

## PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT For Immediate Release

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### NYCHP 2010 Students Return from Studying Abroad in Kobe, Japan



*San Francisco (August 26, 2010) –*

This past summer through the 2010 Nikkei Youth Cultural Heritage Program (NYCHP) six college students set out on an adventure to study, live and learn about the culture in Japan. Many of the participants

had traveled to Japan prior to this trip, which triggered their interest to learn more in depth about daily life in Japan and the language, as opposed to just touring. In addition to San Francisco, community centers from Hawaii, Seattle and Los Angeles worked collectively in reaching out for college aged students from different regions. Here, they reflect on their experience and what they discovered about the culture and lifestyle of Japan.

Kristin Fong, UC Davis

Traveling to Japan has been one of the best experiences of my life! I've learned about the history of Japan during school, but having the opportunity to

visit and live in Kobe for a month takes history to a whole different level. Before we went to Kobe, Diane Matsuda led the 2010 Nikkei Youth Cultural Heritage participants to Hiroshima and Kyoto. In Hiroshima, I



saw the aftermath of the atomic bombing in 1945 and felt the emotional impact walking through the museum. Our next stop was to Kyoto, where we visited Nijo Castle, Maruyama Park, and Kiyomizu Temple. All historical sites were amazing!

In Kobe, I had the opportunity to live with two different host families where I was able to learn and experience the culture first-hand. Both host families made the greatest impact on my life and made my trip to Japan amazing. Even though I'm a 16-hour plane ride away, I know I can rely on them for anything, just like family does. Taking classes at the Kobe YMCA allowed me to learn Japanese, but also meet people from different countries. With the YMCA staff and classmates, we went to Kobe's Harborland, Nara, Kyoto, and a local high school to learn about the history and practices of Japan. During my stay in Japan, I had the opportunity to try regional specialty food such as Hiroshima and Osaka style okonomiyaki, takoyaki, and different body parts of a chicken!

Not only did I learn about the culture, but I was able to learn about myself. I was proud of myself for being able to step outside of my comfort zone and try new things. I was in a country where I did not speak the language and had limited cultural knowledge. I was able to pick up the language quickly, allowing

myself to get around Kobe. I had the best time in Japan and I hope to go back soon!

### Alyssa Kato, UC Davis

I am forever thankful for the amazing opportunity I had to go on my dream trip to my homeland to explore the beautiful country, and to deepen my understanding and appreciation of my cultural roots. I really enjoyed eating all of the delicious food, shopping, and sightseeing in Kyoto, Hiroshima, Osaka, and Nara. Our day trip to Hiroshima was my favorite. I tried okonomiyaki for the first time and loved it, was able to have lunch and meet my family who lives in Hiroshima for the first time, and I was moved by the powerful images and stories in the Peace Memorial Museum. Visiting Hiroshima reminded me of my Grandpa as he always talked about his post war experience in Hiroshima. His stories and all that I had read in textbooks came to life and brought me to tears.

In addition, my home stay experience was one I will forever and always cherish. Adjusting to Japanese lifestyle was challenging at first, but as time went on I grew accustomed to it and loved it! I grew to love public



transportation as I used it every day to go to and from school and to explore different parts of Japan. The trains and buses are very convenient, prompt, and fairly easy to navigate considering all the signs are in Nihongo. I tried foods I would never think to touch (eggplant, kabocha, unagi, and chicken heart), I

improved my chopstick skills, and I was able to break the language barrier with the Nihongo I had learned in school. Through school, I was also able to meet and share my adventures with people from all over the world who I now call my friends. I would give anything to go on this trip again. This was an amazing experience that I will be raving about for the rest of my life!

Eryn Kimura, UC Santa Barbara



Before going on the NYCHP trip, I felt like I knew all about Japan, its society, traditions, and etiquette. I thought that just by going to Japan three other times in the past with my family was enough to really understand the workings of the

Japanese culture. I was also confident in my knowledge of Japanese culture just based upon the fact that I take my shoes off before entering my own house, eat natto regularly, and grew up in Japan Town. Though I soon discovered that I actually knew a VERY small fraction of my culture.

When I first got to Japan, I was truly an American – I talked on the trains, stood on the wrong side of the escalator, and was seen as crazy whenever I smiled at people on the streets. I felt like such an outsider and began to think that Japanese society was too stiff, too uniform, and had too many rules. Now that I think about how I felt in the first two days, I would say I was quite ignorant and not too open to change.

Though as the days went by, as they say, I think I was turning Japanese. To me the host family experience was by far the best part that really made me change my ways. With my first home stay family, which was a large family of seven, it was so quiet and they would only talk to me occasionally. The first few days with my first family honestly confirmed my ideas that Japan was too uniform, stiff, and quiet for me. But like always, I was proven wrong. I ended up growing very close to the daughter and mother (to the point where I actually felt like she was my actual mom). I began to see that their family was actually similar to mine, and even as loud as mine! They taught me new things everyday – how to greet everyone when they would come home, that I had to finish every grain of rice in my rice bowl, and even how to make takoyaki!

I found also that my families were always so willing to help me – whether it was with my school work, doing my laundry, or even carrying my stuff to my room! I then began to realize that it wasn't just my host families that were genuinely kind, but the whole Japanese society was so kind and giving. Whenever I got lost at the train station or on the streets (which was basically daily), there was always someone there to help me. I immediately began to see that my environment was that of an altruistic and respectful society.

It's truly hard to express how much I learned and grew from this experience. I also grew to respect their strong value for hard-work and value for their family. This experience really made me re-evaluate my own values and behaviors, and helped me open up to different environments, peoples, and ideas.

Though, most importantly I began to truly appreciate Japan, its collectivist and respectful culture, and moreover, my culture.

My time in Japan really made me love it – even the humidity and loads of walking! All I know is that when my month was over, I didn't want to come back to America.

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For more information on the Nikkei Youth Cultural Heritage Program or to apply for Summer 2011, please contact Aya Ino at (415) 567-5505 or email [aino@jcccnc.org](mailto:aino@jcccnc.org)

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### **About the Kobe YMCA Language School**

The Kobe YMCA Japanese Language School was established in 1872. Its goal is to develop strength, knowledge and understanding of the totality of the Japanese language in reading, writing, listening and speaking. Its curriculum

covers a broad range of levels that focuses on personal one-on-one attention that suits every individual's learning style. It has small class sizes with courses lasting as short as one-month to two years.

### **About the JCCCNC**

Envisioned by the Japanese American community, JCCCNC will be an everlasting foundation of our Japanese American ancestry, cultural heritage, histories and traditions. The JCCCNC strives to meet the evolving needs of the Japanese American community through programs, affordable services and facility usage. The JCCCNC is a non-profit community center based in San Francisco.