

Study Abroad in Japan: Testimonial by Donovan Hall (2011)

My journey to Japan was perhaps the single most thrilling, eye-opening experience I've ever had. From the moment I arrived, landing in Fukuoka in the middle of the night to be greeted by Japan's famous display of neon signs, I felt a wave of brain-numbing awe. From that point on my adventure had begun. I quickly learned to memorize the nameless alleyways of the labyrinth-like Nagasaki suburbs. I was overly delighted that my kind and elderly host parents didn't speak a word of English, making my immersion that much more intense. The food they made was delicious: *katsudon*, *karaage*, *okonomiyaki*, Japanese curry, fish, fried rice, yakisoba—everything was mouth-wateringly good. My host mom did have a habit, though, of using cereal as a salad topping. It's not a Japanese thing, it's something she does. Let's see, what else...I climbed a mountain, almost threw up and fell off the side once I got to the top. The hot springs are exactly what you'd imagine them to be—giant bathtubs you share with old men. You learn there is no place for modesty amongst your own sex in Japan. Went to Tokyo and went broke nearly overnight. I went to Akihabara and stumbled into both a video game convention and a four-story porn shop completely by accident. I ate a whale! Part of one at least; deep fried. I also ate raw horse, silkworm larva, snails, and pig lungs. The last three I got from street vendors in Korea. Did I mention I visited Korea while I was in Japan? Being in Kyushu, the tip of South Korea was basically right there. So some friends and I went to Pusan. Being in Pusan, Seoul was basically right there, so we checked that out as well. Thank God for that, because out of our initial group of friends we could speak only Japanese, Chinese, English, and a tad bit of French...and the average Korean is about as bilingual as the average American. All our languages together were basically useless. While in Korea a man yelled at me while I was eating ice cream, calling me, or the ice cream, or both, "delicious"; a fish monger lady bit off a live octopus's arm after it sprayed her in the face; a Peruvian musician was playing atop a mountain, and then we got stranded during a typhoon. Needless to say, Korea was vastly different than Japan. Back in Nagasaki I petted a penguin, watched anime and soap operas with my host mom, and went to a summer *matsuri* [festival], and just had a whole bunch of fun.