



National Parks of the Canadian Rockies



A Wonderful Life

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From:Edmonton, Canada

What is your image of studying abroad?

My image of studying abroad was "making lots of foreign friends," "having fun parties every day," and "easily mastering English."With such dreams in mind, I went to study at a public high school in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada this February.

Edmonton is a city with a population of about one million, located east of the Canadian Rocky Mountains. Compared to eastern Toronto and western Vancouver, it's a rural area.

In this rural city, I had three valuable study abroad experiences.

The first one is about self-assertion.

One day, I went to the pool with five friends. There were several water slides, and each chose the slide they wanted to go on. When I read the atmosphere and said, "I'll go wherever everyone else wants to go,"

They looked at me strangely and asked,

"Which slide do you want to go on?"

It was a moment that made me realize,

"I am the typical Japanese person who lacks self-assertion.

"Their attitude towards classes is also completely different

from that of Japanese people. In Japanese public high schools,

attending any class is taken for granted, but they skip classes they don't think are necessary.



world waterpark

The second is the story of "Can you make friends overseas?"

I found it difficult to join groups of native English speakers because my English skills were not sufficient.

Imagine this: it's like being the only foreigner who isn't good at Japanese in a group of Japanese people. It's not that you're being bullied or disliked, but it's hard to form deep relationships. Most of the friends who invited me were immigrant kids whose first language wasn't English.

In Edmonton, many immigrant children who are financially disadvantaged gather. Among my friends, some couldn't afford a smartphone to stay in touch, some didn't have pocket money to grab a coffee together and spent most of their free time in parks, and some even shoplifted due to poverty. I struggled with how to advise friends who repeatedly committed crimes and whether to continue these friendships. It was even harder when these were some of the few close friends I had. Losing a friend was the most painful experience during my time studying abroad.

The third is about conflict.

In Canada, the use of cannabis and vapes by those under 18 is prohibited by law, but the reality is that many high school students use illegal drugs. I lost my first close friend in Canada when they were arrested for dealing cannabis. Making friends overseas is challenging, and the shock was immense. I continued my study abroad life with the inner conflict of whether to continue friendships with those using cannabis and whether I could consistently refuse when invited to partake. The high school had 3,000 students across three grades, with 1,000 students per grade. There were also Japanese exchange students, but just being Japanese didn't guarantee a connection. Not having someone to consult with in Japanese can be a significant stress overseas. I struggled with this stress as well.

This is the reality of my study abroad experience in Canada.

Photos and videos may look fun and joyful, but behind every picture is a lot of conflict and effort. There were good and fun times, but 80% of it was tough. However, the greatest achievement of my study abroad experience was making friends from around the world, particularly from Asian countries like Vietnam, Thailand, India, China, and South Korea. Of course, my English skills improved, and my horizons and values expanded.

Now, I believe I can think this way because I have overcome many trials in my own way.

If the present me could see off the past me departing for Edmonton at the international airport, I would certainly say these words:

"It's really hard, but it's okay. The end will come someday."

"Work hard, because you will surely discover a wonderful life beyond studying abroad and your dreams."

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