

Report on the stay abroad

Japan is known in western society for cherry blossoms, tea, cars, earthquakes, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the nuclear-tsunami catastrophe of Fukushima in 2011. But visiting the country shows, that there is a lot more to the Japanese culture than pretty scenery and advanced technology. First of all I'd like to mention, that there is quite a considerable amount of museums around every area, that are affordable for students and sometimes even offer discounts and they are definitely worth a visit: The National Museum of Ethnology in Suita, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, the Tokyo National Museum, the Mori Museum in Tokyo or the Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto, just to name a few. Another place to get to know the culture and get a feeling of what it means to live in Japan are shrines and temples. There are Shinto Shrines and Buddhist Temples to be found everywhere, even in the furthest countryside and those might be included in the most interesting ones for me. Of course the Meiju Shrine (明治神宮) in Tokyo or the Kinkakuji Temple (金閣寺) in Kyoto are also attractions with a great history and a very impressive look. But the small shrines and temples in the countryside are of more interest for someone, who really wants to live the Japanese culture. I personally felt the sacredness and spirituality of the place more in a non-tourist area and also learnt that Japanese people are mostly very open to explain the right way to pray at their shrines/temples and are happy to see a foreigner genuinely interested in the country's' original religion, which is Shintoism. Having taken the class "Japanese Religion" made the whole spiritual experience a lot more compelling and fascinating, e.g. when I went to pray at New Year's at the Hanazono Shrine (花園神社) in Tokyo and could do the ceremony correctly without having to ask someone for guidance. This part of Japan shows their great appreciation and love of their traditions, which feels a lot weaker in Europe, or rather Germany. More qualities, that seem prominent in Japan are discipline and balance. Meaning respect towards other people, but also the traditions, culture and language are important and cherished. Life in Japan also concentrates on simplicity, which points out the balance in their culture. The rituals, traditions and food all indicate and manifest this aspect. In contrast to this attitude Japan also has a huge fantasy component to it, with all the anime, manga and other media outlets, that lets imagination and creativity flow freely and explore all kinds of visions. There are even a lot of Manga and Anime Museums, most of these located in Tokyo. Speaking of Japan's capital city: Tokyo has a whole district dedicated to the "nerd-culture", which includes anime, manga, games, figurines, cosplay, electronics and much more in Akihabara. In between these modern sectors with bright colours, many lights and screaming voices to lure in customers, there are once again traditional parts of Japan and in a small alleyway there might be a shrine right next to a skyscraper. And that is the contrast that attracted me to Japan in the first place. In my motivation

letter I wrote, that I was interested in the disparity between modern and traditional Japan and it was nothing less than what I expected. After visiting the country, I've been eager to see, I am still as fascinated as ever and had a wonderful glimpse of Japan, its culture and people, that makes me want to explore even more of its history and look forward to its progress as an imperial power in today's world.