

Earlier this year, I applied to be a part of the official Hobart City Council delegation to Yaizu (Hobart's sister city in Japan). Prior to the trip, I already had a personal connection to Yaizu, having visited once before and hosting students during the annual exchange for the last three years, so when I saw that community members could apply to be part of the delegation I was very eager to get my application in. Initially, I thought it was pretty unlikely that I would be successful, due to the fact that I am a 17 year old college student. But, thankfully, I was accepted and was given the opportunity to travel with the delegation in August. With members of the Hobart City Council, such as Lord Mayor Sue Hickey, a few Aldermen, council staff and two other community members, we left to visit our sister city, to join them in celebrating our 40<sup>th</sup> year of friendship.

The first aspect of the trip that I want to talk about is the official activities. As I am only young, and I'm still a student, I haven't previously been involved in anything this official. It was interesting for me to experience the formalities of this trip. There were a number of activities that we took part in, as a delegation. There were a lot of speeches, and a lot of hot rooms without air conditioning, which was probably the most challenging part of the trip for me. It was a little difficult to sit still, especially whilst feeling hot and unwell. However, I really enjoyed listening to the speeches. While they were a little repetitive and often quite lengthy, it was nice to hear the way that officials from each city spoke about each other and our history as sister cities. It helped me recognize the importance that the relationship has for individual people, as well as the significance it has in both of our cities.

One of my favourite parts (of the official aspect) of the trip was the Hobart Street Ceremony. This event was nice, for me at least, because I got to see many of the girls I had made friends with when they visited Hobart in August, and I also got to be there as they officially named a street after our city. The view from the street is very beautiful, it has a lovely mountain backdrop and is right beside the sea. They could have chosen any street to name after us, but they chose one which was beautiful and reminded them of Hobart, which emphasizes how highly they think of our city and the relationship we have. This was a special experience for me, one I'm sure I will never forget.



Being a part of the delegation also allowed me to experience a lot of traditional Japanese food and culture. We ate some amazing food, made our own Okonomiyaki, watched traditional Japanese dances and so much more. These things, while seemingly not as important, really allowed the delegation (myself included) to understand the culture of Japan and our sister city much better, which in turn allows us to make better relationships because we can connect with people on a cultural level too.

The second aspect of the trip I want to talk about is my homestay. Anyone who has ever partaken in a homestay, or has hosted someone in their own home, knows how special the relationships you make can be. In Yaizu, I stayed with the Nomura Family; three daughters and their mum and dad. I have stayed with this same family once before, and two of the daughters, Momoko and Mikan, have stayed with me in Hobart too. This homestay was so special to me, not only because I got to visit them and Yaizu again but because I felt like I was truly a part of their family. They made me feel just as comfortable with them as I would in my own home, I felt just as loved by them as I do by my own family. This relationship, with the Nomura family, is now something that I value most in my life. I talk to them every day, and can't wait to visit them again.



Aside from this, the homestay also allowed me to experience parts of Japanese culture that I could not have experienced otherwise, and it gave me a better insight into what daily life would be like for me in Japan. I got to try many things that I otherwise wouldn't have, but one of the cultural highlights for me was wearing a Yukata. While we were in Yaizu, the Yaizu festival (Ara Matsuri) was on. Part of this festival is a huge firework display, which is where I wore my Yukata. The fireworks themselves were 10 times bigger and went for 10 times longer than anything I have ever seen in Hobart, and the sense of community at this event was so strong. I really enjoyed being able to experience this with the Nomura family. Being a part of the family in Yaizu is not only one of the highlights of the trip, but one of the highlights of my life, which I know would never have happened had it not been for the Hobart-Yaizu relationship.

Both aspects of the trip, the official activities and the homestay, really helped strengthen my personal relationship Yaizu, as well as the opportunity to contribute on behalf of our whole city. I can't stress enough how important I feel our sister city relationship with Yaizu is, after visiting again I am so certain that our relationship is at its strongest and will continue for a long time to come. This trip has given me a greater appreciation for both Hobart and Yaizu, and a motivation to do whatever I can to continue to be a part of this relationship.

Since returning from the trip, I am aware of just how much I love the city of Yaizu and the experiences and memories that I have created there. In the future, I hope to go to university and major in Japanese which will lead me, hopefully, into the JET Program. A program at UTAS that will allow me to live and work in Japan. I am beyond excited to live Japan, and hopefully in the beautiful city of Yaizu. I am so grateful to the Hobart City Council for allowing me to be a part of this trip, which has turned out to be one of the most valuable experiences of my life.

