



Me posing in front of a temple at Ginkakuji, one of the most famous historical locations in Kyoto



A torii (gateway) demarking the entrance into a shrine

My experience in Japan was nothing short of fantastic. I stayed in Kyoto, which is the cultural center of Japan, and as a result, I spent most of my free time visiting famous

temples and shrines. While I did enjoy touring the large temples, my favorite places to visit were the shrines. While the temples had a regal, palace-like appearance to them, the shrines were often backed by foliage and tended to blend into the natural landscape, and it was this kind of setting that greatly appealed to me.

Japan's culture is more than 1000 years old; therefore, it has much influence on Japan's modern society. This is exemplified in the numerous cultural festivals held throughout the year. One of the biggest festivals, the Gion Matsuri takes place in Kyoto and lasts the entire month of July! I was lucky enough to be able to participate in the great parade of floats, which is one of the largest parts of the festival. Basically, I was part of team that carried a large, ornate float down the main streets of the city. At intersections, we would



Me in traditional garb, posing next to the float that I helped parade through the festival

stop pushing the float, lift it above the ground, and spin it around for all the spectators (of whom were many!) to see. It was a great honor to be able to participate, and it is an experience that I will never forget.



Of course, I took time to explore the more modern venues while in Japan. Some of the most striking places I went to were the subway stations. They essentially serve as central hubs for shopping, food, and places to socialize, all in addition to relatively large subway systems. As a result, many stations have restaurants and convenience stores within them; the largest of them, like Kyoto Station, have full-scale malls, sit-down restaurants, grocery stores, and even a helipad! The contrast between these



Japanese stations and stations found in Boston just blew my mind.

In terms of a place to visit, Japan has a lot to offer: the scenery is breathtaking, there are many interesting landmarks to explore, and festivals are aplenty. It's actually kind of funny; most people experience a "cultural shock" when travelling to



distant lands, but after living in Japan for 3 months and become accustomed to life there, I actually had a bit of a culture shock when I returned to Boston. Going to Japan has been one of the most eye-opening experiences I've had up to this point in my life, and while this was my first time, I have no intention of making it my last.

