

Dear. AFS Japan and Mr. Debari,

It has passed nearly 5 months since I came to Australia. It means I will have finished half of my exchange soon. I feel it so quick that I want to stop my time in Australia.

My hometown is located on the border between NSW and VIC. I always go over the Murray River, which divides two states, to go to school. I have two older brothers in Japan and the second one doesn't stay together because his university is far from my house. In Australia, I have three older brothers and the youngest one is the only brother staying home together. I think it is similar to my natural family. They have two dogs, two cats, two birds and one snake. I haven't held him that it's so scary. I'm really happy to have a big house, a big own room, many lovely pets and wonderful family.

My host family treasure spending time all of family together and they express LOVE a lot like hugs and kisses. They always think about me and help me anytime. I can say for sure that they are the best host family in the world. How lucky I am to have such a nice family! My host dad loves riding a motorbike and the other day I sat behind him and we ran around the bush and chased kangaroos with his motorbike. It was so cool and thrilling that I loved it. We could get close to a kangaroo and it was only a few metres to reach him!

My town, Barooga, is really small that when I say "There are about 2000 students in my school in Japan", people look really surprised with their eyes opened wide and say "It's same as a population of this town!". But here is blessed with nature that I can see hundreds of kangaroos, many koalas and beautiful stars so I love here though I know it's much different from Chiba.

At school, I serve as an assistant in Japanese class. I laugh sometimes when people speak Japanese. Though I know they are trying hard it is so strange. But,, I can't laugh any more when I think about my English because it could be such strange English like their Japanese. My school is also small as you know so it was not so hard to match their names and faces. My host mum said it's because my school is small but I was surprised that students talk lots with another students even they are in different grade. I think it is great though in Japan we call students in another grades "Kohai" or "Senpai" and feel difference that cause not talking much with them just because of their age. We normally stay outside except classes. It's really refreshing to lie on the grasses and eat lunch especially on sunny day! But now it is getting colder I start missing Japanese classrooms that we can keep warm.

I play basketball every Mondays in local team. I'm not good at it but I like it because my teammates are all kind and look after me. In Japan we play sports separated girls and boys but we are always mixed and actually my teammates are all boys. I'm enjoying even just this situation that is much different from Japan because I go to girls' school in Japan.

I know everybody do many new things whilst their exchange but I feel I've already done so many things afresh now I'm writing this.

I went to Great Ocean Road with AFS students in my region. I felt there was so "special" place. We saw twelve apostles that were great. When we visited London Bridge it was still a bridge like a shape of arch but the bridge has gone recently and now there are only two rocks that used to be the ends of the bridge left over. I saw a history! That's very interesting even I've been here for just 5 months and I also think I'm lucky enough to have seen it when it was still a bridge.

One of the reason I think I had a clever choice to come to Australia is AFS in here has many optional tours. I joined Bushtrek to Broken Hill on Easter holiday and I have just returned back last week from Safari!! Both of them are so awesome that I can't compare. They were just excellent.

On Bushtrek, I remember the surroundings we stayed for 1week were not definitely comfortable for example we slept in a swag in a Woolshed that smelled so bad, little water and electricity, dry and sandy there (one of my friends said we inhale 50% air and 50% sand.) and the worst thing was there were incredibly many flies, moreover moths at the night times, but I had never felt such magnificent nature by then. I hadn't been to a place surrounded every 360 by horizon and continued desert. One night each of us sat down in the middle of desert alone with nothing that emits light like camera or mobile phone. There was nothing around me except innumerable stars in the sky. That was absolutely fantastic that I felt swallowed up in the sky. I did camel riding that was lots of fun. Because I did the first horse riding in here before Bushtrek I could compare with it and I think horse riding is much scarier because horses run much faster and struggle that I couldn't control them but I'd like to learn to. However camel riding also had very scary part and it was when camels stand up or sit down because it was very sudden and high that I gasped with surprised at feeling fall over. The camels didn't stand up or sit down without everybody's scream... And then, we went into the Day Dream Mine with a helmet that didn't fit my head. Inside the mine was dark and narrow enough to hit my head many times but it was so much fun. The most unforgettable experience was I put my arm into a cow and felt a calf in her body. As you can imagine, it took me a lot of courage to try to put my arm in a hole full of dirt but I'm curious enough to have done it. I want to praise myself about that.

The other trip, Safari, was for 2 weeks from Sydney to Cairns and Bushtrek was the midland but this one was the east coast. Every beach was so beautiful but I think Whitsundays can't be compared with anywhere else. I know whatever word is not enough to describe there but it was like a heaven. It was brilliant there; the sand was white and the water was crystal clear. I did kayaking, rafting, snorkelling and scuba diving whilst this trip however I had a problem with doing these things and it was that I can't swim besides it was only me. But I could do all of them like the other people even though some people asked me

"What did you come here for?". Now, I can say for certain even if someone has a difficulty with doing something, do it, never give up. I love scuba diving best and there were many colourful fishes and beautiful corals in Great Barrier Reef. It was impressive that everything was new and fresh for me. It seemed everything in there said to me that this was Great Barrier Reef. As I said just now I can't swim so when we did rafting we had several opportunities to swim however I stayed in the raft whilst my friends jumped into the river one after another but such a dull thing was not allowed among my friends. Of course my friends, Mary Jo and Niklas, pulled me and I fell over into the river, then they left me! As you know we wore life jackets so it was just funny thing but when I was burying under the raft I thought seriously I was dying.

One night, we stayed at a pub and girls had to make Boys dressed-up like as girls! It was so funny and even one boy looked like a real girl! When I showed a video to my school friends after the trip, they asked me dubiously "What have you been doing for 2 weeks!?". I don't say it was the best part of this trip but I laughed most in this part.

Except for water sports, we did lots of things and one of them was we went to Dream World. It was so much fun and cheaper than Tokyo Disney Land! In addition, It was not crowded!! I found why exchange students my school hosted last year complained when we went to Disney Land together... Because they were from Australia!!

By the way, I had my birthday during this trip and it was the first time for me to have a birthday in a foreign country. The day was that we spent most of time in the bus unfortunately but I was happy just because I was on the trip. But after tea everyone celebrated my 17th with yummy cakes and the song "Happy Birthday to you" in their first languages! There were some people have to go back to their country very soon but I was really happy to spend some time with them.

This year is the 50th years' anniversary of AFS Victoria so we had a ball "State Dinner Dance" in Melbourne. I loved it so much and it was the first time I went to a ball! We all dressed up, girls wore accessories and had make-up and boys wore ties. They looked gorgeous in their formal dresses. I wore a blue dress with lots of lame that has cowl neck and diagonal uneven hem skirt and silver earrings with Swarovski. Most people wore black or dark colour dresses so some people admired my dress and also I played the piano on the stage as an entertainment at the beginning of the ball. I was so nervous that I felt I wanted to escape but after playing everybody gave me a clap and there were even some people praised me personally and asked what music I played, what composer it was and how long I've learned piano for. I was so happy that everybody enjoyed my playing.

In addition, I gave a piano recital that my host father's mum organised for me at the beginning of June. What's more there was an article about me and my piano on the newspaper the other day! I'm really surprised that everybody think my piano is amazing because I know some of my friends in Japan who can play the piano as well as me or even better than me so my piano is very normal in Japan, however I'm most grateful to people

that they enjoy my music and make a compliment to me.

I'm sure I've spent really precious times so far and I'm also sure that I'll spend so quick but so irreplaceable times from now on. I appreciate this is made of all helps of all people around me and if even just one of them had been lacking I couldn't have such an amazing time and enjoy myself as much as like now. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest thanks to you all at the Odyssey Communications and AFS Japan.

Yours truly from Down Under,
Rie Yamauchi