

It took me a long time to decide what to do last weekend, but in the end I decided to go to Kobe with a big group of friends. For some reason, I wasn't too interested in going to Kobe. I was afraid that my friends, all first year ALTs, only wanted to go there because there is so much foreign influence. I don't get to see all of these friends so often. I met them in Tokyo when they first came to Japan last summer and I worked at their orientation. But since then, we rarely spend time together as a big group. Some of them I see more often than others, but it had been a long time since we all went out somewhere together. I don't know Kobe very well, as I had only been there one time, so I decided to go along.

Saturday was spent shopping, walking through the city, eating lunch in Chinatown and then meandering along the waterfront and the harbor in the evening. I quite enjoyed just walking around outside, because the feel of Kobe is so much different from other cities around the same size, like Nagoya or Osaka. I like being able to see the mountains to the North and the sea to the South. I didn't feel like I was so surrounded by tall buildings and busy city life. The feeling in Kobe was much more relaxed than other cities in Japan. It was also nice to relax by the harbor in Kobe. By the time we got there, it was evening and the sun was starting to set. We sat and talked by the water for a long time, until it got too cold, and then took a ride on the ferris wheel to enjoy the view. It was a beautiful view and in some ways, I felt like I had left Japan.

On Sunday, we got up early and enjoyed breakfast at Chococro, one of my favorite places to visit when I go to the big city. Eating Chococro reminds me of the time when I lived in France, and the foods I used to eat for breakfast there. It's a good thing we don't have a Chococro in Tsu or I would probably gain weight! After breakfast, we walked back down to the harbor, did some shopping and finally sat and talked in the sun. Sunday was so warm that I was very hot even though I was wearing a short sleeve t-shirt! It must have been more than 20 degrees, and I think it felt even warmer in the sun.

I had to hurry back to Mie as there was an AJET meeting at my house that night, but we didn't leave Kobe without a stop in Chinatown (actually, we ate there both days!). Since visiting Hong Kong, I have come to appreciate Chinese food much more than I did when I lived in America, so it was nice to taste some of those foods that I don't often get to eat in Japan. The whole weekend felt a little bit surreal—I had escaped the normal worries and stresses of daily life here and just enjoyed the feeling of a new place. And it was only 3 hours away! It wasn't until I had just stepped onto the JR train back to Osaka that I remembered I had completely forgotten to buy omiyage! Maybe my weekend made me relax a little TOO much.

This weekend made me think more about places to visit in Japan. I used to have the idea that if you'd seen a few big cities in Japan, you'd seen them all, but I realized I was wrong. There are many more places that I can visit and learn from in Japan—there are too many places that I still haven't visited! My next trip will be to Shikoku in just a few weeks during the spring vacation. My friends and I will rent a car and drive all over the island, so if you have any recommendations about places or things that we should see, please tell me!