

walked around the snow filled crater, and said our goodbyes, their trip was ending. They were going back to France, they had been in Japan for 14 days hiking the Japanese Alps. For me, the next stop was Kyoto.

Four days in Kyoto was not nearly enough, but I managed to find out I love yakisoba, and okonomiyaki. I took the train from Fuji and got into Kyoto around 6pm. I needed to do laundry after climbing the mountain and it was at the laundry house that I met a new friend. While our clothes were being cleaned we got some ramen and then later went to a okonomiyaki restaurant to meet up with his friends. It was the first time I experienced this type of food and I had to say it was some of the best food Japan has to offer. The next three days in Kyoto were filled with things to do. The first day I cycled around the city shrine hopping. I also made reservations to see the Imperial Palace, and thanks to help from Ibuki and Yuto, their parents helped me book a tour at the Yamazaki Suntory Whiskey Distillery. I also saw Kinkaku-ji, the Golden Pavilion which was breathtaking. Kyoto had a lot to do there was so much beauty engulfed into one city, but there was too much to see elsewhere so I needed to make my way further south. In hindsight had I known a typhoon would develop causing the weather to be very rainy in Kumamoto, I

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would have easily stayed three more days in Kyoto, but at this very moment time was pressing.

Next on the agenda was Nara where I saw the Tōdai-ji, the biggest Buddha in the country. I then headed over to Osaka where I ate the best Takoyaki in the world thanks to some detailed maps and directions provided by Haruka and Masanobu. Thanks to the advice of Yui and Tomoko I went to Kobe and took a sake tour and then relaxed and read a book on Soma beach as the sun passed over the mountains behind me. In Himeji, I met up with my some friends from Suzhou, Tommy, Jerry and their family and got a personal tour of Himeji Castle. The trip was now on the last leg of the journey. I had three cities left to see. I had taken in so much, I witnessed more than I could have ever imagined. The last night in Himeji I ordered Takoyaki and prepared for the next city. It was time to head to Hiroshima.

World War 2 was an atrocious event that will always be remembered. As an American, Hiroshima is seen as a tragedy but also a last option. I view it as a blemish in American history but we can't turn back, we can only hope that we can all progress to bring peace to everyone and learn from this tragic day. As the train pulled into the station the first thing that appeared outside the window was the



Waiting for the Train after a walk through Mt. Yōtei

Honda Zoom-Zoom baseball stadium. It lays right next to the tracks, brand new, it is an example of progress. Ten years after the bomb a baseball team came to the city to lift the hopes of the people. Sports are amazing, sports can take your mind off all of your hardships, it can help you



relax and give you reasons to root for someone, to support them and wish them to succeed. Just like that attitude we get from sports the city of Hiroshima took in that energy and bounced back creating a modern city that has a lot to offer. I took a day trip to Miyajima where I hiked Mt. Misen and walked through Itsukushima, the shrine in the sea. The next day I walked through the Atomic Bomb museum

and got tickets to see the Hiroshima Carp play against the Chunichi Dragons. What I was feeling at this moment is indescribable. I played baseball for ten years growing up, I rooted for the Cleveland Indians all my life, watching year after year always hoping for a World Series title that would never come. After two years of not having seen a live baseball game, I finally got the chance to do so. This moment like Mt. Fuji is something I will always cherish. The fans, the passion, the highs, the lows, it brings back so many memories, reminding me of being a fan at a game back in the USA. The Hiroshima Carp fans took us in with open hands and by the end of the night I left the stadium a Hiroshima Carp fan. I will always root for them to win it all.

With two cities left on the list, it was time to go to Kumamoto. While I was there a typhoon began moving into the region and it caused me to only get one day to explore the city. I had already paid two nights for my hostel in Kumamoto but thanks to the Shinkansen I was able to take the bullet train to Osaka and explore more of Den-Den town in Nipponbashi and the town my best friend Yuhei's family is from. After knowing him for almost 19 years it was rewarding getting the chance to explore his father's culture. I spent the day there and took the last train back to Kumamoto, a 5 hour train ride, similar to going from Suzhou to Beijing on the G train.

I spent the last three days in Nagasaki where I got the chance to relax, and catch up on some much needed reading and writing but also making time to explore the city in full. In Nagasaki I met with some friends from Suzhou Keiichi, Aiko and their family where I experienced a traditional



Nagasaki lunch. The experience was one of a kind, the talented chef cooked one dish at a time and by the time you finished your first dish she was soon coming along with the next dish. Each dish was just as delicious as the last. The work that was put into this meal shows the passion and integrity of this country and this culture. I also got the chance to meet up with two friends I met in



Hiroshima, a Canadian Couple from Quebec. We explored Nagasaki Peace Park and strolled around the Museum. They were heading to Tokyo and I was heading back to China. The trip was finally over, this was Japan, from the top to the bottom, many places seen, many more yet to discover.

History is my life, so it was amazing for me to be able to compare two fascinating cultures. Japan learned a lot through Chinese culture and it is still evident today by the fact that they still use a similar writing system. Being able to walk amongst their society for 24 days I was only able to take in a small amount of what living in Japan would be like. While I was there I met some of the most friendliest, most helpful people I had ever encountered. For example we asked this one older woman if she knew of a specific restaurant to which she did not know and apologized and went on her way. Now it was raining but not a minute later she ran back to us in the pouring rain just to tell us she found the restaurant. This is just a small example of what I took in. The only food I believed the Japanese ate was sushi and ramen, but I discovered dishes that I will forever crave and different types of ramen I will forever drool for. I thought 24 days was enough to experience all Japan had to offer, but I was foolish. I look forward to one day coming back and seeing what more it has in store for me.

