

## Mayor's Young Ambassador Japan Travel Program

Los Angeles Mayor's Office of International Affairs

In partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the Mayor's Young Ambassador (MaYA) Initiative sent 23 young Angelenos to Japan from January 14-22, 2019 via the KAKEHASHI Project. "KAKEHASHI," which means a "bridge" in Japanese, is a project of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan that promotes people-to-people exchange programs between Japan and the USA/Canada.

**DAY 1:** During their exciting first day in Tokyo, the students attended lectures on Japan to enhance their understanding of Japanese history, politics, and culture. They visited the Edo-Tokyo Museum, Meiji Shrine, and explored modern Tokyo at the Harajuku District.



**DAY 2:** The students traveled by Japanese high-speed bullet train to L.A.'s Sister City Nagoya. Once in Nagoya, they bonded with students at Nagoya University's School of Foreign Studies and participated in a traditional Japanese tea ceremony.



**DAY 3:** The students toured Nagoya Castle, conducted a courtesy visit at Nagoya City Hall with the Deputy Mayor where they discussed education in the U.S. and Japan, and attended a lecture series with representatives of the Aichi Prefectural Government.



**DAY 4-5:** The highlight of the program was the students' two-night homestay with local host families. For two days, the students immersed themselves in the daily lives of a Japanese family—attending their children's



soccer matches, shopping at the local market, and enjoying home cooked family meals. They developed deep lasting bonds with their host families, and the farewell ceremony was filled with many tearful goodbyes. Before departing Nagoya, the students made one final stop to observe cutting-edge technologies at the Toyota Museum.

**DAY 6-7:** During their last two days in Tokyo, the students visited Senso-ji Temple and presented their findings and observations about Japan to delegates of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



## TESTIMONIALS

“I have learned how to trust unfamiliar people and places, and how to navigate uncertain situations in foreign countries. **I learned to trust a family and their home in a place I had never visited or heard of before.** I also learned how to build lasting connections on a global scale, as I now keep in touch with my host family and Nagoya University friends.”

“My favorite experience during the trip was staying with my homestay family. At first I was really nervous because I did not know what to expect but once they opened the doors to their humble home, they instantly treated me as one of them. I felt normal like I belonged there. **They helped me understand the value of traditions and love.**”

“This trip not only filled my phone with great pictures, but also filled my mind with fresh perspectives on life. As someone who has grown up in the same place for almost twenty years, it was interesting to see what people in a different country do and how they do it.”







**“I never expected to connect with strangers as I assumed that our language and cultural differences would make it difficult to communicate. However, we related so much through our interests in art, sports, and educational goals. This experience shut down my preconceptions of Japanese character and culture. I assumed that I would be looked down upon for making mistakes and that Japanese people are very serious. In fact, Japanese people are so patient, kind and helpful.”**

**“I completely fell in love with trying to improve our relationship with other countries.”**

**“I felt considerably nervous the first few hours of the homestay since my Japanese is lacking. But soon those nerves faded as I sat down with my host family to have dinner. They are some of the kindest people I have ever met, speaking with me throughout the entire meal even though they struggled with English. Eventually I started to laugh with them as they spoke Japanese. Even though I really wasn’t too sure what they were saying, it just felt good to smile together.”**



**“My favorite part of the trip was visiting the market with my host family. This seemingly mundane trip was mind-blowing to the part of my brain that wants to continue traveling abroad to learn about how cultures differ from American culture. The trip presented an intimate view to Japanese life, as the market presents a space where the community goes, so getting to see what type of products are sold, and what people were buying was enormously interesting.”**





“Through the generosity of our city and the country of Japan, I was able to interact with a culture whose rich and deep past is interwoven with their modern day society. **I had the amazing opportunity to not only see many of the differences between us and Japan, but the countless similarities that bind us as human beings.**”

“Prior to this trip I had never traveled far away from my family. I didn't even have my passport before this trip but I learned how important and amazing having the ability to travel can be. This trip made me want to travel more in the future. **It opened my eyes to how big the world really is and the many different cultures out there. It taught me to appreciate a culture different from mine.**”



“My favorite experience was visiting Nagoya University. Being able to interact with students similar in age and interest **made me feel as if we may have more similarities with people in foreign countries than you would think.** Also learning that many foreign students make an effort to learn English was very heartwarming.”



“**Since coming home, I act with more kindness and respect in the world** and in my home. Japanese people have so much patience and respect that it made me reflect on how I behave and influenced me to be more like that towards the people in my life.”

“**I wanted to immerse myself in the culture so that I'd become more aware of those that live not only overseas, but also mere miles away from me.** I feel after having the opportunity to stay with a host family, partake in many traditional aspects of Japanese culture, and see much of Japan's landscape (city and countryside), that **my appreciation and awareness for where I live, who I am, and who I want to be has grown.**”

“**Initially my goals were to learn more about how Japanese citizens maintained such a healthy lifestyle,** and how they would incorporate exercise into their daily lives. After this trip I learned how much portion control, fish and soy centered diet, and how easily walking and commuting via bicycle fit into Japanese society.”

“**I learned how respectful, uniform, family oriented, welcoming, and attentive to detail Japanese people are** by experiencing the homestay and meeting youths from Nagoya University. The individuals we met were so patient and took into consideration our inexperience with their customs while trying their food and taking part of their daily routines.”

“**I learned being culturally conscious and aware of foreign countries outside the U.S. is very important because that will lead to peaceful interactions between the U.S. and the rest of the world.** Creating relationships with people outside our borders is important because we can learn a lot from them.”

“I believe this trip has rooted an ambition within me to travel further and longer with a greater open mindedness and understanding.”

