

My host in Japan was Professor Hideko Takeshita of The University of Shiga Prefecture, Hassakacho 2500, Hikone, Japan. My name is Dr. Nadja Reissland and my work concerns fetal development.



Japan is an interesting country with many facets. For example they use three types of scripts and if you are in a region where not much English is spoken it is at times difficult to make out even which rest room is designed for women and which one for men.



However I found the Japanese people to be very friendly and accommodating to my lack of Japanese. Even at breakfast they would take out a mobile phone and try to find translations for the food they served. At the end of my stay I had a stack paper of scrubs on which names had been spelled out in Japanese and English. My host Professor Takeshita, found information so that I could attend evening classes designed for expats in Hikone.



I also went to a “walking tour” in Kyoto, where I attended a Japanese class in the morning and went for a tour of Kyoto in the afternoon where I discovered Shokisan, the demon who protects houses in Tokyo.



And met up with friends of my host and ate “hot tofu” with them. We went to a tea ceremony and geisha dance as well as various temples and the famous rock gardens.



Of course it was not all play.



I had an office in Shiga University, where I worked during some of the days spend at the University of Shiga Province. We discussed with various colleagues of Kyoto University and Kagawa Medical School the possibility of doing cross-cultural research on foetal development.



I gave talks and attended a conference at the Institute of Advanced Studies and spoke with a number of colleagues about potential projects for future research.

It was a truly memorable trip and I am very keen to go back to Japan and have enrolled in Japanese beginners classes.

For those fellows going out now, I would suggest:

1. Read the weather report before you go...It was freezing when I was there.
2. Learn a few phrases of Japanese.

3. Experience the varied cuisine even if you cannot identify what you eat, such as the variety of sea creatures from Biwaka lake, and practice eating with chop sticks.

