



# The International School

## Blog from Japanese Capstone trip, November 2009

*by 5<sup>th</sup> grade parent chaperones Matt Schweitzer & Tonya Jones*

Fifth grade students at The International School travel to a country of their adopted language and culture as a Capstone to their international education. The students generally live with a host family or at a boarding school, attend school with their peers, and visit historical and cultural sites they have studied.

**End of week 1:** Wow! I have found that word coming out of my mouth several times in the first week of our trip. Every parent is proud of his children but it is hard to describe how it feels to watch your child interact within the culture that they have been studying.

What an amazing first week we have had. We got up at the crack of dawn to go the fish market in Tokyo and watch the large tuna being auctioned off. I have to give Kilian and Elisabeth credit for being willing to eat sushi for breakfast. I know that at 10 years old, I would have not been to excited about the idea of eating raw fish at any hour, let alone 6am.

We spent 3 amazing days in the old city of Kyoto. We had the pleasure of viewing amazing temples; I only wish we had more time to enjoy each of them.

We formally met the host families yesterday and said goodbye to the kids for the week. It was hard not to be nervous on their behalf but we have been told by Sensei that they are fitting in already just fine. We are anxious to hear how they are doing. I guess I will have to try and figure out what to do now that I have no responsibilities for the next 5 days. What a rough life I lead.

*Matt san*

**During week 2:** It is the second week of the Japanese Capstone trip and I am now footloose and fancy free in Tokyo. But last week was another story.... We arrived in Tokyo after a 3 hr delay in Portland. This was our only bad luck, however. We checked into a very nice hotel and spent a good Halloween night sleeping.

The next morning, we met Nao and Saki Yamamoto (former TIS students) in the Shinagawa area of Tokyo. There were a lot of



hugs! The sight of the four children chattering down the street together caused a lot of big smiles from the passerbys!

Next, Taka sensei let us go to the science museum. This was like OMSI only much bigger. (TIS teacher) Hideko's parents also met us there. We had so many friendly guides! It was a great time and our kids spoke Japanese so much - reading the signs at the museum, buying tickets, and ordering lunch.

The second day was just as amazing: the fish market (so busy!), Tokyo tower (buildings as far as you could see!) and a Japanese tea ceremony. Kilian and Elisabeth had practiced this at school and so made the tea lady very impressed. They sat on their knees the whole time, unlike Matt and I who could not! They were very confident and it was great to see how comfortable they felt in what was a very formal situation. Their Japanese manners came through very well. Thank you TIS teachers! They were well rewarded with a fun ride on the Tokyo Dome roller coaster, "Thunder dolphin".

Our next few days were spent in Kyoto. We made quite the sight bicycling around Kyoto. My favorite part was getting dressed up in fancy kimono and walking to Kiyomizu temple. Again, the sight of the four children, dressed up, laughing and speaking Japanese made so many people look and smile. It made your heart warm. They truly were making memories of a lifetime. As we made it to the temple, the sunset turned pink and the children looked like models on a photo shoot.

The children's favorite part was the visit to Eigamura (an old time Japanese theme park). They especially enjoyed the ninja show and playing pretend around the park.



Later, we spent a day in Nara. The kids paint their name on a tile for the new roof of Todaiji temple. Their brushwork makes the lady next to them widen her eyes in surprise! Again, the great work of the teachers of TIS comes shining through!

In the evening we brave the sushi bar and each try a taste of sea urchin. Both kids have no fear and are willing to try almost anything.

Our last day sightseeing was Kinkakuji (golden temple) before meeting with the host families. Our students made a small off-the-cuff speech about themselves in Japanese (Taka sensei reported they did very well) and we left them playing with their host families in the new science room on campus. The Seitoku campus looks very large and is located near the train station. Today, they went to school for a half day. I just got off the phone with Taka and he reports that they are both doing well. Of course, Kilian is making lots of friends playing soccer and dodge ball at recess! I cannot wait to hear their stories at the end of the week!

*Tonya*

**After the trip:** There is a well known belief in American culture that grown men are not supposed to cry. But I have to admit I was

holding back tears as I watched my daughter's host sister crying because her new friend and "sister" of one week had to leave. Every parent is proud of his child, but to have the opportunity to watch as she directly experiences the culture and language she has been studying for the past 6 years, and to witness the bond between her and her host sister - it was an experience that will stay with me forever.

Our trip to Japan was one of a lifetime and an experience that I know my daughter will never forget. After sightseeing for the first week of the trip, I had the opportunity to meet Elisabeth's host family and see the school where she would study for the next week. As I gave my 10-year-old a kiss goodbye, it struck me that she was on her own for the next week and so was I. Cell phone in hand, I told her to call or text me any time she needed me. Three days later I got my first call: "What are you doing, Dad?" I told her that I was about to have dinner with a family friend and she responded, "Okay, I will make it brief." (Can this possibly be my little girl, who sounded so confident and grown up?) She proceeded to tell me that she and her TIS classmate Kilian had given speeches in Japanese in front of the entire host school (500 students).

I couldn't help but think that there is not a snow ball's chance that I could have pulled that off at age 10.

I know for certain, had I been able to extend my daughter's stay in Japan, she would not have hesitated for a moment. She was in her element and loved every minute of it.

The amazing teachers at TIS have brought my child to this place, where she can experience, learn, bond and even give a presentation to an audience of 500, all in a language that is not her native tongue. There are not enough words in English to communicate my respect and gratitude for all of the Japanese track teachers that have taught Elisabeth over the last 6 years.

When you choose to give your child a bilingual education you know that you are giving them a great gift for life. But the thing that I did not see as clearly until the Japanese Capstone is how much easier it is for them to accept and be accepted in another culture. The confidence that Elisabeth and Kilian showed on this trip was truly amazing, as the adults followed them through the train stations and not the other way around. I only wish our trip could have lasted longer.



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