

## Hawaii – Okinawa Student Exchange Program – by Jillian Ota

There were many things that I enjoyed on this trip, which was going to the school, Gyokusendo and the Okinawa World, and the many food that I got to eat on this trip.

The school that Rhiannon, Nikki, Koa and I went to was called Kyuyo Senior High school. This was one of my highlights on this trip because I got to spend time with my host, experience the long school day and meet new people. Kyuyo High school has a long school day that went from 7:30 am to 5:00 everyday with eight periods and homeroom. The main classes are Science, Math, home economics, English, Japanese, Social Studies and PE and Health. I got to participate in English and Science class. Most of the teachers only spoke Japanese that gave me a chance to do work, or read a book. Good advice for school is bring something like a long book or paper to keep yourself busy when the classes get hard or just spend time with the English teacher. School is also gives you a chance to meet new people. There are at least forty kids in the class that will want to talk to you and get to know you better so be out-going and try to learn their names. I got to know many of the students there and became good friends with them.

Another place to go is to the Gyokusendo Cave and Okinawa World located on the South side of Okinawa. When you get off and see the nature and don't see the place, you would be confused but learning we had to go into a cave before seeing the village. Traveling inside the cave was very long and wet. It was a long and complicated road before making out of the tunnel to the sunlight and tropical gardens of the village. There were many things to do in Okinawa World and many sights to see traveling through there. One of the sights to see is the beautiful eisa performance with the drummers and dancers wearing hot uniforms during the dance and drumming. Another experience is holding a white and yellow snake. Its fun to be with two or people to help split the cost and help you out to hold the snake. It was a thrilling experience to hold the snake up and laugh about it. Another place you should check out is the Doctor Fish. It costs 500 yen for five minutes of fish eating dead skin off your feet. It was very ticklish to the feet but it makes your feet clean and feeling good. They also had a picture place where you got to wear the traditional clothes and kimonos and got our picture taken.

The last thing I enjoyed about Okinawa is all the food that I got to eat on this trip. For school everyday, I got to eat bentos that were made from my host mother. Each bento was something different and tasty to eat. On field trip days we got to eat bentos that had many things we could eat. Even though every lunch was mostly a bento, I got to experience some the foods that Okinawa people love to eat. One of the things that the eat a lot was Goya. It is a bitter melon, which sounds really bad, or good if you like bitter things. I tried bitter melon or Goya and immediately tasted the bitterness of it making me gag. Chinsuko or the Okinawa style of a shortbread cookie was very tasty and had many flavors to choose from. I like the original cookie that was very good. Okinawa's soba is like regular soba but with thicker noodles. It's a meal that can be eaten anytime and it's very delicious. Besides the Okinawa foods, I also got to eat many Japanese foods such as natto, sushi, yakiniku, shabushabu, Yakisoba, ramen, curry, katsu and okonomiyaki. When your host student ask what you like to eat and what you dislike, make sure you tell them or else you may be eating some weird things that you might not enjoy such as mozuku which is a slimy seaweed.

Being on this Okinawa Trip made me realize on how Okinawa and Hawaii are very alike in many ways and experiencing at these two places and the foods that I got to eat made this trip worth it.