

Host report: The Tsubaki Family Mark Wooldrage

All of the men in the Culture Delegation stayed with the Tsubaki family (Chikara, the father, Rie, the mother, Yuga, their teenage son, and Wakako, the grandmother). Our housing arrangement was unique in that we weren't actually staying at their house, but at the Day House Camelia, their business. The house is in a business/residential area, and faces a moderately busy road. On the first morning there, we took a short walk around the neighborhood, and saw the mix of everything in the area: houses, apartment buildings, convenience stores, gas stations, and restaurants.



Chikara, would stay with us through the night. Each morning, Rie would arrive and prepare breakfast. They are incredibly gracious hosts, and worked incredibly hard to take care of us. They also took care to point out things that were uniquely Japanese in our food and housing. Each night, they prepared the bath for us, so we got to experience a Japanese bath.



Our sleeping arrangements

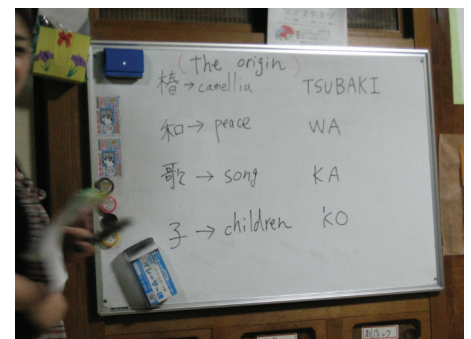


Breakfast in the main room

We were set up with sleeping accommodations, two of us to a room. Don and I slept in a room adjacent to the kitchen (which usually serves as a small dining room), and Joe and Dave slept in the room in the back of the house. The floors in most of the house were tatami mats (with the exception of the main hallway). It was incredibly comfortable.

Over the week, we learned to communicate well with each other. The Tsubakis understand spoken English, but don't speak as much. We made use of smartphone translation apps, and began to get the knack for how to use them to get our thoughts across. They don't work perfectly, but they help a great deal. (Since returning, I have begun studying Japanese in earnest, and I'm amazed that the translation apps work at all, with how different English is from Japanese).

One evening, the Tsubakis explained the meanings and characters behind their names. We learned that Tsubaki means "camellia", a kind of flower common in Japan...and one that we had seen that day at the Chiba folk museum grounds. That led into an interesting discussion about names in general.



One of the topics that came up one evening was what to do on our free day. We were all having problems deciding what to do on our free day, so we asked the Tsubakis: if there was one thing that they, as citizens of Japan, would like a visitor to see, what would it be? It took quite a bit of thought and discussion, but their answers were: Mt. Fuji (Chikara), Tokyo Disney (Rie), Kyoto (Wakako), and Tokyo (Yuga). We tried to figure out what was most reasonable with travel time, and decided that a day trip to Tokyo would be our free day activity. Yuga and Chikara decided that they would like to come along, as well...so they joined us on our Sunday trip. It was also

that night that Chikara announced that the next night (and our final night with the Tsubakis), we would go to a Japanese bar.

The next night, after getting home from our last school visit, Chikara handed us a written note, telling us that we would be leaving at 6:15. Time to get ready! None of us knew quite what to expect from the idea of a “bar”, as the word has a definite meaning in Wisconsin. Rie came with us, so we figured out that it wasn’t a “guy’s night out” kind of bar very quickly...but then we also picked up Wakako and Yuga. As it turns out, it was a sushi bar/Japanese style restaurant. We had a semi-private room reserved for us, with semi-traditional seating: you could sit with your legs folded under you, but you could also put your legs under the table if you wanted.



This didn’t seem like a “tourist” restaurant (despite its proximity to the rail station), as everything was in Japanese. None of us knew quite what was going on, or how ordering was supposed to work, so we asked Chikara to choose for us. That’s when we found out...that was the plan. This was an izakaya style restaurant, where many small dishes were ordered throughout the evening, and we all shared them. Thus followed one of the most incredible meals I have ever experienced. There were many calls of “kanpai” that evening.

We also learned of the Tsubaki’s love of animals. On the way to the restaurant, when stopping at the Tsubaki’s residence to pick up Wakako, Chikara went inside and brought out his cat for us. Also, during the last ride in to town, Chikara took us past the stable where they keep their horse, Tsubasa.

Later on that day, Rie and Chikara came to see us at a performance at the Narita 60 year festival. It meant a lot to us that they would take the time to come and see us.

The Tsubakis were incredibly gracious hosts, and made us feel completely at home. We will always look back fondly on the memories we made in Chiba, and the friendships that were created.

