

It seems like forever since I've been to the Education Center! I'm back from an ALT conference in Tokyo and a long weekend in Okinawa, and I am feeling really optimistic about my next year in the JET program. It's almost been a full year since I first came to Tsu, but it doesn't feel that long at all! At the beginning of last week, all of the ALTs who will stay in Japan for another year met in Tokyo for a conference about being an ALT. There were a lot of really motivating workshops about using English at school, both in and out of the classroom, and I am full of new ideas and enthusiasm to get more involved at school this year.

I came back to Mie with my friends from the conference on Wednesday night, and since we had already missed three days of school, we decided to leave on Thursday and go to Okinawa for a long weekend. I haven't traveled much outside of this area since I've come to Japan, so I was happy to explore a new part of Japan. On the flight to Okinawa, I felt like a child, staring out the window the whole time. I have never been to a tropical island like Okinawa or seen coral reefs, so everything was so amazing and new to me.

When we got to Okinawa, I was surprised to see how much of an American influence was visible even just driving down the road. There were so many American restaurants and stores that I felt a little bit guilty that the American military base had changed life on the island so much. Even so, all the encounters that I had with people in Okinawa were positive. I thought maybe local people would not be happy to see more Americans, but we were always greeted warmly and welcomed into stores, hotels and restaurants. This is one of the things that impressed me most about Okinawa.

We stayed in a hotel at the beach about an hour north of Naha, and even though it was rainy season there, we were lucky enough to have two full days of beautiful weather. It was so nice to go swimming and snorkeling and enjoy nature, but I found out the hard way that the sun in Okinawa is much stronger than the sun at the beaches that I'm used to in America! Now I just have some postcards and a bad sunburn to remember my trip. Sometimes we felt like Okinawa was a different country, but we could still enjoy the comforts of life in Japan. I even got to have a root beer float, a traditional American soda with ice cream in it—something that I hadn't even thought about in a long time! On my way back to Tsu from Kansai airport on Sunday night, I was totally relaxed and refreshed from our vacation but just as happy to come home.