

# Homestay Reflection Report: Hamamatsu Cultural Exchange

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Shizuoka University (Dec-12 to Dec 14.)

## I. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to summarize my recent two-day homestay experience in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka. This program provided a unique opportunity to move beyond the academic environment and experience authentic Japanese daily life. Staying with a local family allowed me to gain insights into Japanese traditions, household dynamics, and local landmarks that are not accessible through standard tourism.

### The Host Family and Household

I was hosted by the **Takeda family**, a household of four located in a peaceful residential area of Hamamatsu, near to our campus. From the moment I arrived, I was welcomed with immense warmth and hospitality.

- Atmosphere:** The home was filled with energy, largely due to the two young children in the family.
- Interaction:** Despite being a short stay, the environment was very inclusive. I felt less like a guest and more like a temporary member of the family. We spent significant time playing indoor games, which served as an excellent medium for bonding despite any language barriers.

Name	Role	Profession/ Interests	Personality & Observations
Jun Takeda	Father	Professor at Shizuoka University of Art and Culture (Anthropology)	A specialist in cultural exchange who even grows a coffee tree indoors. He is a devoted father who loves playing with his children.
Midori Takeda	Mother	Medical Physiology (Hamamatsu University School of Medicine)	The "Queen of the House" and an incredible cook with a wonderful laugh.
Itsuki Takeda	Son (Age 9)	Manga and Comic Books	A bit shy with a deep passion for reading; he has an impressive collection of manga series.
Sora Takeda	Son (Age 4)	Weather Reports and News	Highly energetic and observant; he summarizes the morning weather news for the family every day.

## Personal Reflections

- **Sora:** His high energy and bond with his father reminded me of my own childhood. I was impressed by his discipline in summarizing the weather news every morning.
- **Itsuki:** Though shy, his focus and passion for his extensive comic collection were very clear.
- **The Parents:** Professor Jun provided fascinating insights into cultural anthropology. Midori-san was a joyful presence and an excellent cook, balancing her medical work with managing the home.



## II. Culinary Experience and Halal Hospitality

One of the most touching aspects of my stay with the Takeda family was their proactive approach to my religious values. Even though I did not explicitly mention it, the family researched and prepared **100% Halal meals** throughout my stay. Their attention to detail and respect for my background was truly moving.

### Dietary Log: Dec 12 – Dec 14

Date	Meal	Menu Items	Observations
Dec 12	Dinner	Temaki-zushi (Hand-rolled Sushi)	A spread of fresh sashimi (tuna, salmon), seaweed (nori), and vinegared rice.
Dec 13	Lunch	Soba Noodles	Traditional buckwheat noodles served with seaweed, green onions, and fried tofu.
Dec 13	Dinner	Grilled Sea Bream (Tai)	A whole grilled fish served with roasted potatoes, onions, and a side of seasoned spinach.
Dec 14	Lunch	Takoyaki	Savory octopus balls prepared at the table using a specialized grill.

### Daily Staples and Traditions

- **Miso Soup:** I enjoyed traditional miso soup with every meal, a comforting and essential part of the Japanese diet.
- **Traditional Breakfasts:** Every morning began with a balanced Japanese breakfast consisting of steamed white rice, grilled fish (such as salmon), and clam soup.
- **Side Dishes:** Meals were frequently accompanied by traditional sides like lotus root (*renkon*) and cucumber.

### Reflection on Hospitality

The effort required to source Halal ingredients in Japan is significant. Seeing the Takeda family's commitment to ensuring I could eat everything safely—without me even asking—made me feel deeply respected as a guest. Whether it was the precisely sliced octopus for the Takoyaki or the carefully prepared Soba, every meal was a testament to their kindness.



### III. Places we visited: Local Exploration and Cultural Landmarks

Beyond the dining table, we explored two distinct locations that showcase the spiritual history and the creative spirit of Hamamatsu.

- Hōkō-ji (Temple of Expansive Directions)
- Nukumori no Mori (Forest of Warmth)

## Hōkō-ji

This historic Zen temple, established in the 14th century, serves as the head temple of its branch of Rinzai Zen Buddhism. The atmosphere here is profoundly quiet and spiritual, nestled deep within a lush forest.

- **Five Hundred Rakan:** The grounds feature 500 unique stone statues of Buddha's disciples, each with a different facial expression.
- **Zen Architecture:** It boasts a massive main hall and a stunning wooden bridge that offers a panoramic view of the forest valley.



## Nukumori no Mori

This location feels like stepping directly into a fairytale or a Studio Ghibli film. Designed by architect Shigeyoshi Sasaki, it is a small village of whimsical, hand-crafted buildings with soft, organic shapes.

- **Architectural Art:** Every building features unique stone masonry, curved roofs, and tiny windows that create a "European fantasy" vibe.
- **Artisan Boutiques:** The village is filled with small shops selling handmade crafts, essential oils, and local sweets.

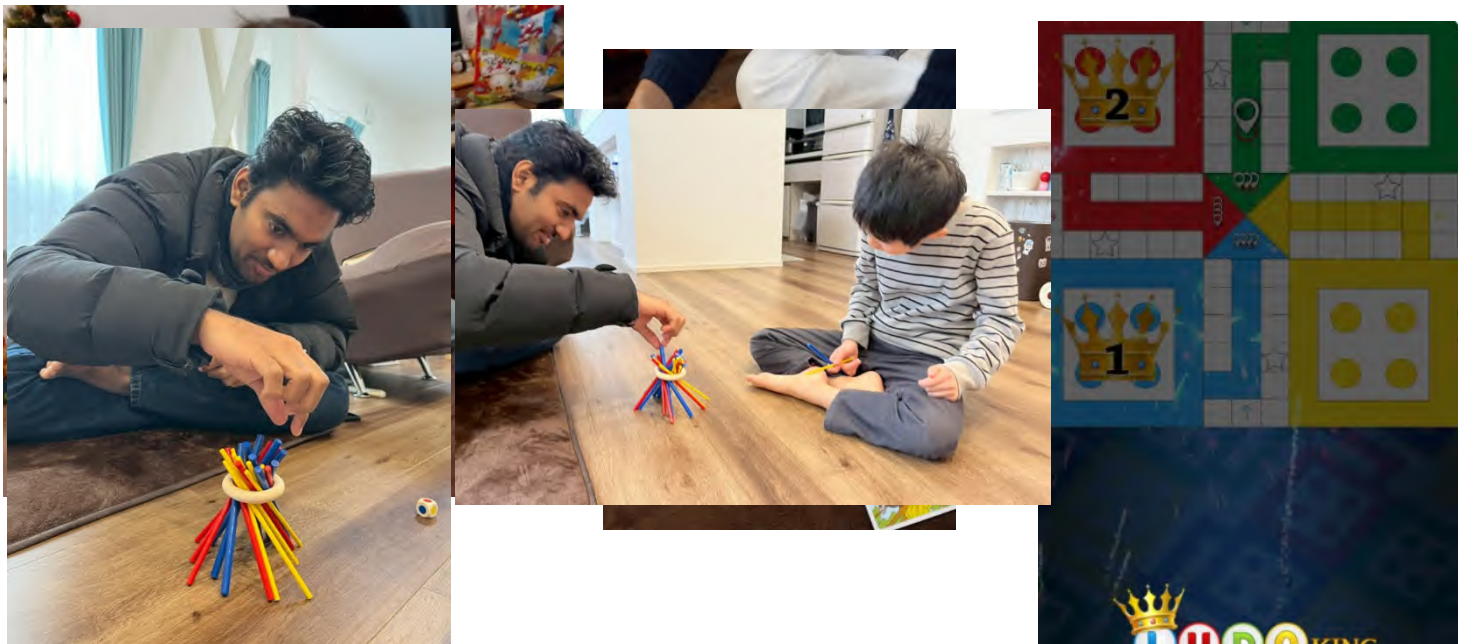




#### IV. Recreation and Universal Play

Shared activities with the children proved that play is a universal language. We spent hours engaged in various games that bridged our two cultures.

- **Japanese Card & Table Games:** We played several language-learning card games and high-energy tabletop rubber games. I was amazed to find that many of these Japanese games had "local versions" almost identical to the ones I played growing up in Bangladesh.
- **Introducing Ludo:** I shared a piece of my heritage by teaching the family Ludo. It was a new experience for them, and watching their excitement as they learned the rules was a highlight of the trip.
- **Building Connections:** Whether through familiar childhood games or new board games, these sessions allowed me to bond deeply with Itsuki and Sora. The "huge fun" we shared demonstrated that laughter and competition require no translation.



#### V. Conclusion

I am deeply grateful to Shizuoka University and the Takeda family for this life-changing opportunity. This experience provided me with a second family in Japan and showed me that genuine connection transcends language and borders. To conclude, rather than using more words, I will let the youngest member of the family share his spirit with you.

**Please enjoy this video of Sora-kun's daily weather report.**

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