

An Unforgettable Journey Through Japan

In May 2025, I had the opportunity to travel with the Caldwell Fellows to Japan! We travelled to Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto, Hiroshima, and Osaka. I chose to participate in this experience because I was excited to see a new country with other Caldwelles and to get closer to my peers through a transformative journey.

After 2 incredible weeks in Japan, I returned back to my mundane everyday life and tried to reflect on the time I had spent there. I found it difficult to put my experience into words, simply because I could not describe the amazing atmosphere, cultural odyssey, and lifestyle change that I experienced in Japan. I have never travelled abroad before, and this opportunity could not have come at a better time. After graduating from NC State, I wanted this trip to be a point of reflection for my time in college and the Caldwell Fellows program, but also a pause before beginning my full-time career. I went into this trip feeling nervous, but came out feeling ready to apply the things I learned while in Japan and to adopt some Japanese practices and ideals into my daily life.

A trip highlight for me was visiting Kamakura, the previous feudal capital of Japan. I, at the last minute, jumped into this day trip and didn't know what to expect. I was jet-lagged and my feet already hurt from the previous jam-packed day, but tried to jump into it head first. On the hour-long train ride, I thought about how I felt (bad) and what I was looking forward to on the trip (sleep), and tried to keep an open, energetic mind. After arriving, we went straight to the "money washing" temple, where you rinse your money in hopes to increase your wealth. There were so many locals and travellers there lighting incense, washing their cash, donating money, and praying to the powers that be. You could also get a fortune and then tie it to strings around the grounds. I used this time to go solo and reflect on my next steps, and felt so connected to nature and the Japanese culture when thinking about the purpose behind temples like these and observing the local people as they went about their day. Then, we travelled up the mountain to a temple dedicated to the fox. The red Torii gates lined the stairway up to another temple with thousands of tiny fox statues. The site was so beautiful and well maintained, and it made me think about Japanese culture as a whole. The entire country was clean, orderly, and focused on timeliness. In comparison to the United States, this was a major refresh that I enjoyed and took notice of for the rest of the trip.



Another highlight for me was the day spent in Hiroshima. I didn't expect to feel so moved by the experience the Japanese people endured during WWII. I, admittedly, did not know much about the history of the atomic bomb or the war in general. As we walked from the hotel to Peace Memorial Park, we remained silent and observed the city around us. We saw people going to work, children going to school, shops opening, trains and streetcars running, just how it was on that day. We took time to walk around the park, then went into the museum. I am not a big museum person, but I read every single plaque, looked at every picture and artifact, and felt moved by each story in that museum.



Just travelling to another country was nerve-racking, new to me, and I wasn't sure how I would feel not knowing the language or feeling familiar in my surroundings, but I felt amazing. I cannot wait to travel abroad again to experience and immerse myself in a new experience. It was the perfect culmination to my time in the Caldwell Fellows, putting to use the skills I learned in leadership and cultural competency. It also gave me time to reflect on college and how I want to carry myself into my new career and life in North Carolina. I thought about what was really important to me and how to be a better servant leader, which was so prominent in the Japanese lifestyle. If you are a student who has never travelled abroad before, I **STRONGLY** encourage you to take the leap into a challenge and do things you never thought were possible. This is a chance to connect with a diverse group of NC State students and with the world, so just jump in.

Thank you to the Caldwell Fellows program and Stephen Sumner at the NC Japan Center for making this trip possible. I will never forget it.