



Claire Chen (center) meets the Hidaka family for the first time at Shonai Junior High.

Cross Culture Closeness

BY CLAIRE CHEN, 2016 S2I participant

From the start my host family was amazing, they wanted me to have fun and live the Japanese life. The Hidakas welcomed me and made me feel like part of their family. During my stay I spent a lot of time with the kids—Sumina,

Mitsunari, and Suzuna Hidaka. We became great friends and they made sure I got the most out of life in Iizuka.

The highlight of my trip came when the Hidaka family took me to a local temple for a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. The serene environment of the temple, the kindness of the hostess, the bitter green tea that Sumina, Suzuna and I shared and a surprise earthquake left a deep impression on me.



Larissa Lai (center) and her host family and the Aso family residence. The uniform she wears is that of a local high school.

A Family Visit

BY LARISSA LAI, 2014 S2I participant and 2016 returnee

I went to Iizuka with the 2014 S2I. The experience I had 2 years ago sticks in my brain—the school culture, language, lifestyle, my loving host family—and

every time Japan came up I knew I had to return.

I did so in June all by myself, staying again with my original host family. I created lifelong friendships in 2014, and now I have my second family I talk to everyday. It was an unexpected bond that started with that first brief visit, nurtured across years, reinforced by this second visit, and will continue for the rest of my life.



Bella Huang (second from left) enjoys time with her host siblings.

Beyond The Classroom

BY ANNIE SHIAU, 2016 S2I parent

My 12 year old daughter participated in the 2016 S2I program. Even for a child who has traveled to 25 countries in the world, the S2I exchange was an invaluable experience thanks to her host family.

Despite her early homesickness, her host family welcomed her and worked to ensure she lived the Japanese life like a local. The bonds with her host family and new friends at Shonai Junior High School will last a lifetime. These bonds will bring my daughter back to Iizuka in February 2017, this time to introduce me to her host family and friends she made during the S2I trip.



Participants are all smiles at the San Jose Mineta airport after returning home from Iizuka.

New Friends and Great Food

BY LESLIE BECKER, 2016 S2I chaperone

Over the ten days of the S2I trip we joked, laughed, cried, napped, played, toured, ate and took lots of pictures. I can't imagine missing any one person on this trip. We needed each and every student and chaperone to add their own uniqueness to our big traveling family.

No story about Japan is complete without mentioning food! Japanese food is amazing and our group devoured it! From our first grocery store dinner trip to tempura and sushi, the welcome buffet, school lunches and dinners prepared by our host families, we ate well. I loved watching the students get their last ramen and Japanese food at the airport before we left and then say they wanted their first meals back in the US....to be Japanese food!



Volunteers cleaning the site of the S2I farewell party at the Aso family residence in Iizuka

An Eye-Opener

BY YUKIKO ARARAGI, *S2I coordinator*

Thank you everyone who supported the 2016 S2I exchange project. When I started this job I thought I would be taking care of Sunnyvale students and Iizuka host families, but looking back I think I benefited most from the

experience. Every encounter made me a more open-minded, international person.

I would draw your attention to the attached photograph. Many people volunteered their best efforts to make this project a success and I cannot emphasize enough what a difference they made. This year's exchange was inspirational, welcoming, educational, unique, multicultural, illuminating... and an eye-opener.



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Current opportunities:

- Program Manager for Student Exchange Program
- Program Manager for Sunnyvale City
- Want to help with something else? Let us know!

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