

Hawaii Okinawa Exchange Program

I hosted Haruka when she came to Oahu and was not planning on going to Okinawa because my other friend who also hosted was not going to Okinawa. But then after reading Haruka's thank you note I decided to go to Okinawa. Going to Okinawa was one of the best decisions I have made. Being in Okinawa and living Haruka's life with her is so eye opening because she wakes up at 5:20, catches the bus to the monorail, and then walks to school every day. It makes me realize that I am lucky to get a car ride from my dad every day to go to school. Little things like that opens my eyes to the world around me.

Going to school with Haruka was great because her class was so nice and welcoming. Even though you speak English and they speak Japanese that does not stop you from creating a friendship with them. They begin to learn English very early so talking to them is easy, and if not you can use your hand motions or a translator. Her class was so great and becoming friends with them was fun and interesting.

We also learn about The Battle of Okinawa and how terrible it was. Learning the history of Okinawa makes you realize how brutal war is. There were so many young boys and girls who were turned into soldiers and nurses during the battle. One lady spoke to us about her experience during the battle and you could understand through her hand motions how horrific the scene was. Another school took us to an actual cave that civilians used to hide in during the war. The hands on experience helped me understand how horrible it was for the civilians during the war.

Every other day the Hawaii students go on field trips together to different places. While also learning about The Battle of Okinawa we went to other fun places. During these field trips

you begin to bond with the other Hawaii students and begin to call each other friends rather than acquaintances. We get to go to the aquarium, Okinawa World, Shuri Castle, and so much more places.

Also during the trip we go to different schools meeting many new people. It's great to interact with others and learn about the different schools and students. Through school visits you learn the differences between the school's rankings. You also make many new friends through the school exchanges which makes you want to stay in Okinawa even more.

When it finally comes time to leave you do not realize it until you are at the security checkpoint. It hit me fast and before I knew it I was crying and hugging Haruka. You think you can hold it in but in reality you can't make the tears stop. The pain you feel leaving your new friends and host student is so crazy that you will be crying about it that night as you fall asleep. Leaving Haruka was like leaving a dear sister behind and never knowing when you may meet again.

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