

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all of you! 2025 has officially ended and another year has started. This December was filled with a lot of fun experiences, so I want to share some of it!

This month, I get to experience Christmas, which is one of the biggest events in America. Of course, the day of Christmas was extremely fun, but the time before Christmas was also filled with excitement, too. A lot of our neighborhood, including my house, were decorated with Christmas lights. My living room had big Christmas tree and surprisingly, the tree was real! The Christmas spirits that surrounded me during this whole entire month kept me joyful. On the day of Christmas, whole family on my host father's side gathered up at the grandparents' house. We opened our presents underneath the tree, ate delicious food and played card games. Thankfully, I got to receive presents, too! It was crazy how many presents that me and other kids got and made me realize that there isn't such a thing that a present needs to be only one in this family, which made me jealous. They all treated me as a part of their family, and I felt huge love and thankfulness to them once again.

The following week, I had my sweet 16th birthday. In America, 16th birthdays are a big milestone, and people can start to get a driver's license. My friend in the same grade already got permission, which is crazy! On that day, I went shopping and bowled with my friends. It was my first birthday without my family, but thanks to the fortunate encounters, I got to spend fulfilling time. My friend wrote me a letter that said Happy Birthday in Japanese, and that made my feeling very heartwarming. I am so grateful for all the laugh, conversations and memories with her. I appreciate this study abroad program for bringing us two together.

On 12/31, our family went to our second house to spend a New Year's Day there. Me and my host sister stayed up until 4 am, watching times square and TV shows. Waking up on the next morning was tough, but it was so fun that it made me think it was worth it. There were a lot of fireworks and parties going on around our house. I felt a cultural difference here by how they capture "New Year". Here, people tend to see New Years Day as a new beginning that is filled with joy. However, I think in Japan, people seem to spend New Years Day by feeling reluctance for the year that is ending. I like both ways how they spend New Years Day. But I really miss eating my mom's traditional Japanese New Year's food with my family.

This year was filled with challenges, starting with this study abroad. I strongly believe that every experience, mistakes, challenges, and tears that I made in 2025 is bringing me to the next stage. I want to make this year something full of growth. I wish all of you to have a blissful year filled with moments of love! Thank you for reading until the very end.

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