

Home Away from Home: A Heartwarming Homestay Program



Meeting the Sakashita (坂下) family and Abe-San

Kanako San's family was warm and lively. She lives with her husband, father-in-law, mother-in-law, and her three sons. Her sons' names carry interesting meanings to them. Her first son's name is Taiyo 太陽 =(Sun) who lives in Tokyo with his family, Sora 空 =(Sky) who is currently living in Australia playing in a local baseball league, he was also an alumnus of Shizuoka University, and Fuu 風 =(Wind) who is currently staying with his mom. Her house is a peaceful sorority which everyone craves after a long day of hard work, yet the people here enjoy a lively chat with each other. On the first day, I was greeted by Abe San who is a best friend of Kanako San's husband's childhood best friend along with the Sakashita family. We had an ice-breaking session along with sashimi and sukiyaki.

A glimpse of Japanese hospitality

On my first evening, I had a rather interesting encounter with Abe-San at the dining table. Picture this: he was wearing black sunglasses in the middle of the night, with his face completely covered in black paint. Suddenly, he jumped toward me making a funny noise. I was shocked—but at the same time, I couldn't help laughing. That hilarious moment instantly broke the ice. After that, we had a long and friendly conversation about my culture, my family, and my background, all while enjoying a great meal together.

The next morning started with Kimchi Ramen for lunch—yes, breakfast and lunch merged into one! Afterward, we visited the Sakichi Toyoda Memorial Museum in Kosai City, because the night before I had told Kanako-San how much I love cars. There, I learned about Sakichi Toyoda's



incredible journey. He once said, “Open the window. It’s a big world out there.” That spirit of curiosity inspired him to create the automatic loom for his mother, which ultimately laid the foundation for the Toyota company we know today. I got to see his childhood home, where his big ideas first took root.

Our adventure continued with a visit to the Toyota EV battery factory’s Battery Road and the Suzuki Company Headquarters. On the drive back, we enjoyed the beautiful view of Lake Hamanako and even spotted the spot where boat races take place. Later, Kanako-San brought me to her home. Her father had passed away just one month ago, so I offered my prayers in his memory.

That evening, we went to Shitoro Aeon Mall for some shopping. The real highlight, though, was hitting the arcade and racing against each other in Mario Kart with Kanako San—it was pure fun! We wrapped up the day with a delicious dinner from the food court: fluffy Omurice and crispy Fried Tempura. Honestly, I couldn’t have asked for a better mix of history, culture, and a bit of silliness all in one day. Also, Kanako-San told me she volunteers to teach Japanese to the foreigners. Later at the evening, she took a test of my Japanese language skill and taught me lots of words.

An Unforgettable Goodbye

The last day kicked off with me waking up late. By the time I rolled out of bed, I was greeted with a breakfast: omurice, egg, a sandwich (Her children’s absolute Favorite), and Maguro Kakuni. Then, Fuu and I along with Kanako San, we went to Hamanako Flower Park, where we pedaled around on a tricycle like a couple of kids.

As the day ended, it was time to bid farewell. Being 5,000 kilometers away from home, I had never anticipated finding a second home in Japan. Saying goodbye that evening was an emotional rollercoaster. The warmth and kindness of Kanako San’s family enveloped me like a comforting embrace, instilling a profound sense of belonging. This homestay was not merely an introduction to Japanese culture; it was akin to acquiring a new family. The laughter, sincerity, and care they demonstrated to me will forever be etched in my heart. Ultimately, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for this unforgettable adventure.

