

Japanese Immersion Course

The students were separated into 5 groups based on ability levels, (A to E (E being most experienced)) ranging from absolute beginners through to A level, with each group consisting of one or two English schools. This mix of English classes allowed for familiarity within a group while simultaneously encouraging the integration of different schools into one group.

Each weekday morning was dedicated to lesson time throughout the fortnight, with the afternoons being left for extracurricular activities. Lessons were fifty minutes long with a ten-minute break in between each of the three sessions, highlighting the similarity to the British education system. The topics for class E ranged from basics of self-introduction to local dialect, and role-play as prime minister; such a varying structure kept interest throughout what could have otherwise seemed an over intensive course. All groups also had a small selection of teachers throughout the duration of the course allowing students to experience both a range of teaching styles and varying dialects, while still maintaining a relaxed environment in which the students and teachers could build up a relationship. Group 'presentations' were an ongoing project, each class taking a different topic. This not only helped strengthen a class' individual personality, but also culminated with a memorable awards ceremony punctuated at regular intervals by performances of everything from 'Momotaro' to SMAP and Shakespeare.

Afternoon timetabling allowed for a more tourist style experience of Japan, setting aside time to take in many of the famous sights in and around Osaka and neighbouring Nara; highlights of which included the walk around Nara's national parks, and the Flea Market barely 5 minutes walk from the hotel. Other excursions were to a Panasonic Battery Factory, where students made their own working batteries from scratch, which was surprisingly more fun than it sounds. The success of such trips came primarily from the 'Buddy System'. Teaming up each school with two or three Japanese students for the entire duration of the trip gave it a real sense of togetherness, and it was the start of many lasting friendships. More experienced speakers of Japanese could practice what they had just learnt and pick up invaluable lessons with native peers.

The whereabouts of the hotel also served only to enhance the whole experience; close enough to hold all necessities and a handful of good restaurants close by, but not so central that each morning's walk to the university through some of the smaller roads besides the temples and past local bakeries didn't lack a little charm. All evenings and weekends were left off timetable and the distance to the train and tram stations made travel to any destination possible, thus not placing any restrictions on free time.

All in all, the entire trip was very well balanced, with lessons and experiencing Japan itself taking equal precedent. It was an intensive course, and a longer time period than most exchange trips made it inevitably at times, tiring. This however did not detract from the overall experience, which was a very worthwhile and enjoyable immersion course into Japanese culture.