

Thank you to everyone who was here last week and said hello to my parents. They were so surprised that everyone in this office stood up and said hello when they first arrived. When they went to my school and the 7<sup>th</sup> floor at the kencho office, they didn't receive such a warm welcome. I think they can understand better why I enjoy coming to this office so much.

I had a very nice visit with my parents these past two weeks, but it was so busy that I am exhausted now. My parents were surprised that I could plan so many things into such a short trip, and they suggested that I get a job as a tour planner when I finish my time here as an ALT. I would never want that job, though, because it is way too busy. Two weeks of trip planning was more than enough for me. My parents were here for 12 days and we fit a lot of activities into that time. We went to my school festival, to see my brother's host family in Aichi Prefecture, we visited Tsumago and Magome, Seto, Nabana no Sato botanical gardens in Kuwana, and we went on overnight trips to Koya-san and to Hotel Urashima in Kii-Katsuura. My parents had been to Japan several times before, so I tried to think of things that we could do this time to make this trip different from the last. That's why I decided to take them to Koya-san instead of Kyoto, and down the coast of Mie and Wakayama so that they can understand more easily when I tell them that I saw my friend from Ochiyama or went to Kumano for fireworks. They were surprised how far so many of these places were from Tsu!

I worried a bit that we didn't spend enough time in typical touristy places, and that maybe my parents would be disappointed that we didn't go to Kyoto again during their visit. But quite the opposite, they were very excited to visit new places in Japan and see a new kind of scenery that they weren't so used to. They were in love with Koya-san where the slightly cooler temperatures and the beautiful scenery were a nice change from seeing the sights in a city. We could walk easily from place to place and they enjoyed the cemetery and cedar forest there more than anything else during the rest of the trip. We came back from Koya-san on Friday night and Saturday morning we were in the car driving south to Wakayama. I thought they would be able to sleep in the car if they were tired, but they eagerly took in the sights from the car windows as we drove to the south of Mie and beyond. They were so impressed by the scenery in Mie that is so different from that of the Midwest United States where we are from. They asked so many questions about the places we were driving through and the things we saw that I could easily see how much they were enjoying the trip. I was also worried that they wouldn't want to spend most of the weekend in an onsen hotel when there were more places to visit, but they were so relieved to have that time to relax at the end of their trip. Both of my parents grew up in the northeast of the United States, near the ocean, so they enjoyed the cave baths that looked out to the ocean even more than I thought they would.

Overall, it was a wonderful trip. I was so happy to see my parents again, to show them some places that I like best in Japan and to see that they enjoyed their time as much as I did. While I am relieved that this visit is over and I can get back to normal life again, I still felt sad as I left them to the airport ferry terminal this morning. I only have about 10 months left here in Japan, but I do hope that I have the chance to be tour planner for them just one more time before I leave Japan for good.