

My Experience from My Trip to Japan

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Stayed in Ogimi and Yonaguni, Okinawa

Through my stay in Japan I got to be exposed to history and culture I never knew much or anything about. As a result of these, they are a lot of different identities in Okinawa itself that I wasn't aware of before I came. Before I came to Okinawa, I thought mainland Japan and Okinawa had the same or similar identities and history. After this experience I've become so much more curious about identities around the world and the history and culture that has shaped them. There's so much I'm ignorant about in this world involving just people, language, history, etc. This journey has really inspired me to learn more.

While staying in Okinawa with Ichiro, Ayako, and Rentarou, it was my first time to see a Japanese High school. It was much different than my own. Students all wore uniforms and cleaned themselves instead of having a Janitor they took for granite. I struggled a lot communicating in Japanese during this time which was frustrating but I was determined to try my best either way.

Just talking with Ichiro and his Wife Ayako I learned a lot about their history and culture. But I also went to a war museum in Okinawa that memorializes the losses they incurred. Between Okinawa losing its' rule as an independent country, facing discrimination, losing their native languages, and receiving most damages in WW2, and largely forced assimilation into mainland Japanese culture and language I couldn't help but feel a mix of interest and sadness.



My stay in Yonaguni was overall amazing and in the end I wanted to stay a few months rather than weeks. Although, in the beginning I felt sick. A combination of a new environment, people, & a language I struggled brought me to a low point. Every day, I went to school with Jun and learned and practiced as much Japanese as I could. Meanwhile, I was soaking in a lot of different opinions and viewpoints of Yonaguni people.



My experience in Yonaguni changed dramatically when I started talking with my six neighbors who'd come from Fukuoka to work as construction workers for the Japanese military base. 「じえたい」 They just sat around for hours every day talking and I started to join in. For first few days it was real challenge. Then eventually, it just clicked better and I could listen and talk much easier than before. I certainly become fluent, but I got to a point where I could have conversations had a slightly slower than normal speed with little troubles. I felt relieved. Everyone was surprised at my sudden ability to speak and listen somewhat decently.



Jun helped me out a lot more than he needed to which I appreciate. He set up a few meetings with linguistics studying the Yonaguni language, culture, and history. Those were fascinating talks yet I wish my Japanese was better so I could have got more out of it. Also took me to some Matsuri festivals that were a good view into Yonaguni culture. Older people came and spoke Yonaguni-go with each other. Going to the sport meet ups and afterward dinners were a blast and great practice.

My host family in Yonaguni was friendly and helpful to me. They'd teach me words and phrases if I didn't know every day. Even got to play shogi! Talking with them was interesting and enjoyable. Same goes for everyone at the schools. Many people were curious about me and helped me. The island was beautiful and not too hot in winter.

