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Introduction to Japanese History, Culture, and Society
RS 399

Japanese Culture Travel

Over the course of the past three weeks, our group has been able to travel to many amazing places in and near Osaka by means of bus, train, and even trolley. Through our travels, I have been able to learn and understand a lot more about the way of life in Japan. A list of our destinations include Osaka Castle, Shitennoji, Kyoto, Sumiyoshi Taisha, the Ancient Imperial Grave, Kobe, and Nara. Out of all of these places we visited, I really enjoyed our trip to Kyoto and Nara.

For our trip to Kyoto, we were split into six groups of about half Osaka Prefecture University students and half Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University students. In my group was David, Ryder, Yutaro, and Mike. This trip was based on a business proposal project, so each group was able to pick what locations in Kyoto they wanted to visit. My group chose to visit Fushimi Inari-Taisha and the Nishiki Market. Fushimi Inari-Taisha is a shrine that was built for the god Inari. The god Inari is resembled by a fox which can be found all over the shrine and the shops around it. Inside, the shrine is composed of several red-orange wooden arches that lead into the woods. Each arch represents a very wealthy donation to the god given by different people. Inside the shrine are also several tombstones and graves that are associated with different religions. While we were in Fushimi Inari-Taisha, we had traditional rice wine and we also stopped by a cat café.

The second location in Kyoto was the Nishiki Market. The Nishiki Market is a long narrow strip composed of numerous shops that were selling many different things, but a majority of the shops were selling food. This market seems to be very popular for tourists as it was very crowded and challenging to travel in groups. While we were there, we sampled many different Japanese foods that were all very interesting and delicious. That night, we met up with another group near the market and ate at a super cool revolving sushi restaurant.

For our trip to Nara we went to Todaiji Temple and Kasuga Taisha Shrine. In this area of Nara, there are over a thousand deer free-roaming throughout the park. It is said that these deer act as messengers to the god, so, maybe the reason behind feeding the deer is to feed the god. The first place we went to in Nara was the Todaiji Temple. The Todaiji Temple is a very large structure that protects three colossal sculptures of Buddha, two made of gold and the largest made out of bronze. Unfortunately the building that protects these sculptures is not the original building as the original building was much wider and taller. The second place we went to was the Kasuga Taisha Shrine. There are several different lanterns and red structures that make up this shrine. Inside one of the shrine's buildings is a dark room that is dimly lit with several uniquely designed lanterns. While we were at this shrine, we were approached by a few Japanese elementary students who seemed to be practicing their English on us. It seemed as if they were conducting a survey on where we were from and what our favorite Japanese dish was. At the end of our encounter, their instructor took a picture of us and the students gave us hand-made signs that read "Japan" in Japanese.

Overall, this course has proven to be very insightful and enjoyable. I don't think that I would have been able to have all of these amazing experiences in Japan without this program! It amazes me how much culture and historic locations that Japan has to offer. This trip has gone by so fast, but I am thankful and elated with all that I have been able to do here.