

## ◆長期留学生レポート 1月 英語版

During the winter vacation, the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association arranged a one-week homestay for us, to experience traditional Japanese New Year celebrations. Apart from that, I also want to share some of my experiences and observations during this winter vacation.

### Homestay

I was assigned to a completely unfamiliar family, and I was very nervous when I first saw the information. I was worried about whether my self-introduction would leave a good first impression on the host family. The day before meeting the host family, as I was packing my luggage, looking at my empty room, I couldn't help but feel emotional. I realized how spacious this small room actually was. During the last semester, I was busy getting used to the new environment and didn't really have time to talk to myself. At the same time, I was also thinking, with only half a year left in my study abroad life, what else can I do for myself.

Carrying my suitcase to the meeting station, I was filled with a mix of excitement and nervousness. Living with someone for the first time and getting to know them can indeed be worrisome. Upon arrival, I immediately saw Host Mom standing at the exit, welcoming me. Before dinner, we had a brief chat about my current life as a student abroad and what high school in Taiwan is like.

During the first dinner with my host family, instead of worrying and feeling nervous, I

was more touched by the warmth. Since coming to Japan, I have had to handle everything in my life, big and small, from doing laundry to applying for identity documents. It's been a long time since anyone cared whether I had eaten well, slept well, or dressed warmly. This warmth makes me miss my family even more, who loved me unconditionally.

During this week, I visited many places, and my favorite was when the host family took me to **Nikkō Tōshō-gū** in Tochigi Prefecture. I heard that elementary schools in Tokyo come here for trips. Host Dad enthusiastically



introduced me to the place, explaining that it is actually the mausoleum of Tokugawa Ieyasu, a very famous general the Sengoku period in Japan, and is a shrine dedicated to him. Because of its beautiful natural environment and its special place in Japanese history, many tourists visit here every year.

Inside the temple, there are also very famous monkey carvings with the phrase "See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil." Above the gate leading to the main shrine, there is also a statue of a "sleeping cat," symbolizing a wish for peace and prosperity. Walking up the 207 steps, you can see the Okumiya (inner shrine) of Tokugawa Ieyasu, surrounded by trees. The sunlight shining on the palace, along with the solemn and quiet atmosphere, makes one marvel at how people in the past could build such a magnificent palace without any modern tools. It truly showcases their exceptional craftsmanship. As I was leaving, the sunlight was just right, shining on one of the palaces made of gold, reflecting a dazzling light. The rising

and setting sun perfectly embody the beautiful origins of the name " Nikkō Tōshō-gū" which translates to "the light of the rising sun.

This homestay not only allowed me to experience Japanese New Year culture but also gave me a chance to catch my breath in the midst of a busy life. I hope that for the rest of my study abroad period, I can continue to improve myself and become the person I aspire to be.

## School band's performance+UENO

After listening to the school band's performance at the cultural festival last time, I really hoped for another chance to enjoy their music. Fortunately, a teacher from the International Affairs Office invited me to attend a concert near Ueno Park featuring the winter break band performances.



This time, the performance was in collaboration with other schools, and the organization and instrumentation were completely different from last time. They played "An American in Paris," a piece with rich layers and lively arrangements. The most impressive part was when the audience at the venue clapped along with the rhythm. As they say, a great performance always allows the audience to feel the joy of participating.

After the concert, the teacher and I went shopping around Ueno. A few days ago, when I visited a shrine and drew a fortune slip, I got a bad result. So, the teacher took me to a shrine

that blesses academic success to "erase the shame" of the bad fortune. Fortunately, this time, my academic fortune was moderate, which I prefer over great fortune because it gives me a sense of looking forward to the future, providing me with space for improvement and motivation to move forward.



After a short visit to the shrine, the teacher and I went to a nearby teahouse and tried a traditional Japanese New Year's food—red bean mochi. It's very similar to red bean tangyuan in Taiwan, except it uses mochi instead of tangyuan. During my homestay, I also tried many other traditional Japanese New Year's foods.

That was a wonderful experience! I hope you get to experience New Year celebrations in other countries as well. Each culture has its own unique traditions and customs that make the New Year celebration special.



This is an illustration called “倒福” to bring good luck!