Before traveling to Japan, the thought of visiting there had never crossed my mind. Honestly, I hadn’t considered traveling at all before Japan. Upon returning home from my first trip to Japan, I knew I had find my spiritual home. Japan had captured my heart.

I fell in love with Japan immediately. Everyone is extremely polite and kind, the city and towns are clean and the landscape is unbelievable. The scenery, the nature, and even the streets and alley ways of the cities inspire me. Every-where you look is beautiful and peaceful and it is impossible to not feel relaxed and calm there.

Japan is home to all the pop culture, fashion and the kawaii culture that resonates with me. Anything that you could possibly purchase, there is a kawaii version of it - drink bottles, wallets, face washers, hair ties, nail clippers, pens, notebooks, literally everything. It is comforting for the mundane or everyday things to bring a smile to your face.

Convenience and simplicity is the Japanese way of life – and this is still accessible for a non-Japanese speaker. There are many vending machines around - almost every 100 metres, convenience stores on every corner and most restaurants have ticket machines at the front door - all you must do is select what you want, put the money in the machine and hand the ticket that is printed out to someone in the restaurant.

It amazes me how clean Japan is - especially Tokyo, due to the astounding 13.9 million people that reside there, naming Tokyo the most populated city in the world. There are also no rubbish bins in sight, the people of Japan take their rubbish home with them, and dispose of it there. Even due to the sheer number of people in the city, I never felt crowded or overwhelmed. Everyone is so considerate and respectful of the environment and everybody else around them. In that respect, I believe that it is a culture we could all learn something from.

Tokyo is one of the fashion capitals of the world. Every person who I walked passed was incredibly well dressed and presented with pride. It was amazing for me to be surrounded by many senses of style, all individual, much different from what I experience at home in Australia. The district of Harajuku is **the** place for eclectic and eccentric fashion. Takeshita-dori street is the main shopping strip of Harajuku and this street is filled with clothing boutiques and quirky stores. At night, the streets of Harajuku come alive and are filled with fashion fuelled individuals, all dressed in the clothing that expresses their individuality the most. It is an incredible thing to experience and extremely uplifting to see all these people unafraid to be who they are.

Nikko is a small historic city in Japan’s Tochigi Prefecture, just 2 hours north of Tokyo. Nikko is home to the famous Shinkyo Bridge which was constructed in 1636, although a bridge had stood in its place for some time before the current Shinkyo Bridge. Visiting Nikko is a beautiful and peaceful experience, with many temples, forests, rivers, gardens and a lake to spend time leisurely exploring. Nikko helped me to find a much-needed peace within.

Kyoto is historic capital of Japan, and served as Japan’s capital between 794 and 1868. Kyoto is much more traditional than Tokyo. The city moves much slower, and is more focused on temples, shrines and gardens with traditional Japanese dress more prominent. Despite the traditional side of Kyoto, it is home to the Kyoto Manga Museum for the anime and manga fans. From Kyoto, there are many wonderful day trips such as Arashiyama Bamboo Grove, Fushimi Inari-taisha the Kistune (fox) shrine and Arashiyama Monkey Park Iwatayama.

## Japan allowed me to feel safe, free and welcomed. When I returned home from my first Japan trip, I was homesick. Homesick for a place I had just visited for the first time, homesick for a place where I couldn’t even speak or read the language, homesick for a place that captured my heart.