

Miss Kelowna Lady of the Lake & Princess 2011 Japan Report
to the city of Kelowna Mayor and Council

Miss Kelowna Alex:

Konichuwa and good afternoon her worship, Mayor Sharon Shepherd, City of Kelowna Councillors, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Alex Burnham and I am proud to be Miss Kelowna Lady of the Lake 2011-2012

Kelowna's Princess Erin:


And I am Erin Van Zyderveld, Kelowna's Princess 2011-2012. We are pleased to be giving you our report of our recent trip as ambassadors to the city of Kasugai Japan, Kelowna's sister city.

Alex:

Arriving in Japan was one of the most exciting things I have ever experienced. All of a sudden everything was in a different language that I could not decipher, people talked in a way I could barely understand, and everyone bowed to one another, almost constantly. Even after what had been an extremely long, exhausting day of travel, I could barely contain how ecstatic I was to finally be in Japan. After going through customs, we met two Kasugai city officials, Reina and Geojie. They took us to stay the night in a hotel in Nagoya, before we made the commute to Kasugai. The next morning we visited a shrine.

Alex:

The Atsuta Shrine was breathtaking. Before we entered, we cleansed our hands with water from a pool, using wooden ladles. Reina demonstrated for us the proper method of worship at a Shinto Shrine, and we were able to look at some of the prayers that people had written on beautiful wooden slabs that were hung next to the shrine. After walking around for awhile, we looked around a museum that was on the premises. Inside was traditional Japanese artwork and weapons.



Every painting and scroll had a story behind it, and we were lucky enough to have Reina explain the legends behind each one.

Erin:

After visiting the beautiful shrine, we got back into the van and headed to the next amazing sight: Nagoya Castle. This was absolutely breathtaking, but not as old as one would think. This castle had been burned down three times during the Edo period, and even now is being rebuilt. From the top of the castle I could see a good portion of the city of Nagoya. It was an amazing introduction to the country and culture of Japan.

Alex:

The next morning we drove over to Kasugai's Chamber of Commerce, and I read out the letter from Kelowna's own Chamber. While we there city staff showed us portraits of the past ambassadors that had visited, and it felt surreal realizing that soon our portraits would be there among them as well. They told us a bit about the city of Kasugai, and we learned about how the city's main industry was paper and growing cactuses from seed, which we found very interesting.

Erin:

After our meeting in the Chamber of commerce, we went straight to a meeting with City Council. We shook hands, introduced ourselves, and exchanged gifts. We also saw a miniature version of the Kelowna Sails sitting on the Council table, and it was nice to see a little bit of home.

Alex:

That afternoon we attended a lunch meeting at the Kasugai Rotary Club, and I read out a letter from Kelowna's Rotary Club. There was a heart-stopping moment when we thought that one of the Club members was reading my letter, which is exactly what happened to the previous Lady of the Lake, Breanne Cleland. If that was the case I would have to make up my own speech on the spot, but fortunately that was not what happened, and everything went smoothly. After that we were able to meet Mr. Kuahara and his family. They were

disappointed that we would not be staying with them this year, but grateful that we had come to visit them.

Erin:

Our calligraphy lesson was probably one of my favourite experiences while in Japan. I really liked learning about the different strokes, how to make ink, and the history that went along with the different types of calligraphy. I wrote the character for flower.

Alex:

That evening we were privileged to each try on a kimono. I had no idea that they literally take about half an hour to put on. I stood there expecting them to just tie a robe on me like a house coat, but instead I was wearing maybe around six different layers. Even though the socks they gave me to wear nearly ripped on my apparently gigantic feet, I felt the same way as I did when trying on my prom dress for the first time. Our chaperones Marya and Mrs. Croft were able to try on their own as well, and Erin was able to put on a traditional bridal kimono. After that we all had a photo shoot with both of our host families, and their friends. I felt a huge urge to just run away with my kimono and never come back, until I realized how much easier it is to breathe and do simple actions such as sitting and walking without one on.

Erin:

After a lovely dinner prepared by Mrs. Adachi and her friends, we learned how to arrange pressed flowers into a picture.

Alex:

The next morning we drove over to city hall to meet Mayor Ito. Though there was a language barrier between us, he came off as a very friendly and kind person. While we were there I read out her worship Mayor Shepherd's letter to him.

Erin:

The opening ceremonies for day one were held on an indoor stage, as it was raining outside. Alex and I sat on the stage while Mayor Ito and various other delegates spoke. Alex then had the opportunity to speak about what we had been doing up to that point. Then the festivities began!

Alex:

After that, we were invited to a tea ceremony. Participating in a traditional tea ceremony was definitely one of the highlights for me. Because it is so important to Japanese people and a sacred act, I felt deeply honoured to be a part of it.

Erin:

The festival attractions included a World Food Street, and we all had a delicious lunch there. After this we went to the cultural center, where we met the people running the Kelowna booth, and had the opportunity to try on another Kimono. Other fun events included rides, dance performances, and traditional tea ceremonies.

Alex:

While at the cultural center, Erin and I were able to try out a Japanese musical instrument called a koto. You have to wear special bands with long tips on each of your fingers, so that you can strum properly. It was definitely more difficult than it looked. Erin and I were both interviewed by a reporter, and we were excited to see an article written about us in the paper the next day!

Erin:

Day two of the festival was warm and beautiful. We sat in a park, trying to avoid getting mud all over ourselves, and watched a captivating martial arts display, an adorable primary school marching band, and more speeches before heading to the parade grounds.

Alex:

One of my life goals has always been to be able to cut an opening ceremony ribbon. With the white gloves, the special scissors, and everyone clapping behind me. Erin and I got to do just that. It was hard to stop myself jumping up and down and screaming wildly out of excitement after cutting the ribbon to kick off the parade. We walked alongside Mayor Ito and a few of the city councillors in the parade, and all of the floats we saw were spectacular.

Erin:

That night we got to put on our gowns and tiaras. The welcoming party was hosted in the same place as the Rotary lunch, so we already knew our way around. We were introduced as we walked through the doors, and they led us to the stage where we sat until it was time for us to present our speeches. After this, we were instructed to socialize, which gave Alex and I the opportunity to learn even more about Japan and her people.

Alex:

The Adachi family made the trip the best I have ever been on. They were genuinely happy that we were there, and I truly felt like one of the family. On our last day they took us to a wonderful restaurant, Inuyama Castle, a very unique Shinto shrine, and shopping at a mall that used to be Kasugai's old airport.

Erin:

My host family was beyond amazing to Mrs. Croft and myself. They were extremely accommodating, and genuinely happy that we were there. On our last day in Japan, Mrs. Sato took us to Inuyama Castle. This castle was never burned down, so it had all the original interior design, including the cliff like stairs. It was almost like we were climbing a ladder. When we made it to the top, we realized that all that climbing had been worth it, as we could see for miles. Also that day, we went to the girl's elementary school and gave out some Canada pencils. Everyone was so excited to see us! We finished the day with a shopping trip, dinner out, and a lovely view at the top of the TV tower in Nagoya.

Alex:

We left very early the next morning, and I was very hesitant to go. Both of us shed tears when we had to leave our host families, but we reassured each other that we would always stay in touch and that they are welcome to visit us in Kelowna any time that they would like.

Erin:

Japan is a beautiful country, one that I definitely want to go back to some day. The people were wonderful, and the culture so rich; a true mix of tradition and technology that melded seamlessly into the beautiful country that I can honestly say is now one of my favourite places on Earth.

Alex:

This trip has had a huge effect on me, and I have learned and experienced so much in such a small amount of time. In the bottom of my heart I will always have a deep love for Japan. Every single person I met was so kind to us, and extremely friendly.

On behalf of myself, Erin, and the Lady of the Lake society, thank you for letting us share our experiences in Japan with you. Arigatou