



5W Meets Snow Monkeys in Japan!

**Japanese Gathering,
10-16 April 2016**

Seven days of travel from Nagano, on central Honshu island, to Hiroshima, the furthest west from Kyoto started on 10 April with 32 participants from UK, Canada, Alaska (USA), Finland and Australia. A total 20 members from Japan also joined this big event with their friendship and warm hospitality. Japan Rail Pass made this trip much easier and reasonable and visitors enjoyed the trip by bullet train, Shinkansen. The first highlight of this trip was meeting Snow Monkeys in Jigokudani, smelling sulphur from hot spring in the hell valley. There is a hot spring pool in the park and it is very well known all over the world. Can you imagine, wild snow monkeys are

walking around you and showing their daily life to you very naturally? They looked very fluffy and quiet and some were sitting with baby monkeys, so cute.

The first night in Ryokan inn (Japanese style inn with outdoor hot spring bath) was also special for all of us. Almost all participants enjoyed hot spring communal bath (big bath, but divided between men and women). This is part of Japanese life style when we take a bath even at home. Hot spring water warms our body very well and we enjoyed wearing Yukata as Japanese style room wear, where we could pick our favourite colour from several colours. Then we met again in the banquet room with Tatami mat for the welcome dinner. The dinner was Kaiseki Cuisine, a full course Japanese dinner. I could see a room full of lovely smiles from many countries. I also heard that they had learned it must be the time to enjoy everything they could not experience in their own countries.

Yes, the exciting journey started from Nagano. The second highlight of this Gathering was to two special places, Hiroshima and Miyajima. The chief organiser had been planning to visit Hiroshima, especially the Atomic Bomb museum in Hiroshima Peace Park. She thought it would be the right time to visit there with members from overseas, after Fukushima crises with the huge earthquake and Tsunami. We all had time to think and feel the threat and the tragedy of Hiroshima again. Some members learned and made the paper cranes (Sadako story) with colourful Origami on the previous evening. Hiroshima Peace Park looked the most peaceful place in the world. After we had a meaningful time there, we moved to Miyajima the next day. I can say we were very lucky, because the whole island of Miyajima had a spring festival, Toukasai means Peach flower festival. It is rare for Japanese tourists to visit there on such a certain day. Miyajima is a very well known and popular place. Itsukushima shrine looks to be floating on the sea and is one of the World Heritage sites of Japan. We were able to visit every temple and the shrine where each unique festive ceremony can be shown. The weather was perfect on the final day, and all of us enjoyed the farewell party with laughter and tears.

I can say I learnt that 5W gives us such opportunities to meet and learn more about each other, from different nationalities, not only enjoying travelling together, but showing what is important between us.

Thank you so much to all the participants.

You all provided the respect, consideration and friendship that are the ethos of 5W.

This made the Gathering very special.

Thank you all, Noriko, Japan

