

Thoughts and reflections —How I changed



I love eating, especially chocolate and ice cream, but I also like eating all different types of food and I'll try anything!

Abby [Australia]

16, Year 11 at Dandenong High School, Victoria

"I became more confident."

It was really interesting to see the way people lived on Izena compared not only to Australia but Yokohama and Tokyo as well. I loved meeting and working with the other students while in Japan and it's great to have made friends in so many different places. It was really interesting to see the differences and similarities between our daily lives.

Since participating in the Deai project I think I have become more confident. Knowing that I can travel overseas by myself and just meeting so many great people has really improved my confidence. I think I can use the knowledge I've gained of other countries and cultures, and I will have more confidence in doing new things from now on.



In Japan I wanted to experience the life of an ordinary high school student like myself.

Bai Yun [China]

17, Second year at Changchun Korean Secondary School, Jilin

"I relate to people differently now."

I'm very quiet and rarely approach people myself, but the program changed that. Not only the participants from the US, UK, Australia, and New Zealand, but those from Japan and Korea could speak English, and I was the only one who couldn't. I had a lot of difficulty communicating with everyone. But using the little English I knew along with gestures allowed me to communicate without any major problems for the most part. But this was why I had to be more assertive than usual in talking to people. From now on, I think I'll be more confident in approaching people.



Since fifth grade in elementary school I have been a reporter for the *Yomiuri Newspaper's* Junior Press. I like making things with my hands.

Hari [Japan]

17, Second year at Toyo Eiwa Jogakuin High School

"The experience gave me confidence in learning a new language."

The fact that the students from abroad made the effort to give their presentations in Japanese was most memorable. I think this experience will give me confidence when I learn a new language because of the sense of comfort that comes from having seen foreigners who are trying to study a new language, just like I am studying English. What I learned was this: foreign languages are hard for anyone. But even without being able to speak fluently, one can make friends.

Until we went to Okinawa, we only knew each other through the Internet. This was really *ofukai* (offline meeting) on a very large scale. These ten days were an example of global connections born out of the Internet. It struck me that this is the use for which the Internet was really intended. Some of the participants were quite different in person from the impressions I had of them on the Web. That, of course, is another thing that makes the Internet interesting.

The photo essays and full-text of the “Thoughts and Reflections” of the 14 participants can be found at the Deai Photo Essay Cafe website. http://www.tjf.or.jp/photoessaycafe/cafe_okinawa/

Note: Ages and school affiliations are as of the time of participation in the program.

Kin [Japan]

16, Second year of Kanagawa Prefectural Senior High School of Foreign Studies

“I realized how fun it is to be connected to other people.”

Until I participated in this program, I shied away from group activities because they seemed like such a hassle and a waste of time. But having experienced the difficulty and the joy of completing a project through cooperation with others and the sense of fulfillment we felt, I’m completely addicted! I realized how fun it is to be connected to other people. Also, having been given the opportunity to be a group leader, I’ve gained confidence that I—one who has always been on the receiving end of support—can lead others. I also learned to be open to other people’s views and to look at things from various perspectives. I’ve also become able to voice my own questions and opinions, no matter how trivial, without dismissing them for fear of being considered weird.

It might be true that understanding is possible despite language barriers, but I often became impatient about the fact that I couldn’t clearly communicate what I wanted to say. I feel that language is very important, and there are some things that can only be communicated through a certain language (for example, *itterasshai* in Japanese). Also, during our Internet chats after the program was over, I was blown away by the expression LOL (laughing out loud) which would be the equivalent of (爆) in Japanese, and want to learn more of those expressions, so I’ve decided to study language further.



I came to Japan from China when I was nine years old. I love languages and speak Chinese, Korean, and Japanese.

Ko [Japan]

17, Second year of Kanagawa Prefectural Senior High School of Foreign Studies

“Kids of the same generation are the same anywhere you go.”

Until I participated in this program, I had few opportunities to interact with foreigners my own age. So I’d been a bit scared of them. But having met everyone on this program I realized that kids of the same generation are the same anywhere you go. I think at our age, our main interests are music and such. And when someone’s humming a song and another person recognizes it (“Hey, I know that song!”), that leads to further conversation. As we talked about lots of things like fashion and boy/girlfriends, I saw that we’re all thinking about the same things. The actual content of our conversations are things that would embarrass people if I told anyone . . . so I’ll refrain from writing any of it. Hmm. Talking late into the night has become a wonderful memory.

My vision for the future is clearer now because of this program. This is because I was able to learn that interaction with people from various countries is enjoyable. In the future, I want to become a sophisticated globetrotter. Since I read a lot of essays by students from different countries in the screening process, I want to visit more countries now.

The thirteen people I met on this program are great. If I ever experience a setback in the future, remembering that I have friends somewhere on this planet, doing their best, will surely help me regain the courage to keep going. A big thank you to everyone who had a hand in making such a great opportunity possible.



My hobby is playing the saxophone. I’m studying Chinese.



"We all knew similar hand plays, and I felt like the world is all interconnected."



I am always smiling. Well, maybe not always; but I am a happy person.

Kosoo [Korea]

17, Second year at Sehwa High School, Jeju

"I will have a more accurate picture of Japan."

I think my way of thinking and the breadth of my interests expanded. It is true that there is a lot of mutual misunderstanding between Korea and Japan. I myself really did not know much about Japan; I just had a vague feeling of wariness toward Japan. This opportunity to make friends in Japan helped me fix my negative ideas about the country, and made me realize that things are not as bad as some people say. I think I will be able to have a more accurate picture of the country.

I regret lacking the confidence to speak in situations where I had enough English and Japanese language ability to do so. Still, I gradually built up confidence and could speak out in the group little by little. On the last night in Izena, the interpreter helped me out and so I was able to say what I wanted to say in Japanese. I could always say things through the interpreter, but at least that one time, I was glad that I could directly express my feelings to everyone by myself.



I am a huge Disney fan. I also love English.

Mickey [Japan]

17, Freshman at Yokohama Commercial High School

"I'm not as easily swayed by others as I used to be."

I noticed that the students from other countries all had strong opinions. I was impressed by their ability to stick to their guns without fearing conflict. The night before our presentation at the junior high school, Malee and Bai Yun had a difference of opinion about the order of the groups in giving their presentations. From the feel of the discussion, Bai Yun's view seemed to have the support of most of our group, and I think Malee was aware of this. But she stuck with her view. I admire that strength, because I'm the kind of person who doesn't have the guts to express her own opinion as soon as she finds out that someone else thinks differently. I think that now I'm not as easily swayed by others as I used to be. I've tried to grow out of the idea that "it's good just to be the same as other people," and to hold on to my own views.



I'm active in the cooking club at school. I want to become a Japanese language teacher.

Misa [Japan]

16, Freshman at Yokohama Commercial High School

"I learned how to communicate my ideas."

I was moved that the others would try really hard to help me understand when I had trouble, and that they made a great effort to understand my broken English.

Before I participated in this project, I was rather passive, never offering my opinions until someone asked. But watching the other participants actively taking part in discussions was very stimulating, and I learned how to communicate my own ideas. Also I think I've become a better listener because we conducted many interviews during the program.



"We found *shisa* everywhere we went."

Rosie [UK]

17, Year 13 at King Edward VII School, Sheffield

"My level of tolerance has been increased."

I have learnt more about my own culture by seeing how it differs from with other peoples. Since many people had backgrounds in countries other than where they lived, I got to see an even more varied view of the world. Through Malee I learnt about Hmong culture and about Mexico through Paul.

And after meeting people from so many different countries with so many different opinions I feel that my level of tolerance has been increased. I've learnt that even if I disagree with people on some issues, there will be other parts of their character that are really great.

My main regret is that I did not learn a few words of Chinese and Korean before going to Japan just so I could have made an initial attempt at conversation. In future, before traveling to a country I will make sure that I always know a few basic phrases to help me get by.



I would really like to have a dog—a chocolate brown Labrador would match perfectly with my favorite food.

Paul [US]

18, formerly Durango High School, Nevada

"I really enjoyed Japan."

The project taught me how other people live and how their culture is like. Because of that I would like to travel to other places to find out how people are living and what their culture is like.

I also learned a lot about Japan and its culture. For example, I was amazed that Japan is so clean. Also the whole time I was in Japan I felt very safe. One day Kensuke and I were out late and had to walk and ride the train home. During that time nothing happened to us. That was strange for me because here, in Las Vegas, when my friends and I are out late something bad usually happens like a fight or something like that. I really enjoyed Japan and am considering moving to Japan in the future. Maybe I can teach Spanish or English in Japan.



I was born in Mexico. My hobbies are tennis, partying, driving fast, and eating sushi.

Maya [Japan]

17, Third year at Tokyo University of Agriculture Daiichi High School

"I hope to find a career that builds bridges between people."

I've never been very good at meeting new people, so at first I was really nervous and didn't know what to do. But as the other participants started talking to me, I began to grow more comfortable. Until now, I used to wait for people to start conversations with me instead of initiating them myself, but after working on this project, I started to feel a need to change. Since I've learned that overcoming that initial apprehension allows people to grow closer, I want to make an effort to talk to people. I'm hoping I'll be able to change, even if it's a little bit at a time.

I realized that though we may have grown up in different countries, we are all people. It was surprising to me how close we could become. In the future, I hope to be able to find a career that builds bridges between people.



I'm a member of photography club at my school. I love shopping and the Okinawan rock band Orange Range.



"The sense of being in touch with nature was very strong with the Izena people."



My mum and dad are from China. I was born in New Zealand. I speak Chinese and English, both fluently. I love my country.

Vicki [New Zealand]

14, Year 10 at Horowhenua School, Levin

"I became more independent."

During the program I sometimes felt isolated and useless because I didn't understand what other people were saying in Japanese. I guess I locked myself away from others, and now when I think back, I regret it a lot. I should have contributed to every second. However, my shyness evaporated quickly when we worked together and as I got to know the group members better.

This experience has given me even more motivation to learn the Japanese language and culture. Also meeting all the other participants has given me another inspirational "boost" to pursue many other languages, so that one day I can talk to them fluently not only in Japanese but in their native language, too!

You could say I went through some sort of "metamorphosis" during my stay in Japan. The experience developed me into a more independent person. I can do things by myself, and not rely on others as much anymore, and I am proud of that.



My parents are from Laos. Hmong culture is a big part of my life.

Malee [US]

17, Year 12 at Menasha High School, Wisconsin

"I appreciate language."

The best and humorous part of getting to know the other participants was overcoming the language barrier. We learned to use body language, using sound-effects, and making fools of ourselves to get our points across. It was so hilarious using body language to get our point across to another. This is one of my favorite memories from the trip and only allowed us to appreciate language more.

Until I participated in this program, I never knew how much Japanese I knew and going to Japan helped me realize I wanted to further my studies in the future. I hope to receive a degree in Japanese language in college. Perhaps I would even consider studying in Japan in the future.



I love music and dance. I'm hoping to get a job in something related to fashion.

Kensuke [Japan]

17, Second year at Yokohama Commercial High School

"I've grown to value encounters."

I no longer hesitate to interact with people of different ages and cultures. Now that I no longer want to end my relationships after the first meeting, I think I am more confident in my relationships with people.

Despite the language barrier, everyone found ways to communicate, which I thought was impressive. The closer we got, the more we wanted to talk with each other. Also, music had a big role in our communication. I like Western music, and being able to talk about music, a topic many of us had in common, helped to break the ice. Playing the Izena drums and singing Okinawan songs also played a big role in bringing us together. I truly felt the power of music.



“Our final discussion
—in spite of our exhaustion
—was lots of fun!”

From Shun'ichi and the Tutors



The day before this program started, I was overcome with anxiety about whether I would be able to make myself understood by the Japanese and foreign participants in the program. In an effort to express myself as I am, I sang songs and played *sanshin* so that they could experience firsthand the music I create and perform. I spoke to the participants about my life and what I planned to do in the future. Everyone expressed a great interest, asked a lot of questions, and I enjoyed talking about myself!

In addition, I could tell that as the participants took a tour of the island and learned more about its culture, nature, people, and homes, they grew to like the island even more, and that made me very happy!

Shun'ichi



As time went by, I felt that perhaps the students would get on better with the other participants if I didn't interject so much as an interpreter, so I tried to keep my distance. I advised a student who was having trouble participating due to language barriers to be more assertive, and asked other students to pay more attention to her. I was relieved when this participant, on our last night on Izena Island, said, "I wasn't able to speak much with everyone because of my lack of language skills, but I'd like to make more of an effort to be an active participant from now on." I'm sure she was going through a lot in those four days, but I'm convinced that she's overcome a lot of her troubles and grown a lot as a result.

I think it was a truly wonderful encounter in which the participants grew closer and closer in these five days, trying wholeheartedly to understand each other's feelings, and actively exchanging views in an effort to achieve a common goal.

Piao Jinqiu, tutor



Watching the high school students grow close in the five days they spent in Okinawa, I realized that the distance between people can be reduced in spite of language barriers. The program made me realize that words are the same as music and sports—bridges that connect people. What is most important in building a relationship is how much interest one person has in another. Even if you were fluent in English, if you don't speak to anyone, it wouldn't mean a thing. On the other hand, if you wanted to learn more about another person, you'd make the effort to communicate, somehow. I think that's when you really start to feel the value of words.

Horie Asako, tutor



What I felt most strongly through this program was that meeting people is just plain fun. "Intercultural interaction" is simply an encounter between people who want to get to know one another. And what's really important is not what culture you come from or what language you speak, but rather, who you are. These high school students all come from different cultural backgrounds and speak different languages. That they could grow close to each other is because they were all energetic, cheerful people.

Yoshida Yuri, tutor