

Clearwater Sister Cities 2024 Young Ambassadors Newsletter



CSC Middle School Exchange Program with Nagano, Japan since 2001



By Lauren Jackson

This trip was honestly the greatest experience of my life. Japan was always number one on my bucket list, and I was excited and grateful to be chosen as an ambassador.

On this trip I learned many valuable lessons. Specifically, I learned that it's not about the destination, it's about the journey. When I was in Kyoto, we climbed the famous mountain with 1,000 torii gates. It's amazing to get to the top of the mountain but when you got there, it was just trees and tourist shops. Along the way, however, there were so many places to look at the views. The people who designed this many years ago wanted visitors to learn this lesson.

During this trip we went to Nagano and stayed with a local family. My host family were the Miyazakis and included Aoi, the 12-year-old sister, and Yasiharu, the 7-year-old boy. My family was amazing. They took me to see many places and cooked the most amazing food. Some fun things we did were go to a samurai house and get sushi. Staying with a host family isn't scary as they are so kind and attend to all your needs. This experience really shows a new way of life for a family.

When we attended Kawanakajima Junior High, the class I was placed in was so kind. Interacting with them was awesome as they are the same age as me. My favorite was participating in the after-school club of Kendo. It was cool to see Japanese style of martial arts as I practice Tae Kwon Do here in Florida.

I really had an amazing time going to Japan. The people on the trip with me were so much fun, and we got along so fast. I recommend this program for every middle schooler. Even if you are scared to travel, the chaperones make you feel so cared for and want you to have an amazing experience. This is one of the few opportunities for middle schoolers to open their worldview and experience a place outside of Clearwater. I will definitely be going back to Japan and looking into more exchange programs.





By Milan Durrance

My trip to Japan was the experience of a lifetime. It was a journey filled with new experiences, cultural discoveries, and unforgettable memories. As I reflect on my time there, I realize how much I've learned and grown through this adventure.

One of the most meaningful parts of my trip was my time with my host family. They welcomed me with open arms, making me feel like a part of their home from the very first day. I learned not only about Japanese customs and daily life but also about the warmth and hospitality that are deeply embedded in the culture. Sharing meals with them was an experience in itself—every dish was carefully prepared, beautifully presented, and filled with new and comforting flavors. They taught me the value of mindfulness and of being present in the moment.

Language was another aspect of the trip that challenged me, but also brought with it incredible rewards. While I had studied some Japanese before my trip, being immersed in the language daily pushed me to improve in ways I hadn't imagined. I found that even the smallest effort to speak Japanese was met with encouragement and patience. This experience reminded me of the power of communication—not just through words, but through gestures, expressions, and the willingness to understand and be understood.

As my trip came to an end, I found that I wasn't just leaving Japan with souvenirs or photos—I was leaving with a deeper understanding of a culture that is both rich and complex, and with a newfound appreciation for the lessons it had taught me. My time there made me more open-minded, more appreciative of different ways of living, and more mindful in my own life. I hope that one day, I can return to Japan—not just to relive the memories, but to continue the learning journey that began with this incredible trip.

Applications for the 2025 Young Ambassador Exchange Program are open!

Learn more and apply:

<https://clearwatersistercities.org/young-ambassadors>



Have specific questions about the program?
Email: csciya@gmail.com

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clearwatersistercities@gmail.com



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