



A PEACEFUL SPOT TO
READ INSIDE
SHINJUKU GYOEN



THE BIGGEST
OUTDOOR BUDDHA IN
NARA: KÔTOKU-IN



A RELAXING STROLL
NEXT TO MT. YÔTEI

Nippon Bound: A Pilgrimage to Japan



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Sitting at my computer with Google Maps on full screen, I was imagining all the possible places I could travel to. With my notebook at my side, I set a reasonable budget and then I began narrowing down my choices; dreams of island hopping around Indonesia, backpacking through the jungles of Southeast Asia, a European Excursion, or maybe I could even visit my family back home and it was then that it hit me, it was time to cross the East China Sea and take a journey to Japan. Much like China, Japan was another country that had I to experience. Growing up I learned about Japanese culture through my best friend Yuhei Kato. We would race home from school just to make sure we made it home in time to watch the latest

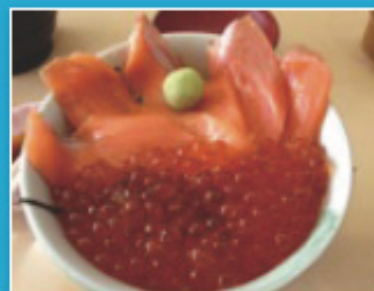
*Enjoying a
beer and a
nice book on
Suma Beach
in Kobe*

episode of Dragonball Z(龙珠Z). I remember getting frustrated at the TV when it took so long for Goku to defeat Frieza. With the help of some wonderful friends I have met here, I began plotting my adventure.

After it was all said and done, I had 24 days to enjoy in Japan. My plane would land in Sapporo and fly out of Nagasaki. Thanks to this awesome plan to increase tourism the Japanese offer tourists a chance to buy the Japanese Rail Pass(JPR). The JPR allows the holder of the pass to take any JR(Japanese Railway) train line for a specified period of time (7,14,or 21days). I bought the 21day Green Pass and mapped out 16 cities spread out over a total of 2,921km. This was my pilgrimage, a chance to journey alone into the unknown. As school began to end, the exams were collected and finally grades were distributed, the date to take off was closely approaching. I packed lightly, bringing only a backpack filled halfway with clothes and a pair of hiking sticks to ease the stress in my knees as I hike up Mt. Fuji. The time was finally here, it was time to venture out to the land of the rising sun.

Hokkaido flew by me, I planned to visit four cities so I could hike a couple of mountains, essentially giving me the chance to explore the natural beauty the Northernmost island of Japan had to offer. I took the train to Furano to see some beautiful lavender flowers, in Sapporo I enjoyed a beer to some Jazz music, in Kutchan I climbed around Mt. Yotei, the next day I was in Toya climbing Mt. Uso and walking around Lake Toya, and the final day in the area I was in Hakodate where I experienced the freshest seafood I had ever ate. I had to sit down and rest, it had been five days, and I had been to five cities. The next morning I was taking the Shinkansen to Tokyo where I had planned 3 days to take in the sights and sounds

Tokyo was more then I could ever imagine, besides the bright neon lights and all the delicious food I came across, I was most impressed with the metro system. The city was humongous and I am not the biggest fan of big cities. I prefer the much more laid back type cities like Yangshuo and Lijiang, with more mountains and trees than skyscrapers and machines. With only three days in Tokyo I came nowhere close to seeing the entire city. However, with excellent coordinating and planning the Tokyo Metro is by far the most complex, yet convenient system I have ever seen. It allowed me to get to any point in the city and with so many stations it was easy not to get lost. I was determined to make the most of Tokyo so I walked through Meiji Shrine and Yasukuni Shrine, it was at the Yasukuni Shrine were I felt the most odd and awkward. I left the place with a depressing feeling, I needed to cheer up so I jumped back on the Metro. I ended up at Shinjuku Gyoen which is one of the most beautiful gardens I saw in Japan. The next day I witnessed the early



*Fresh Salmon at the
Hakodate Fish Market*



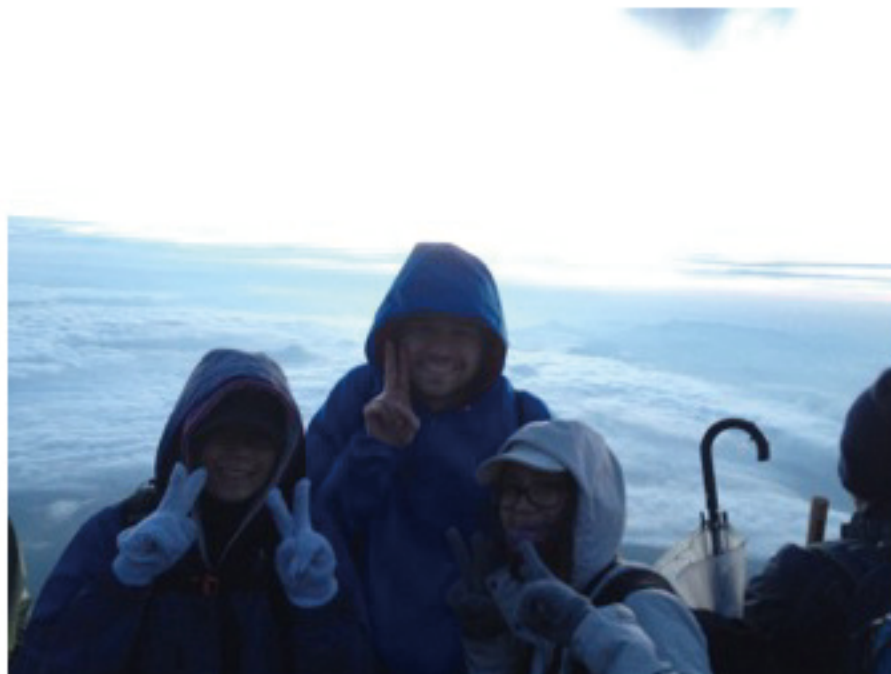
*Visas for leaving and
coming back to China*



*The top of Mt. Moiwa
overlooking Sapporo*

morning action at the Tsukiji Fish market eating more fresh fish at the world's largest fish market. I played video games such as Mario Kart and Dragonball Z, I got destroyed in in Dragonball Z but won some races in Mario Kart. I people watched in Akihabara, witnessing all the fun and energetic cos players(角色扮演) and wondering in and out of mangastores. It was complete anime mania and I loved it. I left Tokyo wishing I had more days but the desire to take on the most epic hike ever could not be passed up. If I had to say one thing about Tokyo, the culture found on Akihabara street was one of my most enjoyable moments in the city.

I left Tokyo at 6am to take a train to Kamakura so I could see Kōtoku-in, the giant outdoor Buddha and walk around Hase-dera temple. The weather was in control of what came next, I always imagined climbing Mt. Fuji, I remember back in school looking at photos of Fuji with snow covering the top, but weather was threatening this chance. After I left Hase-dera, I searched for some WIFI and then checked the weather. The previous days had been full of rain and the previous night said to expect more rain the next day. When the APP loaded I saw it went from a 'rainy forecast' to a 'mostly cloudy forecast' convincing me to jump on the next train to Fuji.



I took the 11:00 train to Mt. Fuji station and arrived at 3pm. I needed to make sure I packed enough food and water for the night hike I was about to go on. Thinking I had until 8:00pm to catch the last bus, I took my time, rested and focused. I then head to the station but a minor mishap came up and threatened to derail my plans. Little did I know, it was a Japanese holiday, and the last bus stopped

running two hours earlier than normal. I was in shock and began to find out what the next plan of action was going to be, when like fate, two French sisters came running out of the last train wanting to go to the top of Fuji as well. We hitchhiked half way because mountain policy only allowed buses and taxis to go up the mountain road. So we paid the equivalent of 400rmb to take a taxi to the 5th stage. The French sisters names were Claire being the oldest and Zoe the most talkative. Claire was taking photos of the stars and the surrounding lake as the stars glistened their faint light down on the city below. It was 11pm and we needed to begin our ascent to the 10th stage so that by 4:30am we could catch the sunrise. It took us 5 hours and we managed to reach the 10th and final stage just in time to get in a good position to see the approaching sunrise clearly. Despite the mountain being cold thanks to a heavy wind there were hundreds of other hikers doing the same thing we were doing. After watching the sunrise, we ate some noodles,