

Mr Eden Law, a JETAA NSW committee member, took on the challenging role of supervisor to a group of university students. Here is his take on JENESYS.

This year I was fortunate enough to be selected as a supervisor of the Australian contingent for the JENESYS 2.0 program, a Japanese Government youth exchange program administered by JICE (Japan International Cooperation Center). Made up of 19 participants (or Jenesysts as the JICE director dubbed us at the end of our tour) between the ages of 18 to 24, and hailing from Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, our busy, 9-day schedule (23 June –1 July) covered Tokyo and various places in Hokkaido.

Accompanying us were the smaller New Zealand group, and also our guides from JICE. JENESYS 2.0 covers different themes for each group, and the theme for ours was **Mass Media (General - Journalism, Multimedia, Bloggers)**.

Our program schedule was quite eclectic and packed, travelling extensively on buses from one location to the next, which required an early morning start (sometimes at 5am) in order to get through it all. In Tokyo we got behind the scenes at NHK Studio's English language department newsroom, as well as the more publicly accessible NHK Studio Park News, where visitors can observe how various television programs are produced. We also visited Edo Tokyo Museum, with its wonderfully elaborate scale models, and Senso-ji in Asakusa on the second last day of the program. Hokkaido's program was focused more on technology, with a tour of Bibai city's "snow technology" facilities and a visit to the Hokkaido Institute of Technology, with a stop for lunch at Arte Piazza Bibai, a peaceful sculpture park containing artworks by Kan Yasuda. But the definite highlight for everyone was the homestay with local Sapporo families, where many participants enthused about their individual experiences that included food, culture and traditions - or "authentic Japan". Lastly, participants were then asked to formulate and present a plan on how they would use their experiences on the program to promote Japan, and to contribute generally to a deeper interest in the country at a local level.

Travelling with a young and especially energetic group of youths and young adults certainly made for a lively (and busy) trip. As the majority had never been to Japan before (and some had left Australia for the first time), it was very interesting and enjoyable to see Japan through their eyes and perspective, and re-discover what had sparked my own love for Japan, and to share my own thoughts as well. And I was quite impressed with the overall quality of the participants who were chosen: quite a few spoke a second, even third language, and there

were writers, musicians and artists. Of course, they were rambunctious as can be expected (the phrase 'herding cats' comes to mind), but they displayed a high sense of curiosity and adventure about their environment.

As the Australian group were university students who were involved in arts, communications and online media disciplines, it would have been an excellent opportunity to have included in a "Mass Media"-themed program, greater exposure to things that were related to their background. For example,



introducing them to journalists, artists or students studying the same disciplines, who utilise the online social media environment to communicate and facilitate cultural ideas and modern Japanese culture. As young adults, our participants used their free time to not just shop and have fun, but to experience Japan and its culture through all their senses, which they will report and disseminate back home to their friends and family. Every aspect of Japanese life is interesting - from the smallest details of crossing the street, to wearing a *yukata* for the first time. The best publicity is to allow them to have fun and communicate that enjoyment and fun to the world. More people will then be attracted to Japan, and will come to experience this for themselves.

As for my duties as a supervisor, much wasn't known beforehand, as a detailed schedule was not available until the start of the trip, but I was certainly kept busy with performing numerous tasks during the day, which would include daily temperature checks of participants (to catch impending illness), marshalling the group (or locating stragglers distracted by the Japanese retail wonderland), and helping our JICE guides, who had more responsibilities and worked far harder than us supervisors. Adaptability and resilience are definitely required of a supervisor, as there can be changes and last minute information that one has to respond to quickly. Both myself and my NZ counterpart certainly came to appreciate Japan's very reasonably priced alcohol after hours!

All in all, it was a packed and enjoyable trip, especially the aspects where the participants were able to enjoy interacting with local people: from chatting to a group of elementary students on excursion at the Edo Museum, and being part of the lives of families during home stays. Japan's most easily recognisable asset, its culture and traditions, were also highly popular, and the all-too-brief introductions left us wanting more.

Acknowledgement must be made of our JICE guides who work tirelessly and were endlessly helpful and generous with their knowledge and time, and who ensured we got to our next appointments, and whose patience we must have tested time and time again. Of course our host families and all the friends we made on the trip, who truly made Japan come alive beyond what we see and read, are remembered with warm regard. And finally, many thanks and appreciation goes to the Japanese government for creating this incredible opportunity for others to come and experience their country. The potential of the JENESYS program is great, as it focuses on building relationships with youth of the Asia Pacific, and as JENESYS 2.0 continues to improve and develop, positive things lie ahead in the future.

Every aspect of Japanese life is interesting ... The best publicity is to allow them to have fun and communicate that enjoyment and fun to the world.