



Japan's Friendship Ties Program "KAKEHASHI Project"

Invitation Program for Sakura Program Report

1. Program Overview

【Objective】 Representatives of the participants of the Sakura Program, an exchange program sponsored by the National Conference of State Societies and held during the National Cherry Blossom Festival, a celebration of friendship and goodwill between the United States and Japan held every year from March to April in Washington D.C., were invited to Tokyo and a local city in Japan to deepen their understanding of Japanese culture and society through people-to-people exchanges and different observations, and to have them actively promote the attractions of Japan to the world.

【Participants】 Total: 2 participants – 2022 Cherry Blossom Queen (working youth) and 2023 Cherry Blossom Queen First Runner Up (graduate student)

【Locations】 Tokyo, Kyoto

【Program Schedule】

■ Online Pre-study Program

Feb. 22 (Thu) **【Pre-departure Orientation】** Program objective & mission, rundown of the schedule, travel precautions, COVID-19 countermeasures, etc.

Set Period Prior to Arrival **【Video Viewing】** Lecture “Japan and the United Nations”, “Lecture on Japan” (selected from Web Japan)

■ Inbound Program:

Feb. 27 (Tue) Arrival at Haneda Airport

Feb. 28 (Wed) **【Observation】** Meiji Jingu Shrine, Harajuku (Japanese pop culture)

【Observation】 Gajoen Hyakudan Kaidan

【Opinion Exchange】 Japan Sakura Foundation

【Observation】 Asakusa

Feb. 29 (Thu) **【Courtesy Call】** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

 Mr. Hosaka Yasushi, Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs

【Japanese Cultural Experience and Observation】 Ozu Washi paper, Making Japanese paper

 Travel from Tokyo to Kyoto

Mar. 1 (Fri) **【Observation, Opinion Exchange】** Kyoto Women's Base, La La

 Kyoto, Mother's job café

【Observation】 Kawazu Cherry Blossoms on Yodo Waterway

【Cultural Experience】 Matcha green tea and Yatsunashi experience

(at Yatsushashi-an and Shisyu no Yakata)

【Meeting with the Host Family】

Mar. 2 (Sat)

【Homestay】 1 household in Kameoka City

Mar. 3 (Sun)

【Farewell Party with the Host Family】

【Courtesy Call】 Mr. Katsuragawa Takahiro, Mayor of Kameoka City

Sakura tree planting ceremony at Kawa no Eki Kameoka (Riverside Park),

Observation in Kameoka City, Lunch meeting with the Mayor of Kameoka

【Observation】 Tenryuji Temple, Expolring Arashiyama

Mar. 4 (Mon)

Travel from Kyoto to Tokyo

【Reporting Session】 Presentation of program findings and action plans

【Courtesy Call】 First lady of the Prime minister Mrs. KISHIDA Yuko

【Observation】 Odaiba Diver City Tokyo

Mar. 5 (Tue)

Departure from Haneda Airport

2. Program Photos

Inbound Program



February 28 Observation】 Gajoen Hyakudan Kaidan



February 28 【Observation】 Asakusa



February 28 【Opinion Exchange】 Japan Sakura Foundation



February 29 【Japanese Cultural Experience and Observation】 Ozu Washi paper, Making Japanese paper

	
March 1【Observation, Opinion Exchange】Kyoto Women's Base	March 1 【 Observation 】 Kawazu Cherry Blossoms on Yodo Waterway
	
March 1【Cultural Experience】Matcha green tea and Yatsuhashi experience	March 1-3 【Homestay】
	
March 3 Courtesy Call】 Mr. Katsuragawa Takahiro, Mayor of Kameoka	March 4 【Reporting Session】 Commemorative photo

3. Voices from the Participants (excerpt)

◆ Graduate Student

During the exchange program, the most impressive parts were visiting the local school of Kyoto and engaging in cultural workshops, where I interacted with students and educators, gaining valuable insights into Japan's education system and fostering meaningful cross-cultural connections. Additionally, company visits like visiting the Kyoto Women's Base provided firsthand experience of Japan's corporate culture, witnessing innovation and dedication while exchanging ideas and best practices, leaving a lasting impression on my understanding of global business

practices. Moreover, participating in community service projects, such as courtesy calls and meetings with local government officials, allowed for meaningful engagement with community leaders and a deeper appreciation for Japan's diplomatic and civic processes.

◆ Working Youth

I cannot speak more highly about this program. Although it is very busy, it is incredibly thoughtful and alternates from fun activities to more serious thought-provoking ones. I appreciate that you come away with a very strong sense of Japanese society, customs, and norms. I also cannot speak more highly of everyone who made the program possible. They were also great ambassadors for Japan.

4. Voices from the Receiving Parties (excerpt)

◆ Courtesy Call Destination

During their stay in Kameoka City, the participants, the host families, and local citizens deepened their understanding of each other's culture, society, and ways of thinking through exchanges with each other. In particular, the importance of "cherry blossoms" came up many times as a topic of conversation, and I believe the exchange was very meaningful.

◆ Host Family

As the US Cherry Blossom Queen and Runner Up, not only were they beautiful, but there were many things to learn from them, such as the way they act, speak, and care for others. It was also a good opportunity for my children to hear and speak real English. Both of them were very friendly with my children and we were able to communicate with each other, ignoring the language barrier. I would love to continue accepting homestays in the future.

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

March 2, 2024 (Instagram) Visited Kyoto Women's Base this morning. The work they do is extraordinary! This organization supports the women of Kyoto through job training + placement, offering free	March 3, 2024 (Instagram) I am so thankful for the invaluable opportunity afforded to me through the Kakehashi Program. It has been a transformative journey of cultural immersion and personal growth, one that has

legal consultations, and supporting domestic violence and children.

enriched my understanding of Japan and its people in ways I could have never imagined. From the bottom of my heart, thank you @jjce_exchange for this life-changing experience, for opening doors to new perspectives, and for fostering connections that transcend borders. I look forward to continuing to bridge nations and cultures in the spirit of kakehashi.



March 4, 2024 (The Kyoto Shimbun)
 Goodwill through Flowers going Beyond Borders
 U.S. Cherry Blossom Queens
 Weeping Cherry Tree to Kameoka
 Exchange with the citizens of "Kawa no Eki" in Chiyokawa
 To promote goodwill through cherry blossoms, the U.S. Cherry Blossom Queen and Queen Runner Up, who are visiting Japan from the U.S., visited Kameoka City, participated in planting a weeping cherry tree at "Kawa no Eki, Kameoka Riverside Park" in Chiyokawa Town, and deepened exchanges with local residents.
 ...
 The two said they want to return to see the flowers in bloom and share in the U.S. the beauty they were immersed in in Japan.



March 5, 2024 (Kameoka City's Facebook page)
 U.S. Cherry Blossom Queen and Cherry Blossom Queen Runner Up planted a cherry tree in Kawa no Eki, Kameoka Riverside Park. As part of the KAKEHASHI Project, they visited Tokyo and Kyoto, and joined a homestay in Kameoka. One comment we received was, "Kameoka is a beautiful place, rich in nature and kind people. I hope to come back again when the cherry blossoms are in full bloom."
 Before leaving, the participants planted a tree with the mayor of Kameoka City and others in the hope that the young tree will grow and prosper together with Kawa no Eki, Kameoka Riverside Park.

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

Presentations from both participants (Locations: Tokyo, Kyoto)

	
【What we Learned】 I learned a great deal about cultural diversity and traditions, community relations and hospitality, and the beauty of nature and the seasons. My trip to Japan was a profound catalyst for personal growth, providing countless opportunities to challenge myself, broaden my horizons, and deepen my understanding of the world and myself. 【Action Plan】 Work with local schools, community centers, and cultural organizations to organize cultural exchange programs, language workshops, and international festivals. Facilitate student exchange programs and virtual pen pal initiatives with Japanese schools to provide opportunities for cultural exchange and friendship building among youth.	【What we Learned】 -The wonders of public transportation, vending machines and other technological aspects. -Consideration for public places, the communities in which they reside, and a high awareness of the environmental conservation. 【Action Plan】 Through the following activities, I will share my experiences in Japan and how important cherry blossoms are for building international relations. ▪ Washington DC op-ed (publish an essay) ▪ Junior League of Washington – Professional Women’s Discussion (organize a luncheon to talk about my experience in Japan and of future opportunities for cooperation) ▪ Japanese Snack Exchange ▪ Regular Follow-up Social Media Posts (making posts to have people think more about Japan)

Implementation Agency: Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE)