

## **Mawson Lakes and Tanunda Primary School Study Tour of Japan – reflections from Erin Bath, Japanese teacher and tour guide.**

Wow! What an experience.... From 30<sup>th</sup> September to October 10<sup>th</sup> 2013, our 2 schools, Mawson Lakes and Tanunda had a group of 19 people, 7 students, 8 parents/caregivers and 4 staff, who travelled to Japan for a once in a lifetime experience. This was my first time organising and planning a trip for such a large group, including taking students to another country. I was feeling quite nervous and worried about people's safety, as well as the language barrier for most travelling on the trip. However, it was a fantastic experience and one that I would be proud and happy to be a part of again. Seeing the students' amazement, and the awe of parents and some staff at being in Japan for the first time, was a really rewarding experience for me. The families that came on the trip were truly amazing, and were able to confidently go off on their own for short periods of time to explore Japan, even on the first day.

We flew into Kansai airport, Osaka and then travelled to Kyoto by bus. In Kyoto we visited Fushimi-Inari shrine, with the most red torii gates I have ever seen. While in Kyoto we also visited the Kinkakuji Temple (Golden Pavilion), Kiyomizudera temple and saw a Maiko (apprentice Geisha) performance in Gion. From Kyoto, we travelled to Hiroshima by shinkansen.



In Hiroshima went straight to Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. Going through the museum is always a humbling experience and one that makes you stop and think about what people, not only Japanese people, went through during the war, and how it can and is still affecting the wider community and the world. Being able to see and read letters from the Mayor of Hiroshima to world leaders such as President Barack Obama, asking for peace, was very a powerful and moving experience. Each time I travel to Hiroshima, the Sadako children's monument is a place where I remember the story of a little girl, that no matter what she was going through in her sickness, was determined to make 1000 paper cranes to wish for good health and 'no war.'



Whilst in Japan in January this year as part of an intensive language course, I had the pleasure to meet and learn from a sensei (teacher) Junichi san, who spent many years in Queensland teaching Japanese and is now teaching English at a University in Hiroshima. He organised for some of his students to be our 'tour guides' around Hiroshima. They were fantastic and not only did it give us, the group, the opportunity to speak Japanese with them, but also gave them the chance to practice their English with us. We learnt a lot about Hiroshima and some of us have made some lasting friendships with our "tour guides". On our second day in Hiroshima, we visited Miyajima Island. We caught the ferry over to the island where we saw the famous Tori Gate and some other interesting sights, including deer that were extremely friendly. To get the best view of the island, some of our group caught the cable to the top of Mt Misen. We then walked down through very picturesque countryside taking 27,000 steps that day!



The following day was an early start, followed by lots of time spent travelling. We began with a 6 hour ride on a shinkansen from Hiroshima to Tokyo. Once in Tokyo we were met by Rie san, who works for the Mobara City Council. Mobara City is Salisbury City's sister city. Rie san guided us through a very busy Tokyo station to another platform to catch a 1 hour train to Mobara. In Mobara, we went straight to the council chambers and took part in a traditional art and craft activity called an ema, which is wooden tablet (block) painting. We had to follow the teacher's instructions carefully to recreate a piece of his artwork which featured a horse. After this, we met with the superintendent of education and 3 other dignitaries who welcomed us to Mobara and Japan. All students in the group introduced their parents/caregivers and Julie, the Japanese teacher from Tanunda, gave a speech in Japanese and Marlene, our principal, gave a speech in English. Dinner was provided for us and we were treated to a local display of Taiko (Japanese traditional drumming). It was an amazing performance that left us feeling energised and wanting to do it ourselves. The following day we visited Otaki Town, an old town that has been around since the samurai were in Japan. We had a walk around the town learning about some of the old buildings and what they used to be, as well as seeing the local heritage listed school, due to its unique design. After a delicious bento style lunch, we were taken to the Otaki Town castle and had an opportunity to dress up in samurai armour, samurai every day wear and/or a kimono. This was a huge highlight and one that everyone got to enjoy as this is not something that you have the opportunity to do very often in Japan. Late that afternoon, we left Mobara and went back into Tokyo.



This time, we had to navigate through Tokyo station on our own, trying not to lose any of our group amongst the thousands of people going in and out of the station at such a fast pace. We learnt to stand on the left of the escalators as the right side is the “fast lane” – this is very important to remember if you’re ever in Tokyo. That night we went into Shibuya. If you have ever seen the movie Tokyo Drift, you might remember the scene when the car drifts through a pedestrian crossing in a busy part of Tokyo and pedestrians part ways for the car. This intersection is in Shibuya. Again, the number of people using this intersection at each crossing is an unbelievable sight to see. The following morning we made our way to the Tokyo Sky Tree. The Sky Tree is newly built and a very popular attraction for not only tourists, but the Japanese people as well. The general admission queue was 2-3 hours waiting time, however, we were again lucky enough to meet another contact that had organised tickets for us through the group entrance. What an amazing view being able to see 360 degrees of Tokyo. Unfortunately, it was too cloudy to see Mt. Fuji. After our busy schedule, we decided that people could have some time on their own that afternoon to either rest or do some more sight-seeing. For some people, the last day in Japan was the best as it was our Disneyland day! There were some in the group that were not as excited as others, however seeing everyone at the end of the night really showed that the magic of Disneyland washed over everyone.



By the end of the trip we had actually been on an airplane, bus, shinkansen (bullet train), train, ferry, subway, tram, monorail, skyrail/cable car and taxi. I think the only modes of transport we didn’t go on were bicycle, rickshaw and submarine!

The trip was a huge success and one that I look forward to being a part of again in the future. I would just like to say a very big thankyou to Marlene (principal) and Pamela (teacher) for all of their support and for just being there. To the students and parents that came from our school, it was an amazing experience and I am glad that I have had the opportunity to get to know you better and that we could share this experience together. Thanks to everyone for making it fun and definitely a trip that I will not forget.

Erin Bath