

Diary of Japan

By Wayne Visser

I woke up with a gentle breeze on my face, and for a moment I was not sure where I was. My room had reed mats covering the floor and wooden panel walls painted with beautiful nature scenes. A sliding door opened onto a tiny garden with a narrow street below. Just outside the door on the step was a small pair of slipper-like shoes. I heard the strange yet vaguely familiar words: "*Ohayo gozaimas*" called in a woman's voice in another room. Then I remembered that I was in Japan, halfway across the world from South Africa. It was a strange feeling.

Only three days ago I had been in Tokyo attending a five day international AIESEC conference with 200 other delegates from 50 countries. We had worked hard and partied hard together while enjoying a fantastic and successful conference (in fact, we had almost solved all the world's problems!). Now I was in Nagoya (Japan's third largest city) on a five day tour together with twenty of the delegates. On the night of our arrival we had been whisked off to a huge welcoming party organised by the Japanese AIESECers. We survived and went to stay with Japanese families for three days. My host family were great and spoiled me terribly.

I got up and greeted Hisako (my Japanese mother) in my best Japanese - "*Ohio gozaimas*, Hisako" (which means "Good morning"). She asked if I wanted to take a traditional Japanese bath. I discovered that bathing in Japan differs from Western baths. You do not wash in the bath because that's for soaking in after your shower. Also, the baths are about one and a half times deeper than Western baths and filled to the brim with temperature regulated water and usually a sprinkling of herbs (what a pleasure!). Yesterday I had visited Nagoya castle with its spectacular seven storey tower fortress. It was built in 1612 for strategic defence, and after being almost totally destroyed in the Second World War, was rebuilt in 1959. That evening my host family dressed me in a *kimono* (traditional Japanese dress) and we all had a good laugh.

It will be sad to leave behind these wonderful friends, but the experiences I've had and the culture that I've grown to love will always be a part of me. This country with its charming mixture of ancient and modern I will take with me to share with others.

Source:

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