



KAKEHASHI Project (United States) Visiting Japan Program for Japanese American Youths (JACL) Report

1. Program Overview

【Objectives and Overview】

From December 11 to 17, 49 youths of Japanese heritage, selected from across the United States by the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), visited Japan as part of a program aimed at deepening mutual understanding and strengthening friendships between the next generation of Japan and the United States.

The participants traveled to Tokyo, Kanagawa, Hiroshima, and Okinawa, where they explored their roots and deepened their understanding of Japanese society, history, and culture through courtesy calls, homestays, cultural activities, and school exchanges. They also actively shared their experiences and insights on social media from their perspectives as Japanese Americans.

【Participants】 Total: 49 participants (47 Japanese American youths (undergraduate students, graduate students, and working youths) and 2 chaperones)

Group Okinawa: 25 participants / Group Hiroshima: 24 participants

【Locations】 Group Okinawa: Tokyo, Kanagawa, Okinawa

Group Hiroshima: Tokyo, Kanagawa, Hiroshima

【Schedule】

■ Online Pre-study Program:

Dec. 4 (Thu) **【Pre-departure Orientation】** Project objective and mission, rundown of the schedule, overseas travel warnings, precautions of infectious disease, etc.

Set Period Prior to Arrival **【Video Viewing】** “Lecture on Japan” (Choose on Web Japan)

■ Invitation Program:

Dec. 11 (Thu) Arrival at Narita International Airport and Haneda Airport

【Post-arrival Orientation】

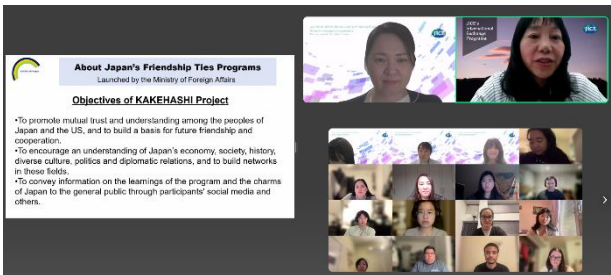
Dec. 12 (Fri) ~ Dec. 15 morning (Mon)

Participants were divided into 2 groups: Group Okinawa visited Okinawa Prefecture, and Group Hiroshima visited Hiroshima Prefecture. The two groups moved to Tokyo after the local programs on December 15.

Group Okinawa	【School Exchange】 University of the Ryukyus 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. SAKIMA Atsushi, Mayor of Ginowan City 【Observation】 Marine Corps Air Station Futenma 【Meeting with the Host Families/ Homestay / Farewell Party with the Host Families】 Yomitan Village 【Observation】 Chibichiri-gama, Shimuku-gama 【Cultural Experience】 Okinawan Karate
Group Hiroshima	【School Exchange】 Hijiya University 【Meeting with the Host Families/ Homestay / Farewell Party with the Host Families】 The City of Hiroshima 【Cultural Experience】 Mochi making 【Observation】 Hiroshima Castle, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum
December 15 (Mon)	【Observation】 Odaiba
December 16 (Tue)	【Workshop】 Preparations for the Reporting Session (summarizing program findings, preparation of action plans) 【Observation】 Japanese Overseas Migration Museum 【Reporting Session】 Presentations of Program Findings and Action Plans 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. OUE Sadamasa, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister 【Observation】 Togo-Jinja, Harajuku
December 17 (Wed)	【Courtesy Call】 Mr. ONISHI Yohei, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Departure from Narita International Airport and Hanada Airport

2. Program Photos

Online Pre-study Program

	
December 4 【Pre-departure Orientation】	December 4 【Pre-departure Orientation】 Self-Introductions by group

Invitation Program

Group Okinawa

	
December 12 【School Exchange】 University of the Ryukyus	December 12 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. SAKIMA Atsushi, Mayor of Ginowan City
	
December 12 【Observation】 Marine Corps Air Station Futenma	December 13 【Homestay】
	
December 13 【Homestay】	December 14 【Farewell Party with the Host Families】
	
December 14 【Observation】 Peace study at Chibichiri-gama	December 14 【Cultural Experience】 Okinawan Karate

Group Hiroshima (Location: Hiroshima)



December 12 【School Exchange】
Hijiyama University



December 12 【Homestay】



December 13 【Homestay】



December 13 【Homestay】



December 14 【Farewell Party with the Host Families】



December 14 【Cultural Experience】 Mochi making



December 14 【Observation】 Hiroshima Castle



December 14 【Observation】
Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

Joint Program (Tokyo)



December 16 【Workshop】



December 16 【Observation】
Japanese Overseas Migration Museum



December 16 【Observation】 Odaiba



December 16 【Reporting Session】



December 16 【Reporting Session】 Group photo



December 16 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. OUE Sadamasa,
Special Advisor to the Prime Minister



December 16 【Observation】 Togo-Jinja,



December 17 【Courtesy Call】 Mr. ONISHI Yohei,
Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs

3. Voices from the Participants (excerpt)

◆ Working Youth (Group Okinawa)

I enjoyed the very fruitful conversations about our shared ancestry. I loved how motivated and enthusiastic the students were and how much fun we all had engaging in discussions together. I wish we had more time to talk because I felt like there was so much we could learn from one another. I loved having the opportunity to hear from the educators and students and gain insight on the Okinawan experience. Although our cultures and lifestyles might have many differences, I think we share many similarities as well and I enjoyed being able to identify them and build connections with the students. The students all spoke decent English! I was impressed by their ability to communicate about nuanced topics like technology and interpersonal relationships. I also enjoyed learning about some of the distinctions between Okinawan culture and Japanese culture like food, holidays, and language.

◆ Working Youth (Group Okinawa)

Being at the host family's home allowed me to witness the intricate and special way of life that the uchinaanchu continue to follow; building and relying on community and emphasizing unity. Not only that, we learned valuable history regarding postwar Okinawa and the struggles the community encountered with the US led government and later on into Japanese control. They welcomed us to their home with open arms, and I will never forget such an experience.

◆ Working Youth (Group Okinawa)

I was very impressed with the knowledge and reverence that our tour guide used to address such a tragic incident. This was my first time hearing about this specific history even though I was aware of the unethical occupations done by the United States and Japan. This experience helped me gain a better understanding of how Okinawan residents experience Japanese and American occupation and violence. To learn about this historical wound from a descendant is very impactful.

◆ Graduate Student (Group Hiroshima)

My favorite parts of the KAKEHASHI program were the homestay in Yuki-chou and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. The homestay family was so incredibly kind, open-hearted, generous, and welcoming to us! We got to learn about their daily life, practice the Japanese language, and experience the beauty of their village and community. They also were so curious and accepting about our histories as Japanese Americans, and extremely empathetic to our experiences. I hope one day to return to their village to take my parents there so they can experience it, and my father especially, as his grandmother immigrated to Hawaii from Hiroshima in around 1910.

I also was very impressed and moved by the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. I had never learned the depths of what the Hiroshima people had gone through. During the evaluation portion of the reporting session, it was put very beautifully that Hiroshima and Okinawa were sites of tragedy during war, but simultaneously, are today major symbols of peace. I believe the Memorial Museum conveyed this idea perfectly, thereby reflecting the resilience of the Japanese people and of Hiroshima as a city: the fact that Hiroshima was rebuilt, victims' legacies were honored, and Americans are invited to learn about Hiroshima through the KAKEHASHI program speaks to the incredible effort of the Japanese government and people to educate people around the world about the value of peace.

◆ **Working Youth (Group Hiroshima)**

I loved the school exchange where we were able to meet and talk to the students and see a little of what they did. It was a very welcoming environment where we were treated well by a number of different departments of the school, which made a lasting impact on me.

◆ **Working Youth (Group Hiroshima)**

During the homestay, I was blown away by the generosity, kindness, openheartedness, and creativity of the family. It truly felt like I had known them many years and I will definitely be keeping in touch. Being in their home, sharing meals, making jokes, and exchanging our cultures made an immeasurable impression on me. I loved going to Miyajima and walking around their property. More than tourism or observation, we became a group together and joined in making memories which will last a lifetime.

4. Voices from the Receiving Parties (excerpt)

◆ **Host Family**

They were really interested in our everyday life, and they asked us lots of questions.

Using translation apps for the harder sentences helped keep the conversation going, and we ended up having a lot of fun.

My child (a high schooler) could understand what they were saying to some extent, but speaking was a bit more difficult. Even so, my child was happy that they could still communicate using short words and simple phrases.

◆ **Host Family**

I remember how much they enjoyed cleaning the hallway floors with rags, and how they told us they loved the waterfall-style bath at the hot spring. Communicating through gestures and translation apps was fun, but it also made me think that if we could actually speak English, we probably could've enjoyed it even more. It made me want to study English, and also learn more about the history of Nikkei communities. We would love to host a homestay in Yuki-cho again.

◆ **Cultural Experience Lecturer**

At first, many of the participants saw karate as simply a “martial art or sport that requires you to move.” But through the lectures and hands-on experience, they began to understand that Okinawan karate isn't just a physical technique, but that it reflects Okinawa's deep-rooted culture of seeking peace and the human spirit behind it.

I was overjoyed to hear comments like “I know see karate in a different way” and “I could feel its spirituality,” and those reactions left a strong impression on me.

5. Disseminations by the Participants (excerpt), Articles, etc.

	
December 13, 2025 (Instagram) Working Youth (Group Okinawa) It was an amazing opportunity to meet with students at University of the Ryukyus! I loved hearing from the Okinawan community and getting to make new friends.	December 13, 2025 (Instagram) Working Youth (Group Okinawa) Enjoying homemade Okinawa food! Learning about traditional and fusion Okinawan food has been so fun (and tasty)! kwatchii sabitan (thank you for the meal!)
	[KAKEHASHI PROJECT 2025] Day 3: Today was a free day to be spent with our host families. My host family took us through a day of preparing and eating LOTS of food! Breakfast was followed by persimmon picking and eating. We learned about different types of persimmons (Amagaki 甘柿 and Shibugaki 渋柿), and ate Makigaki (巻き柿, dried and rolled persimmon) made by my host family mom through her volunteer work! Soft persimmon chilled by the cool air, picked and eaten right from the tree was the best! We also grilled shitake mushrooms picked from some logs in the front yard, as well as satsuma-imo (サツマイモ Japanese sweet potato). From there we made tamagoyaki and makizushi (卵焼き egg omelette and 巻き寿司 rolled sushi), with udon for lunch. We made mikan (みかん Japanese clementine) and strawberry daifuku, took a break to try out a local onsen (public bathhouse), then came back for dinner! Ended the night under a kotatsu 炬燵, a Japanese-style table with blankets for cold nights. Today, I also found out that my late grandfather's hometown is where I am currently staying. My host father put in some incredible detective work where I was able to visit the family grave and a relative's home. This was an especially fulfilling experience for me that let me reconnect with my roots in Japan. My heart (and stomach) are both filled with lots of gratitude.
December 17, 2025 (Instagram) Undergraduate Student (Group Okinawa) Back home in Alaska I have not had the chance to really be involved with a greater organized Japanese-American community and I really appreciated everyone sharing their family's journeys with me and being able to share a little bit	December 13, 2025 (Facebook) Graduate Student (Group Hiroshima) [KAKEHASHI PROJECT 2025] Day 3: Today was a free day to be spent with our host families. My host family took us through a day of preparing and eating LOTS of food! Breakfast was followed by persimmon picking and eating. We

myself. There were presentations on people's family history, and we all got to learn about each other's lineage and through that I developed a great understanding of my new friends in the Kakehashi cohort, and my new friends at the University of the Ryukyus.

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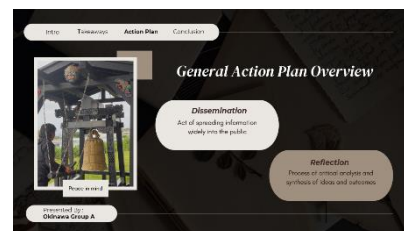
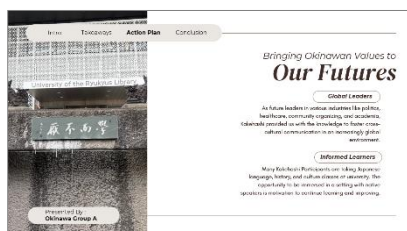
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December 12, 2025 (Instagram) Working Youth (Group Hiroshima) YUKICHO, OAZAFUSHIDANI Our host family owns a ryokan near a hot spring in Hiroshima -some of the staircases and inns here were built during the edo period The air here is so clean, and the hot spring was amazing!	December 13, 2025 (Hiroshima City Saeki Ward Official Instagram “Saeki-ku Mikke”) Since yesterday, Japanese American youth have been staying with local households in Yuki-chō to experience everyday life in Japan. Last night, thanks to the generosity of the Ōmori Kagura Troupe, they had the opportunity to experience Kagura, a traditional performing art. After watching the dynamic performance of “Takiyasha-hime”, they enjoyed taking photos wearing the elaborate costumes and masks. This visit offered a valuable opportunity to encounter Japan’s traditional performing arts and to deepen exchange with the local community.
	 churamura yomitan 今回、読谷村を訪れてくれた 日本米国人訪問団の皆さまは、 歴史文化を堪能され、さらに一歩踏み込み、 沖縄の歴史と文化を深く学ぶための 平和学習も読谷村で行いました。 平和学習では、読谷平和がイデオ 知花直典さんにご案内いただき、 デビチリガマとシムクガマを訪れました。 参観中では、沖縄にルーツを 持つ方々も多く、知花さんの説明に 一人ひとりが真剣に耳を傾けていました。 昨日、笑顔あふれる時間を過ごした 読谷村で、今からより発展的に 超えた戦争の歴史に向き合う―― その目的が、より深い学びへと つながるよう感じます。 「この歴史を決して繰り返してはならない」 「必ず未来へ平和をつないでいく」 そんな強い思いを、参加者全員が共有し、 心に刻む貴重な時間となったことでしょう。 読谷の方からこそ読谷の真実で、 いいね 129件 2025年12月20日
December 19, 2025 (Ginowan City’s Facebook) “Japan’s Friendship Ties Program “KAKEHASHI Project” Visiting Japan Program for Japanese American Youths – Participants visiting Ginowan City ”	December 20, 2025 (Churamura Yomitan’s Instagram) After completing their homestay exchange, the delegation of Japanese American visitors to Yomitan Village took an additional step to deepen their understanding of Okinawa by participating in peace-education activities that explored the region’s history and culture.

6. Presentations of Program Findings and Action Plan at the Reporting Session (excerpt)

Group Okinawa A



【Results of the Program】

◆ Learnings from the Program

Bringing Okinawan Values to Our Futures:

Resilience

- Our Homestay family emphasized the importance of keeping the Okinawan dialect alive
- Despite being annexed into Japan, Okinawa celebrates the rich history of the Ryukyu Kingdom
- The Mayor of Ginowan City is campaigning for the relocation of the Futenma airbase

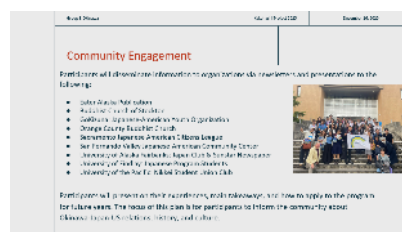
Community

- Master to student connection (Karate master with KAKEHASHI Participants); Emphasis on human interaction
- Cultural exchange through food, history, and excursions
- Building a sense of community within Yomitan Village

【Action Plan】

- Coordinate with the Japanese Embassy to organize speaking events on the Japanese American internment and networking events to connect young Japanese and Japanese American leaders.
- Reach out to regional collegiate groups (NSU's, JASS's, etc.) and young professional JA orgs and engage through informational workshops, events, and media to share history of Okinawan culture and history.
- Reach out to local JACL chapters, student organizations, and professional networks to speak about the history of Okinawa, and share our experiences of the 2025 KAKEHASHI Delegation.
- Contact Japanese American news outlets (JACL Pacific Citizen, Rafu Shimpo) or other community newspapers and submit essays, reflection papers, and images of our experiences.
- Speak about experiences and the history of Okinawa and also present a full seven day vlog (video blog) of the 2025 KAKEHASHI Delegation.

Group Okinawa B



【Results of the Program】

◆ Learnings from the Program

Because of the suffering of the Okinawan people during war time, followed by the constant reminder of the risk of instability demonstrated by the highly visible US military presence, the Okinawans do not take for granted their peace, their community, and their Ryukyu spirit. In fact, their shared experiences contribute to a strong sense of pride in the uchinaanchu identity. These ideas were demonstrated through our learning of phrases from uchinaaguchi, the Okinawan language

Yuimaru no sekai= world of helping one another out

Ichari ba chōdē: =when we meet, we're siblings

Chichi nu haiya, unma nu hai: =time goes by as fast as a horse

Nuchidu takara: = life is a treasure

This learning was only possible by going to Okinawa and hearing the first-hand accounts of real Okinawan people's experience, visiting these places in person, and seeing their day-to-day lives.

【Action Plan】

Participants will present on their experiences, main takeaways, and how to apply to the program for future years. The focus of this plan is for participants to inform the community about Okinawa-Japan-US relations, history, and culture. Participants will disseminate information to organizations via newsletters and presentations to the following:

- Eater Alaska Publication
- Buddhist Church of Stockton
- GoKizuna: Japanese-American Youth Organization
- Orange County Buddhist Church
- Sacramento Japanese American Citizens League
- San Fernando Valley Japanese-American Community Center
- University of Alaska Fairbanks: Japan Club & Sunstar Newspaper
- University of Findlay: Japanese Program Students
- University of the Pacific: Nikkei Student Union Club

Group Hiroshima C



【Results of the Program】

◆ Learnings from the program:

Hospitality and Openness

Regardless of language barriers, everyone we encountered was so willing to take care of us and wanted to learn more about us. Home cooked food and collaborative cooking, hand-picked food; everything was amazing.

Our host family took us to meet with friends and engage with the community. Flexible schedule and willingness to work with us on exploring the area was great, and one family drove over an hour to say goodbye at the airport.

◆ Making use of your experience in your future lives

Throughout the Kakehashi Program experience, there are a few ideas that encompass our time in Japan and interacting with Japanese people and other Japanese Americans.

STRENGTH THROUGH FAMILY, CONNECTION THROUGH HISTORY, RESILIENCE IN COMMUNITY
APPRECIATION FOR LAND AND LIFE

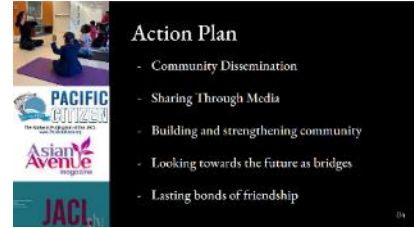
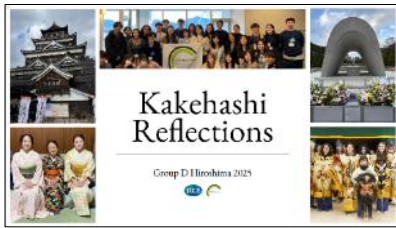
【Action Plan】

Within the next three months, we will carry out the following activities to strengthen our connections with the local community, the friends we made during this trip, and the wider Japanese-American community. We'll use online and social media platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn to engage in writing & publications, create art, and share presentations and other updates. We'll also continue spending time with friends at our universities, and stay connected with Japanese-American organizations and Japanese-American publications, including Pacific Citizen, Discover Nikkei, the Nichi Bei Foundation, the Japan-America Society of Hawaii, and Honolulu Beat, so we can maintain relationships and share cultural understanding.

We also hope to focus on learning Japanese and strengthening our ties with the community through interactions with local Japanese towns/communities.

Through these efforts, we aim to share our experiences and cultural awareness, maintain relationships, and contribute to community building.

Group Hiroshima D



【Results of the Program】

◆ Learnings from the Program:

Japan Discoveries

- Omotenashi Consideration built into the framework of society
- Investment in relationships
- Unlearning expectations/stereotypes
- Overcoming barriers
- Curiosity and our shared experiences

◆ Making use of your experience in your future lives

Bridging Japanese and Japanese American culture through our homestay experiences:

Bridging within our own group of diverse JA backgrounds leading to thoughtful reflections, lifelong friends, and future plans

【Action Plan】

From December 2025 to March 2026, three members of our group will write articles for national, local, and personal JA (Japanese American) and AA (Asian American) digital and print publications.

The main audience will be JACL members across different backgrounds, professions, and community networks. All articles will also remain available online indefinitely, so they can be accessed anytime.

The writing activities will be based in Chicago (Illinois), Denver (Colorado), and Boston (Massachusetts), and will focus on sharing reflections on the KAKEHASHI Project as well as thoughts about the future of U.S.-Japan bridges.

Implementation Agency: Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE)