

Hi everyone. It's weird to be back at work for the third day in a row this week, after two weeks of alternating work and vacation days. A lot of my friends took advantage of the holidays to take a whole week off of work and travel in Japan and other countries. While it would have been nice to go visit my friends in America, see the Great Wall of China, go scuba diving in Vietnam or lay on the beach in Fiji, I'm glad I decided to stay in Japan because I learned that there are still a lot of things for me to see and do, right here in Mie!

In the middle of last week, I took a two day trip down to Kumano with some friends from my tea ceremony class. Armed with sunscreen and my international driver's license, I had no idea what to expect, but I was ready! I brought a sock that I was going to knit to pass the time in the car, but the roads were so curvy and hilly that I ended up putting that away and just looking out the windows. It was the first time I had driven down to the south of Mie and I was so amazed at the scenery! The first day, we drove along the beach in Kumano, seeing Lion Rock and a lot of other interesting places, before we got to our destination in Wakayama where they supposedly had the best meharizushi. It was delicious! After we ate, we spent some time visiting different temples and shrines in Wakayama before I took the wheel and drove to the hotel where we stayed.

Everything that we did and saw impressed me. The hotel, on an island with hot springs in caves that looked out to sea, was almost as overwhelming as the furry-looking green mountains that lined the coast. On the second day, we drove to Nachi to climb up a million stairs, see some beautiful shrines and the famous waterfalls. I was told that it was one of the 100 most famous waterfalls in Japan. I didn't know how to take this. In my life, I've only seen the waterfall in famous Niagara, New York. So when I thought that this was famous for being one of 100 waterfalls in Japan, I wasn't sure what to expect. As it turned out, this was a breathtaking waterfall! When we climbed to the top of endless flights of stairs facing the falls, we had a beautiful view of Nachi Falls and the surrounding scenery. I'd never seen anything like it!

The scenery in my daily life here in Japan is so much different from the scenery that I was used to at home. I always thought it was because the society in Japan goes so much farther back into history than that of the modern United States. But even more so in its natural state, Japan just looks so much different from anywhere I've lived before. Now I understand why Japanese friends were always so amazed when we drove down what I always thought of as pretty boring American highways. As much as I still want to travel to other countries, I'm glad that I spent this Golden Week in Japan to experience these things that are still so new to me. I hope everyone enjoyed their holidays too!