

Gabriel Lovejoy

For the past six and a half months I lived in Japan, immersed within the culture. In those six months I had the opportunity to take two academic programs and volunteer for a summer school program for Japanese high schoolers. As this was my first extended period living abroad and being on my own, I feel I grew and developed in many ways. I believe that this trip will be a turning point in my life when I look back in retrospect.

The knowledge I have gained during my time in Japan has already begun to influence me, and will continue to do so as I move forward in life. This experience has afforded me numerous opportunities: to make friends here in Japan, many who have had their own international experiences that they have shared with me; to experience what it is like to live with a Japanese family; to try new food; to learn more about Japanese culture and society; and to gain a better understanding of Japan and its outlook on the rest of the world. Perhaps most of all, I have come to appreciate the importance of learning a foreign language if one is truly to know another country and culture.

The idealized view of Japan that I had prior to visiting has been replaced with a much deeper, more realistic view of the country, which allows me to see it for what it is. The rapid pace of life and crowded spaces of Tokyo, as well as the ingrained societal expectations have become just a few new aspects of my view of Japan. New information I have gained about the country has engendered an interest in certain societal topics that will keep me paying attention to the news, therefore allowing me to make a more informed decision regarding whether I would like to move to Japan in the future to work.

Before this experience, I was one hundred percent certain that I wanted to work in Japan in the future. Now I am not so certain. However, this is a good thing. I now know what things I do and don't like about Japan, how it could be better, and what to look for in a place that I would like to live in the future. Perhaps I still would like to live in Japan, just in a different area than those I have lived in already. Overall, my experience in Japan has greatly changed the direction my life is going, and I feel more certain in the steps I am taking now, which include continuing to study Japanese and improve my understanding and fluency. Regardless of whether I decide to try to live and work in Japan, my time in country over the past six and a half months has confirmed that I would like to have a lifelong connection with Japan in the future, whether it be through work, family, or simply friends.