

CET Japan, Summer 2025 | Anonymous Student

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Who are the intended audience(s) of your Perspective Piece? "Small-town students, rural students."

Studying Abroad as a Small-Town Student

As a student from a small, rural town in upstate New York (about three and a half hours from New York City), study abroad in Osaka was an intimidating, albeit exciting, opportunity. Most of the people I knew in my hometown didn't have an interest in study abroad, and those who did were focused on places closer to home, like France or Spain.

It wasn't surprising then, that I found the prospect of studying abroad for a summer on the other side of the planet at least a bit daunting. I had been to Japan before, but never for this long and I had had my family with me. Going independently and for so long left me worrying about my ability to make friends and thrive in a densely populated Japanese metropolis, something quite different from my small-town home.

Fortunately, I found that I was more than capable of thriving in an environment much different from my home. I slowly explored different parts of Osaka and balanced this exploration with participation at CET Japan's cultural events. Doing so, I learned about old Osaka and its shopping venues, escaped the urban hustle and bustle at a quaint cat café, and found an authentic New York pizzeria to visit when I was feeling homesick, among other things. Additionally, I made sure to get out of Osaka and discover other parts of Japan on the weekends, which ended up being some of my favorite experiences, as I visited more rural parts of Japan (and improved my Japanese skills at the same time).

One such notable experience I had was cycling the Shimanami Kaidō, a 70-km long national cycling route that goes through the Seto Inland Sea and takes the cyclist through the heart of rural Japan. The picturesque mountains and ocean were of course beautiful, but I found the trip especially moving because I saw a part of Japan that most foreigners don't, and one that reminded me in many ways of small-town America.

This trip was really the moment when I found my stride in studying abroad. I had found a way to discover my identity as a rural student in a foreign setting. While I found the urban atmosphere of Osaka liberating, I was conflicted about fully embracing urbanity and leaving behind the rural lifestyle I had grown up with. On this trip, I found a way to balance new experiences in Osaka that starkly contrasted my hometown with new experiences that reminded me of it.

My advice to anyone who is hesitant on studying abroad because they come from a not-so-cosmopolitan rural town would be this: take the plunge and see where the journey takes you.

Although it may be vastly different from what you know, it very likely may be something you enjoy. Moreover, you may discover aspects of your small-town identity while you're abroad, even if you don't expect to.

Study abroad is valuable for a plethora of reasons, but one that is often underestimated is its ability to change your perspective on your identity and your home. Rather than fearing this, I encourage you to embrace and look forward to this unique opportunity.