

# My Exchange Trip to Sendai, Japan

Gabrielle Houle

# Introduction

はじめまして、私はガブリエルフルです。17歳です。6月2月まで、仙台にいました。日本のぶんかはとてもおもしろいだと思いました、だから日本に行きたかったです！

Hello, I`m Gabrielle Houle, I`m 17 years old, and I stayed in Sendai, Japan for roughly 5 months. I`ve always thought that Japanese culture was so interesting, so I wanted to go to Japan to experience it all!

# School Life

## The Campus

The school I attended is called Sendai Ikuei Gakuen; it is a private high school with a high reputation and plenty of bright students. The school has 2 campuses, one in Miyagino, and one in Tagajō; I attended the Tagajō campus. The Miyagino campus is situated more in the city, and consists of 2 very tall buildings, and 1 sports field. However, Tagajō campus is situated in more of a suburban area, and is spread out along quite a few blocks. It includes 6 school buildings in total, including two gymnasiums; 2 cafeterias, one for regular students for lunch, and one for dormitory students for breakfast and dinner; 5 full-size sports fields: a tennis court, 2 baseball fields, a rugby field, and a soccer field; a school convenience store located beside the school, and a few dōjōs scattered throughout the campus for Kyūdō, Judo, and Kendo. In total, it takes about 20 minutes to walk across, and to me, it looks like the size of a university campus!



More of the school



Hanging out after school



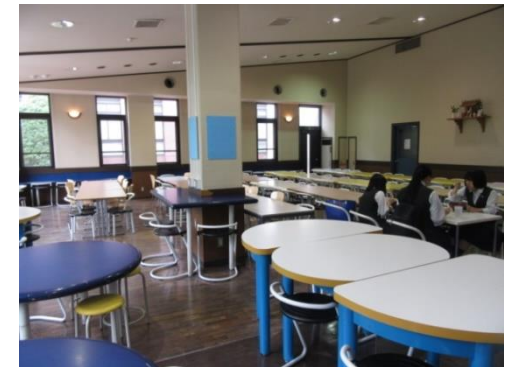
One of the baseball fields



The building where my classroom was located



My grade 11 classroom!



School cafeteria

# School Life

## Daily Life

Sendai Ikuei has a bunch of different programs to offer to students, and I was enrolled in the school's foreign language course, which is made up of all girls, and pretty much most of the exchange students.

I had Japanese classes almost everyday, alongside the other classes I participated in with the rest of my classmates (except for English, where I'd practice Japanese by myself).

I attended Sendai Ikuei for about 1.5 months of grade 10, and 3 months of grade 11. Therefore, I got to meet a whole bunch of new people in each different class.

私のいちばん好きなクラスはたいていと数学です。たいていはともだちとスポーツをするのが大好きです。日本の高校の数学とカナダの高校の数学はちょっと同じ、だからこれがおもしろいですから。

My favourite classes were PE and math, PE because I enjoyed playing games with my friends, and math because the content was very similar to what I learned back home, so it was interesting to see how differently it was taught in Japan!

I also ate at the cafeteria everyday; it was always 300¥, and always very delicious.

My grade 11 class



My grade 11 and grade 10 homeroom teacher



# School Life

## Uniforms

In Japan, everyone in high school must wear a school uniform; Sendai Ikuei's girls' uniform consisted of a skirt, long-sleeved collared shirt, ribbon, vest, sweater, blazer, school pin, and loafers. In the winter, we had to wear the blazer and ribbon to school along with everything else, and in the summer, we wore the vest along with everything else, and could also decide whether we wanted to wear the blazer or not. In which case, because the summers in Japan are quite hot, nobody really opted to wear it! For special occasions, we always had to wear the ribbon.



# Homelife

## Dormitory Campus

Sendai Ikuei has about 3 dormitory buildings, all around roughly a ten-minute walk to the Tagajō campus. There are 2 buildings for girls, and 1 for boys, however there's also a separate boy's dorm closer to the school for the boy's baseball team. Most of the students who stay in the dorms are exchange students, but there's also a few Japanese students from other parts of Japan who stay there for convenience. In my dorm building there were 2 floors, and about 40 girls, 1 to a room.

Dormitory cafeteria



A small part of Tagajō town

Sunset while returning to the dorm after a day in Sendai



# Homelife

## **My Experience**

I stayed in the dormitory for about 1.5 months.

While there, I met my first friend: Naomi. She was assigned as my “school guide”, and she showed me around Tagajō, a small part of Sendai, and came with me to the dorm cafeteria for the first few times.

I didn't really enjoy the dormitory that much, just because there wasn't as much to do in the small town around the school, and nobody really ever talked to each other.



My own messy room



# Homelife

## Homestay Family

I was lucky enough to move into a homestay very quickly (about 1.5 months into my exchange) and to also get a FANTASTIC family; they were always quick to include me in everything, and were all very friendly and kind.

My host family consisted of お母さん, my host mother; お父さん, my host father; Asuka, my host sister and also fellow classmate, and Fuuta, my host brother. お母さん is a stay-at-home mum, お父さん is an engineer who works in the middle of Sendai (about 15 minutes away by bike, which he rides every morning), Asuka is my age, and Fuuta is a 7th grader in middle school. He plays basketball, and had practices almost everyday including games on the weekend, so we didn't always get to see each other too often, unfortunately. My host mother's cooking was also amazing, I made sure to compliment her about it often :).



Sitting down for dessert



# Food

Japan's staple diet consists mostly of vegetables, seafood, miso soup, and of course rice.

Some staple Japanese dishes include ラーメン (Ramen), wavy noodles cooked in a thick broth; 鍋 (Nabe), a mixture of vegetables, meat and sometimes even hard-boiled eggs simmered in a kelp-based broth; とんかつ (Tonkatsu), different types of meat that are breaded and deep fried, usually served with rice and cabbage; 納豆 (Nattō), fermented beans, and カレー (Japanese Curry), which is somewhat different from Indian curry, with mushrooms, meat, potatoes and carrots mixed together with thick sauce served over white rice.

In the school cafeteria, they served とんかつ and カレー every week, and ラーメン was only really served every once in a while (it was always very popular though, so if we wanted to have a chance to eat it, we'd have to rush to the cafeteria after first block to even get a chance to buy the respective meal ticket!). In my homestay, 納豆 was eaten every day at dinner time; ラーメン was made mostly on the weekends by my host mother for whoever was home during lunchtime (as it is quick to make) and 鍋, とんかつ, and カレー were served quite often at dinner time.



Ramen (ラーメン)



Tonkatsu (とんかつ)



Japanese curry (カレー)



Nattō (納豆)

## Sample meals throughout the day



Breakfast: fruit, toast, eggs and tomatoes



Lunch: tempura with soy sauce over rice



Dinner: rice, veggies, tonkatsu chicken (bottom left corner), nabe (top right corner), fried fish, and nattō (in the small white container in the middle of the table)

# Homelife

## The Home

My host family lives in a マンション, or apartment, in a quieter part of Sendai. This was exciting for me, because I've always wanted to experience living in a city, and so I finally got to experience it (and enjoy it!) There is a few convenience stores, a park, lots of other apartment buildings and a few other shops around the area. Because they live in the city, Asuka and I rode the train everyday to school. The station was about a 20 minute walk to school, and the train ride took about 25 minutes, so it took us about an hour to get to school everyday. We travelled with the morning rush crowd as well, which I actually enjoyed; it was kind of like a mini adventure everyday! I also learned that I like taking the train more than the bus or car; it was fast, convenient, and always on time.

The apartment!



My room





# Cultural/Historical Learning Experiences

## Clubs

I joined tea-ceremony club, or さどぶ in the beginning of my exchange, and Kyūdō club, or 弓道ぶ for the month of April. さどぶ had meetings once a month, and during the meetings we would practice the traditional way of serving tea and sweets. 弓道ぶ had meetings 5 days a week, during which we practiced Kyūdō, a traditional form of Japanese archery.



## Sado Classes

二年生で、毎週の金曜日にふたつさどのクラスがあります。In grade 11, we also had tea-ceremony classes once a week for two blocks. I don't have any pictures of this specific class unfortunately, but it was very similar to the way that tea-ceremony club was run.



# Cultural/Historical Learning Experiences

## Sendai's History

During one of my first weeks in Japan, Ted brought me around a few key historical parts in Sendai: Aoba castle, and famous temple named Zuihoden. So, I was able to learn some of Sendai's history which was quite interesting and also apparently went back a long time ago!



## Food

I had my first taste of Japanese food in the dormitory cafeteria, but the first time I went out to eat was with Naomi, and we ate Ramen!

私はラーメンを食べなかったことはありません。それがたのしくて、おいしかったです。

I had never eaten Ramen before, so being able to taste it in Japan for the first time was quite special.





# Sendai's History

In the 1600s, Date Masamune, the first lord of the Sendai Clan Han, began building his castle in Sendai. He had brought in plans to begin developing, designing and to thus build the city of Sendai. He died June 27, 1636, but is still remembered every year with the Aoba Festival during the third week of May. His and his family's resting place is in Zuihoden temple, where I visited with Ted in February.



Date Masamune



Masamune's grave site



Masamune's son's resting place

# Cultural/Historical Learning Experiences

## **Kimonos**

While staying in Kamaishi, my host father's mother offered to help me try on one of her older kimonos she used to wear. I think this was one of my favourite experiences, as it was something obviously very precious to her, and she was so kind as to offer me the opportunity to try it on.



My host father's parents, me, Asuka, and my host-father

# Travel/Excursions

## **Dorm Trips**

While I was in the dormitory, the teachers organized a trip for the dorm students to go skating for an afternoon. The rink was about an hour away, and we stayed there for a few hours. I unfortunately didn't get any pictures, but we all had fun!

## **School Trips**

In early-June, the second-years and some of the third-years were taken to Miyagino campus for a presentation celebrating the Chinese-Japanese relationship with the 2 campuses.



# Travel/Excursions

## Homestay Trips

1. お父さんとあすかとまつしまに行きました。あそんだり、ふねにのったいしました。ふねに1時間ちいさいしまじまのしゃしんをとりました。

Matsushima with host father and Asuka, to explore the town for a small while and to take a small ferry trip around all of its surrounding islands.

2. ホストブラザーのバスケのしあいに行きました。しあいを見て、お父さんの弟のかぞくに会いました。弟のかぞくはしずかで、たのしいです。

We went to my host brother's basketball tournament, where we watched the games and also met my host father's brother's family, who lived not too far away. They were amazingly fun people!

3. Strawberry picking with Asuka and my host father in a small farming town outside of the city in イチゴワールド, or Strawberry World.





# Travel/Excursions

4. かぞくと仙台で花見しました。  
The family and I all participated in Hanami, or Cherry Blossom viewing, in the outskirts of Sendai.

5. I went to Aobamatsuri with my host father in Sendai, which is a festival that celebrates the “founding” of the city.

6. かぞくとすしレストランに2かい行きました。

Went to a Conveyor-belt sushi style restaurant with the entire family. We all went there twice during my time with them!



# Travel/Excursions

7. I went to Kamaishi with my host father and Asuka to visit my host father's parents for a few days. They were very kind people who lived in a beautiful town surrounded by huge mountains!

8. I went to a Rugby game with my host-father in Sendai; it between the men's Tokyo team and the Kamaishi team! We were routing for Kamaishi, but unfortunately, Tokyo won by quite a bit...





# Recreational pursuits/Community life

For fun, I mostly just went around Sendai to hang out with friends, shop, and eat at all the different restaurants.



A few key spots include Purikura, the cat cafe, Sendai Uminomori Aquarium, Karaoke, and the multiple dessert cafes.



# Friends!

Yuuna (on the right)



Asuka

Sandeul

Erica and Sora (on the sides)



## A Few Key People...

- Naomi: She was assigned as my student guide and was practically my first friend.
- Asuka: My host sister who was in the same grade & class as me. We were never really close before I moved in with her family, but we quickly became close, and I also became friends with some of her friends!
- Erica & Sora: They were assigned as my mentors in Kyudo club!
- Sandeul: An exchange student from South Korea attending full-time at Sendai Ikuei. I met her in 11 grade and we got along quite well.
- Yuuna: The first person I sat beside in my very first class ever in Japan! She also introduced me to some new people in the class.
- Asahi: One of the first friends I made who was Asuka's friend as well; we laughed together a lot!



Asahi



Naomi



Kaki

I hung around with roughly 4 groups of friends for most of my time there: Asuka, Asahi and Miku; Yuuna, Una, Rikako, Mio and Sandeul; Kaki, and her other friends (whose names I've unfortunately forgotten), and Ege and Hitomi. I had a lot more friends, but these people were the ones I was closest with and with whom I laughed the most with!



Asuka, Miku and Asahi



Kaki and her friends

Rikako, Sandeul, Mio, Una and Yuuna



Hitomi and Ege



# And the End...

On Thursday, June 28, 2018, my last day of school finally arrived. I said goodbye to my friends, teachers and family, met my father at the airport, and we began travelling in Sendai, Hiroshima and Tokyo for 10 days before returning home.

I will never forget my experience in Japan, and I'm so happy that I got to have to opportunity to go. I ended up accomplishing my goal of learning a lot of Japanese, and becoming friendly with my fellow students. I have grown as a person and have even figured out where and what I want to study in University, just by learning about myself and the world. I plan on going back one day to find all my friends again!