

Tsuru-Hendersonville Friendship Committee

Tips for Being a Successful Ambassador to Tsuru, Japan

Preparation

Successful sister city ambassadors exhibit flexibility, openness, and kindness toward others. Because of sensory overload during international travel, advance preparation is essential.

When you become an ambassador representing your city, you have a responsibility to your leaders, the other members of your group, the Tsuru-Hendersonville Friendship Committee, and especially to your hosts in Tsuru to prepare for the trip.

Start a journal now and continue it during the trip.

Become familiar with the currency. Remember to keep your yen separate.

Educate yourself about Japan—internet, books, travel guide, ask questions.

Make a strong effort to learn the Japanese you are taught. Pay attention to precisely pronounce the phrases you learn. It doesn't matter what you know if you can't be understood.

Expectations

When you go on vacation, you plan to abandon schedules, choose fun activities, relax, eat what you want, be pampered, and be entertained. When you become an ambassador, you are expected to adhere to a strict schedule, participate in group activities, eat what is placed before you (sometimes), and be cooperative. Remember you do not have the right to have everything like it is at home. It won't be. The benefits of a vacation fade quickly. The benefits of a trip to Japan will increase with time.

Remember Japanese culture is extremely complex and unlike any other Asian culture. Don't expect to understand why things are done the way they are. Don't jump to conclusions or generalize.

Whether you are eating in a restaurant, at school, or someone's home—wherever you are, remember to put the feelings and needs of others before your own. Sometimes your hosts may not speak English well so providing an elaborate meal for you may be their way of welcoming you. Several courses are not uncommon and likely cost a lot of money. If you don't like the food, keep it to yourself and be polite.

Understand that a lot of work and thought has gone into the development of the plans for the trip. When something doesn't make sense, consider the possibility that there are underlying circumstances of which you are unaware. The best-prepared itinerary will change while you are there. Always remember to be flexible and adaptable!

Be Smart

All of the suggestions and rules you are being given have been developed by people who have decades of experience in taking groups to Tsuru. The information provided is designed to help you have the trip of a lifetime. When visiting the other side of the world, there are many opportunities for things to go wrong that are out of your group leader's control. Don't contribute to them.

Relationships

Under the pressures of reduced privacy, unusual food and bathroom facilities, crowded vehicles, your inner personality will emerge. Keep your behavior in check. Look for ways to encourage and get to know your group members. Seek ways to support and help them have a good experience. Life-long friendships between group members and with host families often develop on sister city trips.

Common Courtesies in Another Culture

Your responsibilities begin on your flight to Japan. Don't congregate in the aisles on planes. Don't be loud on planes, trains, subways, or walking down the street.

Keep up with the schedule that is provided. Be on time for meals and departures. You waste the other group members' time and you may worry your team leader and local hosts when you are late.

Respect the needs of others for sleep, privacy, and silence.

Be courteous to employees at the hotel. If you have a problem at the hotel, tell your leader.

Some aspects of the culture will be strange to you and down right funny. Be careful about when you laugh. When you are tired and in culture shock, it is easy to become silly. Try to be sensitive about where and when you laugh or show expressions that could insult your hosts.

If your hosts want to show you something unique to their culture, let them.

When lining up for group photos, the leaders are placed front and center. Do not get in front of them.

Do not invite people you meet to visit you unless you and your family really want them to come.

Properly thank people who help you.

Give serious thought to purchases keeping in mind shopping is not the purpose of your trip. You may want to take gifts to family members. But remember you must get everything home in your luggage and not run out of money. Do not overly involve your hosts in your quest to find specific items.

National Pride

Your hosts may have as much patriotic pride in their country as you have in ours. Many people in other countries do not agree with U.S. policies. Do not bring up American politics to your hosts.

Showing Appreciation to Friends in Tokyo

In Tokyo long-time friends of the Tsuru-Hendersonville Friendship Committee have volunteered to lead your sightseeing and shopping experience. Please show them appreciation and respect.

Representing Hendersonville in Tsuru

You are the most recently selected group of ambassadors to represent Hendersonville in Tsuru. More than 35 years of exchange delegations, mayors, friendships, host families, speeches, meetings, presentations, and gifts have gone before you. While in Tsuru, you will attend some official events. You may be invited to Tsuru City Hall to meet Mayor Horiuchi. Take these opportunities very seriously. Dress appropriately. Show respect to persons leading the event. Pay attention to the speeches. Laugh when you should laugh. Be quiet when you should be quiet. Bow when you should bow. Don't look back years from now and wonder, "What was I thinking?"

When You Return Home

Even though hundreds of Hendersonville area residents have visited Tsuru before you, your experience will be unique. Take lots of photos and share them. But be considerate about others' privacy concerning everything you share. Take seriously your role in the Trip Report on August 11. Be an advocate for the student program at your school. Consider continuing as members of the Friendship Committee. If possible, become a host family for guests from Tsuru. Stay in touch with your host family in Tsuru. Keep their contact information available and communicate often.