

STUDY ABROAD STORIES:

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It was my privilege to attend a study abroad session this summer in Osaka, Japan. In all of my travels, this one has become one of the most heartwarming I have to look back on.

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The reason for the trip was to earn credit for two courses, a humanities course and a mathematics course, all wrapped up in just over a month. Standard summer schedule right?

As the trip began, all of the students involved had made their own plans to travel, agreeing to meet at the Osaka International House, a hotel just north of the main city center. Students arrived their own way: some going in pairs with people they knew, others solo; some flying in early or late and a few with appropriate timing. I personally made a trip across the island to get there rather than flying direct. Some grand delusion convinced me that it would save me money rather than paying for the direct plane ticket. I flew into Narita, an airport just outside of Tokyo, then took an hour-long bus ride, a four-hour ride on the bullet train, and a thirty-minute ride on the subway to get to where I needed to go, all the while trying to

use whatever broken Japanese I knew to get around. Navigating the country without knowledge of Japanese is completely and entirely possible.

Much of the public transportation system has English translations under the Japanese signage, so moving around is easy as long as you can understand where you want to go. In addition, a good portion of the Japanese people know some English, as learning English can be a bridge to career advancement there. There were a few moments during the trip where I and some of the friends I made along the way were pleasantly surprised by how fluent in English some of the locals were. A random customer in line at a ramen shop turned around and helped us translate the menu, a random woman helped us travel through the underground labyrinth known as the Osaka metro, and a steak shop waitress who lived in Chicago for a few years chatted with us.

The cuisine was another facet of the trip. Normally someone would recommend trying all the local foods and famous dishes and treats, etc., to gain a true cultural experience. Nonsense. The real way to truly understand how a destination views its food? Visit the McDonalds. Don't rely on it exclusively, but at least go once or twice to figure out what's different and how they treat food service. In every instance that I had to rely on the Golden Arches, the food was ridiculously good. It beat out American McDonalds by a long shot and has ruined me from ever getting going in the states again. Although, to be honest, that's not such a bad thing. With Osaka known as the "Food Capital of Japan," it's no won-

der everything edible was amazing. Whether it was chain stores, mom-and-pop local restaurants, high-end eateries, or even vendors selling food on the streets, everything I had was fulfilling and delicious. The best part? It was cheap. If I paid \$5 for dinner, I was full.

The experience was unforgettable in part because of how historically rich Japan is. In one way or another, the towns, villages, shrines, and castles all had history dating back thousands of years ago, far exceeding the history of the relatively young United States. Even marketplaces that sold electronics and appealed to fans of anime and technology were built upon old fish markets dating back almost 500 years in

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der the past. We experienced Nishiki market, a dense open-air market crammed into a single alleyway, stretching block after block. The market was packed with tourists and locals alike enjoying the smells of freshly cooked fish, sweet treats, and savory meats.

We visited Osaka Castle, home of the story of a famous general known for his cunning intelligence and brilliant military strategy. He was born into almost nothing, and advanced through the ranks by his own

personal ambition. Nara, a city known for its large park, welcomed us with shrines and temples spanning across, home to resident deer that move and live with the locals in harmony. Their antlers were bright and polished like stained wood, which showed how the deer were accustomed to human interaction and being pet. One of the greatest things about this place was how the deer acted, bowing their heads before accepting a biscuit, and peacefully walking through the crowds of people; one or two of them, however, would act up and try to grab a bag here or there. One of the most sobering visits was

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to the infamous city of Hiroshima. After visiting a small island in the bay, seeing the shrines and temples there, we took a tram into the city. It was a slow commute through what looked almost like downtown Phoenix.

We arrived at our stop and stepped off of the bus. In the middle of the thriving city, filled with green parks, and business buildings, there stands alone a single ruined building in front of us, the A-Bomb Dome. A reminder from the past still stained and charred, the rubble and structure left untouched, stands the only building that withstood the atomic blast. In this moment, the weight of the event truly hit.

The entire trip was an amazing experience, and I truly can't wait to go back on my own, but if I'm go-

ing to be honest, it was the friends I made and people I met during the trip that truly makes me thankful. The ERAU students who went and braved the classes made lasting memories of late nights, breathtaking sights, and moments of laughter and joy. The local students from the Osaka Prefecture University helped show us around their city, took us to their favorite arcades, karaoke bars, and local food shops, and shared their experiences with us, a testament to how selfless and hospitable Japanese culture is.

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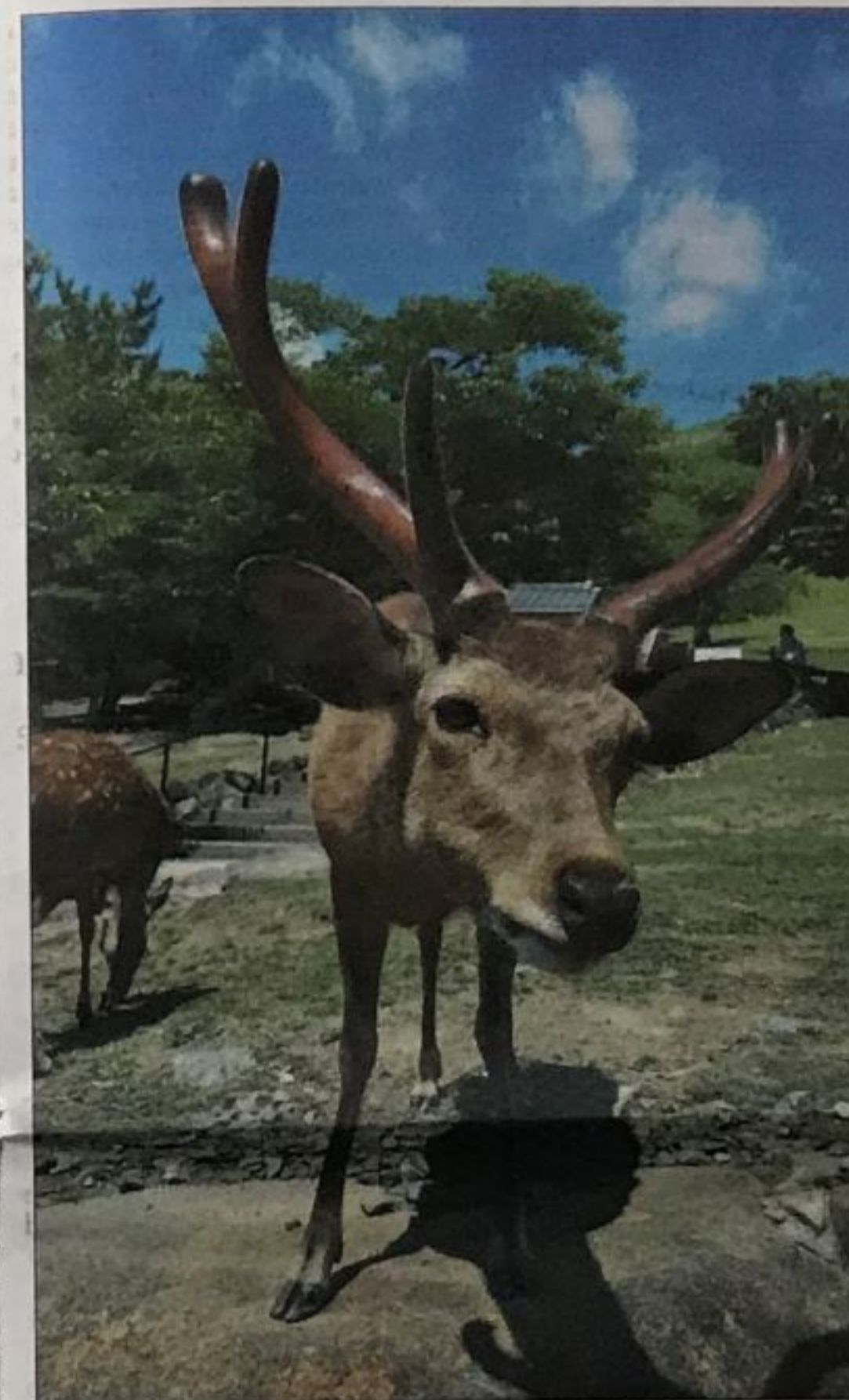
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first place and gave so much to make sure we had the time of our lives while learning what we needed to learn for our courses. But most of all we owe our experiences to professors Dr. Hisaya Tsutsui and Dr. Michele Zanolin. Without their guidance and help, none of the trip would have been possible. If given the chance to visit the Land of the Rising Sun, take it. You won't regret it: I know I don't.

Want to make your own study abroad memories?

Check out the Study Abroad Open House on September 5th or contact Kelly O'Brien at obrienk3@erau.edu

A Month in Japan



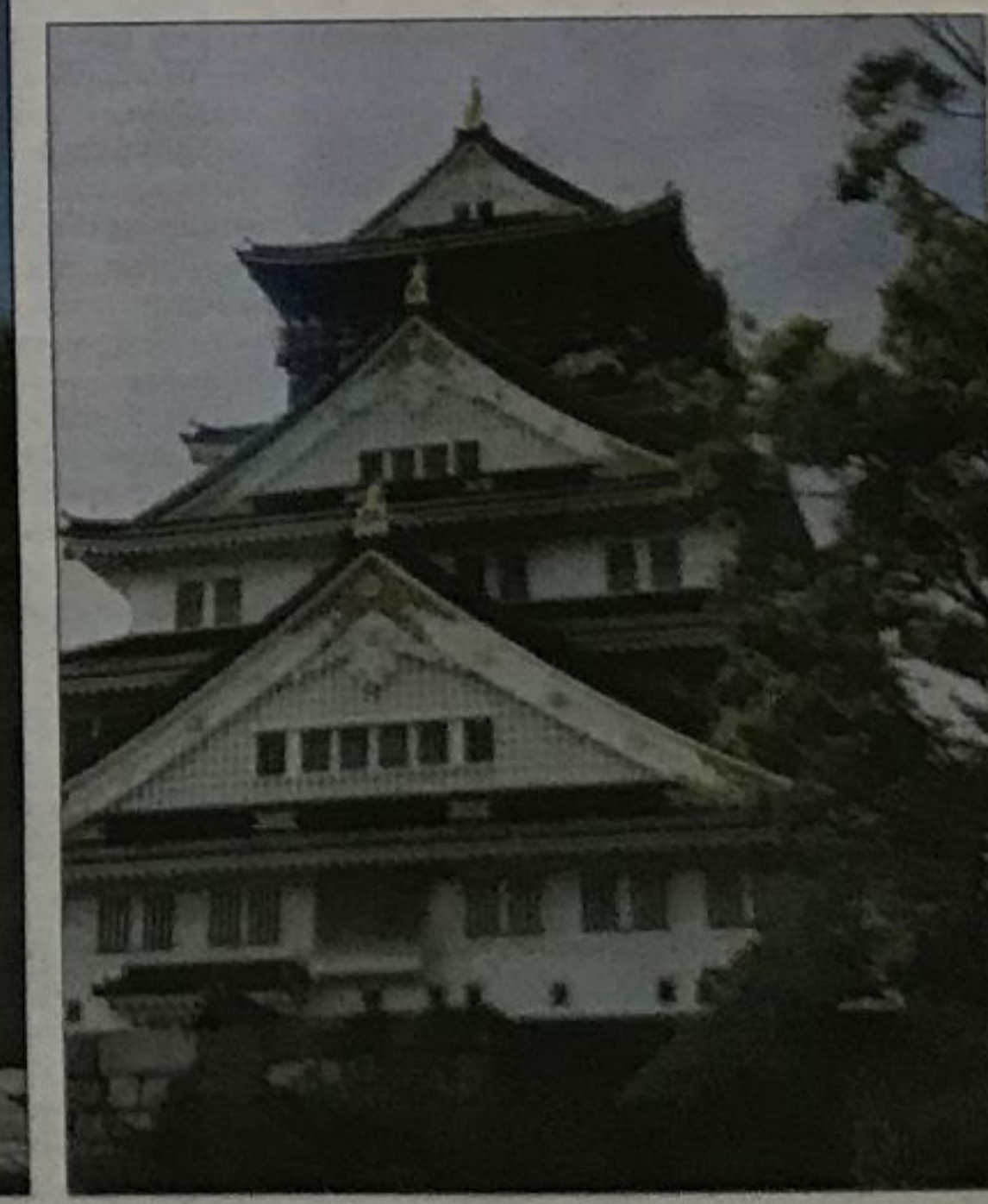
A Curious deer with polished antlers. Nara, Japan



The A-Bomb dome, a memorial site for the victims of Hiroshima, Hiroshima, Japan



Embry-Riddle students and professors who attended the Japan study abroad program outside the entrance to Osaka Prefecture University, one of the largest public universities in Japan



Osaka Castle in Osaka, Japan

