Hiroshima
We arrived at Fukuoka Airport on the Island of Kyuushuu early on Thursday October 26th. We made our way to the Fukuoka Train Station, caught our first Shinkansen (bullet train) and travelled via the undersea tunnel from Kyuushuu to Hiroshima on the Island of Honshuu. We spent our first five days in Japan studying and exploring the Hiroshima area.

Classes and Activities
In Hiroshima we stayed at the Hiroshima International Plaza where we had some classes. The first day we arrived, we were all really tired but we had our first class where we learnt and practised a self-introduction. We later had to say our introduction in front of everyone at the opening ceremony. In our other lessons at HIP we learnt about our home stay, how to discuss our impressions and the expressions to use when eating. We learnt what to say before we started eating and how to say we were full. We also had to practise taking our shoes off so that we could enter our home stay family’s house in a correct and polite way. Other classes included learning how to ask for directions and how to order at restaurants. All the lessons helped both during our homestay and as we travelled through Japan shopping and ordering food.

By Olivia Lord

Miajima
On Saturday 27th September, we went to Miyajima. Miyajima is a sacred island that houses the famous Itsukushima Shrine. To get to Miyajima we had an hour-long bus ride and then a fifteen-minute ferry ride. After leaving the ferry, we headed straight to Itsukushima Shrine. Before we entered the shrine we washed our hands and mouth, to wash away any evil spirits. We had to do this at every temple and shrine we went to. Walking through Itsukushima Shrine was amazing; it was so beautiful. The Itsukushima Shrine is red and matches the famous Torii Gate. The shrine and gate are unique because they are both built over water. After walking around the shrine we got the opportunity to go shopping. The shopping streets on Miyajima still look like Japan would have looked 200 years ago. In every shop you went into there was something beautiful. One of the most amazing things on Miyajima is that they let deers walk freely over the island. These deer are wild animals but very tolerant towards people. The only problem is that they might nibble on your clothes and shopping thinking that there is food in there. Miyajima was my favourite place to visit in Japan. We could have easily spent all day there, so that we could have experienced both low and high tides around the Itsukushima Shrine and Torii Gate. At low tide if you’re lucky you can walk out to the gate. Miyajima was a great place to go; it was fun and exciting as well as informative and interesting.

By Jessica Donnelly

Host Families

The Peace Park
After visiting Miajima and enjoying a beautiful lunch, we travelled to the Hiroshima Peace Park, the site of the detonation of the A-Bomb. There we met our guide, Mr. Mito, a certified inutero survivor of the Hiroshima bombing. He gives free tours every day of the Peace Park, telling the full story of the bombing. We walked around
the Park while Mr. Mito told us about his own experience and his family’s experience of the bombing, as well as telling us the scientific side of it: when the bomb detonated, what the four different classes of survivors were, etc. He also showed us how scientists worked out the exact point where the bomb went off. Mr. Mito showed us a Jizo statue which had survived the bombing and encouraged us to touch it. We found that one side was smooth while the other was rough. The smooth side was the side which had been facing away from the bomb, and so had been protected from the intense heat wave. The statue had quartz in it, Mr. Mito told us, and so when the heat wave hit the statue the crystal melted, leaving the stone rough and uneven. We also saw the A-Bomb Dome, the school which was directly below the bomb when it was detonated. As it was directly below and the blast spread outwards rather than downwards, the school was relatively unharmed. Mr. Mito also showed us the Children’s Peace Park, a statue dedicated to Sadako, a girl who died of cancer after being exposed to radiation during the bombing. Sadako was attempting to make 1000 paper cranes before she died because an ancient Japanese tale said that if you could make 1000 paper cranes you would be granted one wish. Sadako had planned to wish for her recovery. Her friends finished the cranes for her and they are now buried with her. Hundreds of thousands of cranes are sent to the Peace Park every year as a sign of people’s wish for peace. Many of these are on display. Once our tour was over we walked through the Peace Memorial Museum. It had countless stories of pain and death which had been caused by the detonation of the A-Bomb. Many of us found it overwhelming and didn’t finish going through all the rooms, each of which had another set of heart-wrenching stories of those killed by the A-Bomb. One of the exhibitions was a tiny tricycle, which was owned by a three year old boy who was killed by the bombing. We found the Peace Park and Museum confronting, overwhelming and heart-wrenching.

By Lia Visentin

Home Stay
The homestay experience was an essential part of our immersion into Japanese culture. It threw us into the deep end with a real Japanese family and we all had a variety of different experiences. Some of us participated in tourist-like activities such as sightseeing and shopping with our families. Others had experienced daily Japanese life through activities such as going to a supermarket and using Japanese to locate items. Others were involved in traditional Japanese festivals that included a variety of different activities. One such activity involved catching a goldfish. All of our homestay experiences included making traditional Japanese food. My homestay companion and I made Takoyaki. Another group prepared Okonomiyaki. All of us had very interesting experiences during our homestay that helped us to understand Japanese life more fully.

By Gilbert Williams