

# English Camp, Narita

## Seigakuin Primary School, October 19-21, 2015

### Justin Nightingale

Fifth graders at Seigakuin primary school are given the chance to stretch their English muscles outside the classroom on a 3 day school trip. Previous locations have been Northstar in Nagano focusing on outdoor activities, British Hills in Fukushima and recently, Raddison Hotel in Narita.

#### Day 1

8 :30	Meet together at school
9 :00	Departure with games on the bus
10:30	Arrive at hotel
11:00-11:30	Opening ceremony
11:45-12:45	Lunch
13:00-17:00	Class time
17:30-17:45	Bible message
17:50-18:50	Dinner
19:00-20:00	Games
20:00-20:30	Bath time
21:00	Bedtime

#### Day 2

6 :30	Get up
7 :00- 8 :00	Breakfast
9 :40-11 :50	Class time
12:00-13:00	Lunch time
13:10-14:10	Class time
14:30-15:30	Drink order / 'Find a captain'
16:00-17:10	Outside sports and games
17:30-17:45	Bible message
17:50-19:00	Dinner
19:10-20:00	Games
20:00-20:30	Bath time
21:00	Bedtime

#### Day 3

6 :30	Get up
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7 :00- 8 :00	Breakfast
9 :00-10:30	Class time
10:40-11:50	Skit presentation / Closing ceremony
12:00-13:00	Lunch time
13:15-14:10	Packing and departure
15:30	Arrive back at school

#### Curriculum

Thanks to the presence of 8 genki and able native English teachers, my humble English speaking skills weren't required too often. Right from the outset as the buses left the primary school, the 4 teachers on each bus kicked into action with an English quiz using the bus PA.

On arrival, once the introductions and lunch had finished, 76 children were split into 8 groups and assigned a teacher and a classroom.

As more of a helper than a teacher, what went on behind those closed doors was a little difficult for me to ascertain; my presence in such a small space often proved an unnecessary distraction to their games and activities (for the students and the teacher). I was only able to gauge the results and atmosphere during their 10 minute breaks and in the evenings, after a hard day's study.

While the teachers had visibly different styles and techniques, the shared goal was to create a 5 minute skit to be performed in the main hall in front of everyone. The theme, content, style, props and script were to be decided by the children with the teachers' role being that of only a guide. In reality, teachers provided them with a choice of stories to

choose from as most of the groups were unable to decide. The rivalry between the teachers to do the funniest skit was highly amusing.

The teachers were professional, very colourful and usually avoided using and understanding Japanese.

## Environment

Not having any direct teaching responsibilities was refreshing and fun. My actual role developed as the trip progressed into someone who made sure no-one was being left out or sitting by themselves, a translator and as a fountain of knowledge and common sense ('No, you may not play hide and seek in the reception area').

In all honestly, as a context for a fun English camp, I had my doubts about using a hotel. Would I have preferred to go to Northstar in Nagano in the middle of the mountains and pretend I'm not in my 40's doing fun outdoor activities? Most definitely, but from a schools perspective – a school that is naturally keen to equip the students with natural English skills through immersion – the hotel provided an effective environment of melding juku like studying with a fun, new kingdom to explore.

Towards the end of the stay I informally took a straw pole of their impressions of the stay. It was overwhelmingly positive but unfortunately, while they enjoyed the skits and had fun in the classrooms, sharing a room at night (3 per room) was at the top of their fun list.

## English Value

A sizeable chunk of the schedule was spent in those small classrooms and/or preparing for the final day's skit but my initial concerns of the children being

bored or over-studied were unfounded. The children had fun while having nearly 2 months of primary school English time squeezed into 2 and a half days.

The skits themselves were, as you'd imagine, surreal, noisy and fun. The scripts were surprisingly long and descriptive thanks to their own motivation and the guidance of their teachers. They surpassed my expectations.

What counted more than anything were the personalities and skills of the teachers themselves. The better they were able to connect with their class and the more gregarious they were, the better the skit was.

Part of the schedule which when explained to me beforehand I found hard to believe, was for groups of students to wait in the lobby and pounce on pilots (the airport is very close by) and invite them for dinner. With 10 tables we needed 10 pilots (we managed to get 12!). With consummate professionalism and without exception, the pilots patiently listened to the students' invitation and (even though they were clearly exhausted), accepted.

With a pilot at each table, and the theme of explaining Japan's culture to a foreigner, we played card games after dinner. It was a special evening and the children were absolutely delighted.

In closing, an image that will forever stay in my head is of a girl (who I had rarely heard speak – in English OR Japanese) standing on the stage in front of around 100 people preparing to deliver her lines. "On no...", I thought to myself. But, she was not

only able, she was naturally very funny raising much laughter. It's a reminder – especially here in Japan – that English can also be a vehicle for personal development, too.

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