

Week four of my Japan study abroad trip:

As a first-generation college student and a first-generation American, being able to study abroad seems like nothing more than a luxury that was outside of my reach. I certainly felt like I had a lot of excuses not to go when I already immigrated here to the U.S. to get the best education available. Yet my experience in Japan this summer was enlightening in multiple ways.

The moment I set foot in Japan, I already felt like a completely different person. I was overwhelmed with excitement being able to immerse myself in this completely new culture, from learning to navigate and taking the train on my own to buying my first bottle of Ramune using Japanese yen and hand gestures.

From the advanced lectures we received from each professor at Tohoku University to the weekly group projects and presentations, I was pushed beyond the realm of my comfort zone. Never had I been so excited to be so lost in a new environment.

I am now a big advocate on studying abroad, especially for first-generation, low-income or immigrant students. Only now do I understand that really seeing and understanding how large and unique the world is, will that create a whole new meaning for students at a disadvantage. I know that my life now has a new perspective to fulfill, to actually seek out opportunities to make a difference and leave something good behind in this huge world. Whereas before, I was solely focused on myself and my family, instead of creating a life and community for my new home here in the U.S.

— *Vipech Bun*