knew. I missed my family and familiar surroundings. I then met my second host family, the Nagayama family. I remember that my host mom and dad were there to greet me and take me to their home.

Later that evening, we went to get my host sister Konoka from the train station. She goes to college about 2 hours away from her grandparents' house. What I enjoyed most about my second host family was that it was a good experience to have a variety of ages in the family. And going to the festival with my host sister was so much fun and a great experience.

I am so grateful for the families that volunteered their money, time, and energy and hosted us as student ambassadors.