

## THE PAAC SUMMER STUDY TOUR TO JAPAN

The PAAC Summer Study Tour itinerary was designed to give the students a taste of many aspects of Japan, including industry, history, culture, and every day life. Below are highlights from the trip and student journal responses as we traveled through the country:

### Tokyo (June 21-23)

On our first day in Tokyo, students learned to use the extensive public transportation system, in small groups with local guides. Groups were given sightseeing destinations to visit, and used the subways, trains, and even boats to discover the sights of the city, meeting for dinner at the historical Kiyosumi Gardens.



*“Mieko (our guide) helped us at first, but she later told us that... she would follow us. So, (we) had to find out what line to take... and how many stops it was to the next destination... If finding what line to take was difficult, it was much more difficult to find out which train to get on... One thing that I observed when traveling was that almost every Japanese person either catches the subway or walks, unlike in Hawaii, where everyone drives.”*



Other city highlights included visits to the US Embassy and Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), watching the early morning fish auction and eating fresh sushi at Tsukiji Fish Market, and seeing a *Kabuki* (Japanese theater) performance. We also explored famous Tokyo neighborhoods such as Shibuya, Harajuku, and Shinjuku. Students enjoyed the energy of life in one of Asia’s biggest and most modern cities.

Students were fortunate to spend an afternoon at a senior day care center. They shared songs and dances and photos with the elderly, which brought smiles to everyone’s faces. The staff at the center also helped us to understand the problems Japan is facing as its population ages, and how some of the necessary social services are paid for. This was the topic for our first group discussion. Students discussed the reasons behind falling birth rates and possible ways to meet the increasing demands for elderly care and pension payments, using this visit and their research as starting points to delve into the issues.



*“If Japan continues to have a low birth rate, and a large elderly population, then the results may be devastating to Japan’s economy and population. With Japan among the top world economies, anything bad for Japan’s economy in turn will be bad for the world’s economy, affecting even us in America.”*

### Kawasaki (June 24-25)



Students spent a day cooking, dancing, and trying various Japanese cultural activities at Tachibana High School. It was also a chance to meet their home stay partners in person, who they had been emailing for several weeks before the trip. At the end of the day, students went home with their new friends, to experience a night with a Japanese family in their home. Eating home-cooked Japanese food, hanging out with friends as typical Japanese teenagers do, and learning to take a bath in a traditional *furo* (Japanese bath tub) were among the highlights of this experience. Students were taken in with warm hospitality, and treated like one of the family.

*“This was one of the best experiences of my life... The whole family was so kind and... even though at times it was hard to communicate... it was still fun to try... I think this is so valuable because I got to see how another person my age in another culture lives... and I have made a wonderful friendship that I hope will last a very long time.”* – Alisa Urabe

### Kansai (June 26-27)

We spent a day in Osaka. Our students taught cultural lessons to students in kindergarten through grade 7 at the Osaka YMCA International School.

*“Even though (we) just showed them pictures, they were very interested... The only way I can describe what I felt is by comparing it to... when a student has an “aha” moment. Teaching these first graders was very rewarding, and I wish we had this kind of opportunity at home.”*

This was followed by a luncheon hosted at Osaka University and talks on the city’s history and Japan’s foreign policy. The day ended with a visit to Osaka castle.

Our next day was a city tour to some of the most famous places in Kyoto: Ryoan-ji, Kinkaku-ji, Sanjusangendo, Heian Shrine, and Kiyomizu-dera. As the longtime capital city, and because it was spared from fire bombing during World War II, Kyoto has many historic sites and traditional Japanese-style temples and buildings. We also had a chance to experience an authentic Japanese dinner at our *enkai* (party), set in a peaceful garden in the city.

*“I had looked at the brochure picture and didn’t think that seeing 15 rocks in raked sand would be very interesting...I’ve always imagined gardens as places where*





*flowers, trees, vines, and grass grow in. I couldn't really see how rocks with moss on them could make a garden. When I went through the doorway and saw the rock garden, I found it pleasing to look at. The raked sand around the rocks formed interesting patterns to look at and I no longer thought of it as sand around rocks."*

### **Hiroshima (June 28-29)**

The focus of our time in Hiroshima was visiting the Peace Park and the Peace Memorial Museum. We were fortunate to be able to speak to two Atomic bomb survivors and hear about their experiences. After these talks and a look around the exhibits, many students were forced to re-evaluate their feelings about the US actions at the end of World War II, and about the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the world today.



At MOFA in Tokyo, the speaker asked, "Was the atomic bomb necessary?" one student said, "*I personally believe that the US had the right to bomb Japan. We were in a war that we didn't start and it is probably true that Japan was hurting others and the war had to stop. After Hiroshima, she wrote, "Speaking with the A-bomb survivors... totally changed my opinion. The horrors that they described became real to me. Even after all Japan did, I feel the atomic bomb was too much. Too many innocent civilians were killed or hurt forever... I think there would be less war if everyone who wanted to use the (atomic) bomb would speak to a survivor."*

We also used this time to learn about one of Japan's major industries: auto manufacturing. We visited the Mazda auto factory museum and assembly lines, to learn about the history of the company as well as the process of developing and assembling cars.

Another important stop in this city was to Miyajima, one of the "Three Most Beautiful Spots" of Japan. It was a chance to escape from the big cities and relax. We stayed in a *ryokan* (Japanese style inn), complete with an *onsen* (Japanese public bath). Students enjoyed the change of pace, and exploring the island's shrines, shops, and natural areas on foot.



### **Kitakyushu (June 30-July 1)**

At Eco-Town, the country's largest recycling research center, students were amazed by the scope of Japan's recycling efforts. Kitakyushu, formerly heavily polluted from

industrial waste, has cleaned up its skies and its image, and is now one of Japan's leaders in environmental protection. We visited the Coca-Cola PET bottle recycling center and a medical waste recycling facility.

*"I thought that it was interesting that they can make completely different things from various items such as fertilizer made from porcine bone... and that Coca-Cola takes care of its products even after consumer consumption (they collect the cans from the bins placed next to the vending machines). If (they) did this in Hawaii... we wouldn't have such a big landfill issue on Oahu because there would be more recycling."*

We also had a chance to meet with six participants in the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme from Hawaii, who teach English in public schools in Kitakyushu. These young professionals shared their stories about Japan and the road they traveled to get there, and inspired many of our students to think about pursuing a career in Japan after college.



Another trip highlight was participating in the opening ceremonies of the Kokura Gion Daiko Matsuri (*taiko* drumming festival in Kokura city). We learned the basics of drumming from a local *taiko* club. That evening, dressed in traditional *yukata* (summer kimono), we witnessed about 30 of the city's *taiko* clubs drumming together in the shopping arcade. It was an exciting and vibrant event.

*"As the drums began to play, more and more groups joined in and eventually the whole arcade was vibrating under the power of the drums. Once this started to happen, every living soul there began to jump and nod to the music... The colors, food, lively faces- they all play a part in preserving the zest of matsuris and is what keeps them a part of... life in Japan today."*

### **Okinawa (July 2-5)**

Our second high school visit was in Okinawa, at Kyuyo High School. Students from our group were partnered with Kyuyo students, and had been emailing one another before the trip. They spent Sunday together at the Churaumi Aquarium. We also spent a full day at the school, cooking lunch, going to classes, and sharing culture at a school-wide assembly.

*"It's really fun to compare your life with someone living so far away. Some things are still the same, homework, for example. We talked in a strange mixture of hand motions, English, and Japanese... and it was interesting. I found out that (my partner) likes American music and has hundreds of CDs."*





We had learned about the tragic role of Okinawan citizens during the Battle of Okinawa during World War II at orientation and from the book, [Girl with the White Flag](#). Going to the Peace Memorial was another chance to reflect on history and the price of war:

*“I think it is impressive that Okinawa built a memorial to everyone who died (in the Battle of Okinawa), not just the ‘good guys’... I have a lot more respect and fear from what wars could do... And from the book, I learned that war isn’t lenient towards children and the innocent. It’s also based a lot on luck, if you get hit or not. It seems like such a terrible ordeal.”*

Another important local issue caused by the outcome of World War II is the continued presence of the US military in Okinawa. We were briefed at Camp Foster, a US Marine Corps base, about the pros and cons to this situation. Students were able to relate to the Okinawan people and draw some parallels between this island chain and our own Hawaiian islands.

*“When I think of Okinawa and the US bases, I see both sides. It’s an important strategic spot for the US military, ...but I know how I would feel if foreigners lived on my island, brandishing weapons, and(I) wouldn’t trust my own Japanese security forces because they used Okinawans as shields during World War II from shells shot by... the same military that now takes up space on my island.”*

After these intense topics, the US Consulate General’s 4<sup>th</sup> of July reception was a welcome chance to relax and enjoy our national holiday. We were invited to perform our hula on this occasion, and were reminded that we would soon be heading back to the United States.