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Linfield College: Study Abroad in Japan

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Dear Class of 2016:

First off, I'd like to congratulate you on choosing to go to Linfield College. As I'm sure you've heard numerous times – and as the Linfield website dutifully reminds everyone – fifty percent of Linfield students study abroad. I am part of that fifty percent, although I didn't know it my freshman year; actually, I actively denied it! I spent the entirety of study abroad presentations thinking that I would never do it – visiting a country whose inhabitants didn't speak English was scary enough, but having to stay with a host family? Forget it! I was too afraid of making mistakes to even consider going abroad and potentially making a fool of myself in a foreign country.


Then came my sophomore year – my moment of truth. I had started studying Japanese as soon as I got to Linfield, and I enjoyed it enough to want to continue learning it. It was generally assumed that I would minor in Japanese – which meant studying in Japan for a semester – but I wasn't sure if I was up to the challenge. Sure, I had wanted to learn Japanese since middle school – maybe even visit Japan – but again, I was paralyzed by my fear of making mistakes. After many frantic phone calls home and hours spent contemplating my future and my feelings, I finally decided to declare my Japanese minor and apply for a semester abroad. I decided to not let my fear of failure stand in the way of achieving my goals any longer. Although the process leading up to my choice was agonizing, and the months before my departure were nerve-wracking, I made the right decision. As clichéd as it sounds, studying in Japan was one of the best experiences I have had.

I could spend pages detailing every single thing I did while abroad, but I'll spare you that and condense my experience into a few paragraphs. One of the best parts of studying abroad was being able to make friends, regardless of language barriers or cultural differences. And the host family experience – the very one that terrified me – turned out to be one of the most rewarding parts of my time in Japan. Despite my limited vocabulary and wonky grammar, I was able to become a valued part of my host family, and I not only got to learn calligraphy from my host grandmother and make traditional Japanese sandals with my host aunt, but I also got to play with my host grandchildren and teach them a little bit about America. I also became part of the community as a whole – my host mother took me to meet her neighbors, and I went to various neighborhood functions where I got bombarded with various questions about America.

It was also neat being able to serve as an emergency translator for troubled tourists – one time, when visiting Tokyo, I was approached by a European man who was lost and couldn't speak Japanese. I was able to stop in a local restaurant, ask a waitress for directions, and guide the man where he needed to go. My feelings of fear and incompetence about my skills in Japanese were replaced by confidence and empowerment—I might not have been the most eloquent, but I could still communicate. And I left Japan with the knowledge that I could survive on my own in a foreign country – and enjoy it!

All in all, studying abroad gave me a valuable cultural experience, lasting friendships, and confidence – not to mention better Japanese proficiency! So take advantage of the opportunity Linfield offers – free air fare and a pre-established program. You don't even need to study a foreign language to go abroad – I have friends who went to England and Ireland and had just as valuable an experience as I did in Japan. A semester outside the United States seems daunting, but I promise that if you go abroad, you won't regret it.

Cheers,



Elizabeth Turner