# What the Berkeley youths are doing in Sakai, Japan

**(Editor's note: This is the first in a series of reports on the visit of Berkeley youngsters to Sakai, Japan, Berkeley's Sister City. It was written by Marilyn Commerford, a member of the Berkeley delegation.)**

Out trip begins at midnight, Friday, July 20, when we leave San Francisco to spend about 12 hours on a Japanese-American Citizens League charter flight, with a two-hour stopover at the Anchorage airport.

But, because of the time change, we arrive in Tokyo Sunday at 6:30 a.m.

We are met by a few Berkeley-Sakai Student Exchange alumni, including two Berkeley students studying in Tokyo, Sandra Granich and Roger Commerford, who accompany us on the bus to our ryokan — Japanese-style hotel.

**THE HUMIDITY** hits us as we leave the airport, although the day is relatively cool for Tokyo. On the bus we meet our Japanese Travel Bureau guide, who will be with us during the next week.

We ride along a two-lane overpass, past miles of low Western-style buildings, mostly industrial; then, down narrow, twisting streets of shops.

Finally we stop at the top of an alley and walk with our luggage down to our wall-enclosed inn, Meguro Gajoen.

**AT THE ENTRANCE** we remove our shoes before stepping up to the polished wood floor of the lobby and put on heeless slippers. When we reach our rooms we leave our slippers outside the paper sliding door and step onto tatami, mats 3 inches thick and very comfortable to the feet, which cover the floor.

We kneel on cushions around the low table in the center of the room and drink green tea, while admiring our room's tokonoma, or alcove, which contains a scroll, or katemono, and flower arrangement, or ikebana.

**INSTEAD OF** resting, most of us call on energy from somewhere and sightsee during the "day of leisure."

A group of 12, guided by a Japanese friend, Jiro Ishibashi, head, by train and subway, for the Ginza, one of the mapor shopping areas of Tokyo.

Since it is Susday, the main street of the Ginza is closed to traffic and the students can "enjoy" walking from one end to the other. Jiro, teasingly, calls them in Japanese "black eyes," as this is how they show their exhaustion.

**I WALK WITH** Sandy and Roger among the clutter of shacks and shops around the ryokan, stopping at last to eat lunch. Japanese restaurants typically display in a front windowcase the types of dishes they serve, with the price by each dish for the customer's convenience.

Wt enter a shop specializing in soba, a buckwheat-flour noodle, usually served in a broth. It is delicious and inexpensive, about 200 to 250 yen, or 75 cents to one dollar, and is, Roger and Sandy tell me, a popular Japanese lunch food.

**WE RETURN TO** the ryokan for a rest, and in the late afternoon some of us take our first Japanese bath. (It is customary in Japan to take a bath before dinner.)

To wash, one sits on a very tiny stool and, using a basin, draws water from a tap; then, soaps and rinses oneself thoroughly clean and climbs into a large tub for a soak.

We are extremely cautious at this point, however, as the tub water is quite hot, unbearabley so, in fact, until a maid comes running in to add cold water; then we find it pleasantly relaxing. Already I think many of us have fallen in love with Japanese baths.

**AFTERWARD** we each put on a stiffly-starched yukata or Japanese cotton casual robe, provided by the ryokon, then enter the dining hall where we kneel on cushions around low tables to eat our first Japanese dinner.

After our meal, we are given the real privilege of a tour through the hotel grounds. Led by a woman employe, we first put on geta or wooden clogs, then "clip-clop" our way through the extensive gardens, in our yukatas (which are considered proper dress for outdoors, as well).

**WE RE-ENTER** the building, putting on our slippers again; then, for the next 1½ hours, we move through room after room after room of splendors — ornate carvings, inlaid panels, and numerous paintings, many of them Chinese — collected by the first president of the ryokan.

We see so much, yet what we see is only a small part of the total, for there are 500 rooms in the ryokan!

Meguro Gajoen is 300 years old. Such magnificence could not be built into a Japanese hotel today, for so much of what we see is priceless.

Berkeley Gazette Wed Aug 22, 1973

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**(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a series of reports on the visit of Berkeley students to Sakai, Japan, Berkeley's Sister City. The article is written by Marilyn Commerford, a member of the local delegation.)**

Monday morning, July 23, we take an early bus ride to the second floor of a Tokyo department store where we board a train for a 2-hour ride to Nikko (Neek-koh).

We wind our way by bus up into the mountains, past miles of cedars planted along the highway. Originally, feudal lords were forced by the shogun, the chief feudal lord, to make extremely expensive donations for the construction of Nikko's shrine. However, one lord, who could not afford as much as others, planted cedar trees along the approach to the shrine as a 20-year project. In time these have become the most beautiful donation. Thirteen thousand of the original trees still stand.

**IMAGINE THE CURVES** of San Francisco's "Crookedest Street" set among the lush greenery of Japan's mountains and you will have a picture of the Irohazaka Driveways which we take to and from the Lake Chuzenji resort area. The "uptraffic" road, built three years ago, has 15 sharp, narrow turns, while the original road has twice as many — and it is used for "downtraffic!"

The air is misty here along the lake — although Nikko means "sunshine" — and many people are wearing plastic raincoats. At Ryogen Falls we admire the spectacular beauty of its double cascades, then lunch and shop in a small shop immediately nearby. Here most of our students taste soba, Japanese buckwheat noodles, for the first time and like them. Marcy (Marcelle) Moruza buys a large statue of a black bear — native to the area and dubs it our mascot.

Next we go to the Toshogu Shrine at Nikko, the most elaborate Shinto shrine in Japan and therefore in the world. In it is enshrined Isyasu (1542 to 1616), first of the Tokugawa Shoguns. Although Nikko is basically Shinto, we see some Buddhist objects, such as its gate and 5-story pagoda; this combination of religious features is typical of Japan. The Japanese have a saying, "Don' say 'kekko' (magnificent) til you have seen Nikko." Afte two hours of looking at onl some of the details of thi tremendously ornate shrine we, too, are now prepared t say "kekko!"

**AT NIKKO'S** entrance some of our students buy Japanese bird whistles from an old man and can be heard practicing throughout the rest of the day. Kate Mitchel becomes our "whistling" expert.

In the evening, some students visit a discotheque (sic?), while others take a relaxing Japanese furo (foo-roh), or bath, and rest. About 10 p.m., Steve Farnum, Jim Mallman, and I walk through the ryokan's gardens down to the "beeru" pavillion, where the waiters, who are having an "after hours" feast, invite us to join them. They ply us with huge mugs of beer and samples of Japanese foods and attempt to converse with us, using very little English and much Japanese. We finally say sayonara (sah-yoh-nah-rah) and return to Gajyoen, which, as is customary in Japanese hotels, closes at 11 p.m.

## Mike Culbert

# A visit to Kamakura

KAMAKURA, Japan — The Giant Buddha at Kamakura was always, in my mind, the symbol of Japan, a huge image peering impassively over Nippon and as timeless as Brahma.

Visiting the Buddhist shrines in this one-time capital of the Japanese empire reminded me of a visit to the Holy Land last year, with this difference: there is more authentic reverence before the various shrines of Japanese Buddhism than there is before the holy places of Christendom. Commercialism is at a minimum, and no hawking is going on as Japanese stand prayerfully before the symbol of the man whose quiet philosophy once dominated Asia.

A sign before the 210,000-lb. giant Buddha reads, in English, "Do not climb the statue as it is considered sacred."

**As a rather mind-boggling feature, I was amazed to learn the 700-year old statue is hollow and you can go up inside of it. There is in the neck area of the timeless giant idol a tiny Buddha looking down on a platform which goes up as far as the shoulders.**

Kamakura, while beautiful, does not escape the persistent problem which bothers Tokyo and much of Japan, the omnipresence smog, through which the sun glows a sickly orange. The nearby sea is not visible unless you are practically right on it. Everyone takes this in stride, however, and in these days of the great national folk festivals smog does not seem to be on anybody's mind.

Our young friend Saito is a Christian and has been doing his best to explain that Japan, such a synthesis of so many things, is also a synthesis of religion. "A man might be baptized a Christian, go through a Shinto marriage ceremony and have a Buddhist funeral," he said quite seriously.

**Contrasts abound, of course, but again it is Japan absorbing rather than Japan sharing such outrageous incongruities as the — now just imagine this — Col. Sanders Kentucky Fried Chicken parlor right in the midst of some very Japanese buildings in the very Japanese Kamakura "ginza." Though we cannot read the Japanese characters splashed on the walls, there is no doubt that the product within is finger-lickin' good.**

"How do you say, 'Kentucky fried chicken' in Japanese?" this simpleton editor inquired of Saito-san.

"It is, 'Kentucky fried chicken'," was the courteous, if put-downish response. Language lesson over for the day.

We took the electric train here from Tokyo, which, like everything else, is either right on time or slightly ahead of itself.

The dependability, precision and organization of the Japanese are not myths at all. These tendencies make the traffic jams — and on holidays they are highway — and freeway jams, stretching for miles — particularly hard to take.

**This country, thought by WASPy individuals to be a gigantic doll house, is in fact a gigantic dollhouse, and no cars larger than mini-Mazdas and Datsuns attempt to navigate the narrow streets and careening, left-hand driving which is more frantic than that in America but less psychoneurotic than that of Mexico.**

Unlike the other culture to which I have long been accustomed, that of Latin America, there is utter emphasis here on schedules, keeping appointments, being on time, and being reserved in actions and emotions. I sense this "Japanese way of life," so organized, so precise and indeed so ethical, is the core and marrow of the obvious economic miracle of Japan and its staggering capacity to rebound from devastation.

Eating with a businessman here, the great American soybean crackdown came up once again — but, as usual, in an oblique manner and with a touch of humor. Since I have been eating 100 per cent Japanese cuisine, my Japanese companions keep shoving all kinds of new dishes in front of me as if experimenting to see where I'll draw the line.

**I was halfway through a soybean cake doused with something when my host said, "Ah, yes, that is soybean, with which we do such business with the United States. I mean, used to do such business with the United States." Point**

Mike Culbert

Aug 23

# Sakai's memory lingered on

BANGKOK, Thailand — I returned to beautiful Bangkok but the happy sounds of Japan and Berkeley's sister city were still in my ears.

The final night of my brief visit to Sakai, Mayor Takeo Gadoh, providing a sukiyaki party for the Berkeley-Sakai exchange students at an inn managed by Nippon Steel Company, sprang to his feet to shout the one phrase he had carefully learned in English for the occasion:

**"Now there is no Pacific Ocean between us."**

**The Berkeley visitors and their escorts, Mr. and Mrs. J. V. K. Harger, and veteran student leader Bob Morris broke into applause.**

It was a fitting official finale for the third visit of Berkeley students to the adopted Japanese sister city, a visit which was to end the weekend of August 21.

Earlier in the evening, the Berkeley students sang songs and square-danced for their delighted audience of Japanese students and Sakai city officials. Their rendering of "Donna Nobis Pacem" was a deeply moving experience for all concerned.

Beverlee Hasting, who had suffered an appendicitis attack while on the tour, was up and around and effusively praising all the people who had taken care of her and provided around-the-clock care and concern.

**"I'll never be able to forget these people. It was a bad thing to have appendicitis but a good thing that happened because of it," she said.**

My friend Kinzo Takigawa, administrative assistant to Mayor Godah and a careful observer of what everyone does and likes, had stocked the mayor's good-bye party with Asahi Beer, my favorite, and was at bottle-pouring elbow's length every 15 minutes or so when a glass seemed to be empty.

The Japanese and American students outdid each other in lauding the sister city program, announcing plans for the next student exchange, and trading notes on what both sides had learned.

My trip here overlapped with the student exchange for only two days, but they were quite memorable because of the great warmth evinced by the hosts and the growing friendship between the hosts and visitors.

Sakai sister city exchange student alumni joined other Japanese students in splitting into discussion groups with the Berkeleyans at a high school and then reporting back in plenary session.

**A major topic of concern, of course, was pollution. In my simple mind, everyone is so aware of it, particularly in Japan, that the nation need only fear overkill. But there is something to be said for running scared: problems get solved that way.**

Coming to Osaka-Sakai from Tokyo, I had written out a very brief speech which Ken Saito graciously translated into Japanese. It was this lumbering, awkward message which I delivered to the South Sakai Rotary Club. The club members were courteous enough — and courtesy is endemic to Japan — to pretend they understood it.

Indeed, all my efforts at using my 30-word Japanese vocabulary and trying to absorb as much of the language as precisely as possible and as fast as possible were greeted with great enthusiasm veiling the reality that I was just barely understandable. But that's what I like about the Japanese: they want to make you feel comfortable in each and every situation.

I left Sakai quite staggered by the realities there as compared to those in Berkeley. Among them:

**While Berkeley, population 116,000, is worried about the population explosion and evinces a certain coolness toward business and industry while maintaining a relatively high unemployment rate, Sakai, population 700,000-plus, makes room for 30,000 new residents per year, is expanding business and industry on all fronts, and has only marginal unemployment in an expanding job market. Streets are safe at all hours — that is, if you dodge the automobile drivers — and there is very little suggestive of a counterculture.**

The entire population of Berkeley could fit into one large section of the "new town" development. But of course that's only part of the story.

Berkeley's skies are mostly blue most of the time, and Sakai's are mostly grey most of the time. The "new town" development manager told me that life is not a bed of roses in a planned development area of 200,000 people — batteries of sociological and psychological inquiries are going on to soften the cultural, economic and other differences between the scores of thousands of new residents, crowded into a small area, all in efforts to build a sense of "community."

**It is a problem of the future as far as the U.S.A. is concerned, but the problem is in Japan now: how to accommodate, materially and socially, the needs of millions of citizens in a fluid society crowded together in sprawling urban zones on islands of finite resources and growth possibilities.**

So far, Japan seems to be ahead of the problem. The Japanese are acutely aware of what resources, growth, world markets, population and pollution are all about. If we watch and learn from them, the United States can avoid major calamities.

**Mike Culbert**

# Land of rising (obscured) sun

TOKYO, Japan — The world's largest city lifts a multicolored, traffic-snarling, people-cluttered image underneath a mantle of smog as Asia's outstanding example of the successes, and the problems, of capitalism in a thriving society where there is what might be called a Shinto-Buddhist work ethic.

At least that was the composite feeling of this first-time visitor to the Land of the Rising (and now, somewhat obscured) Sun.

From the gaudy, garish Ginza to the people-impacted but well landscaped suburbs, this city of more than eleven-million human beings is both a trauma and a delight to the visitor.

I wanted to check out a few of the Tokyo cliches and the horror stories we had heard, and in short order. Some of them:

**Yes, prices are sky-high and a good steak may cost up to $30, but that's not the only side to the coin. Relatively inexpensive and very palate-rewarding Japanese cuisine of all kinds is available from countless small restaurants.**

Traffic congestion is terrific, particularly in these days of The Grand Festival, with Japanese nationals adding to the tourists in jamming Tokyo and all other points of tourist interest.

Yes, pollution is bad but it's not disastrous. Both the smoggy air and the vehicle-swollen highways and streets are symbols not of Japan's failures but of her multiple successes in building a worldwide economic thrust whose trickle-down effect, despite heavy inflation, is so visible that the mass poverty which plagues most of Asia is not noticeable here.

**Yes, the Tokyo citizens, crammed and jammed into 800 square miles, are a little "pushier" than other Japanese — and are the first to admit it. But, strangely, such human congestion only hones the Japanese sense of privacy and courteous personal relations. The Japanese, including Tokyoites, are still the most formidably courteous and respectful people anywhere.**

populated, all right, yet there are many gr
stretches and minimally inhabited areas. Japan
there first with the problems of people-saturati
limited geography and limited resources. But,
umphantly, as Asia's first economic power, it is
viously facing these problems within the fra
work of liberty.

There has been an invasion from the West —
terms of dress styles, liberal loosening of the fam
unit, frenetic music and numerous fads. Yet
these things are only an overlay, and Japanese c
toms and traditions are holding on. Despite eve
thing, Japan is really NOT "Americanized."

**For the visiting American, though, the mos
salient feature of this huge city (populatio
somewhere between 11 and 15 million) is the
absolute safety of the streets. Muggings are vir
tually unheard of; women can walk in dark
alleys at night, should they wish to, without
fear of rape.**

I decided right off to be as Japanese in hab
as possible. Keinichi Saito, son of the Rev. Ichi
Saito, who led last year's "sister city" stude
exchange group to Berkeley, and who is a stude
at International Christian University, has been
strumental in cushioning the trauma of cultur
shock.

I have learned to slurp my soup (a sign it is e
joyed), bow swiftly and as low as possible in defe
ence to my interlocutor), think in terms of ye
(about 262 to the dollar — down from 360 und
world Nixonomics), and even realized the fir
night that in Japan a taco is not a filled enchila
but in fact is octopus.

Thanks to a dinner hosted by an executive
Pola Cosmetics, Japan's version of Avon, I final
did taste the famous Kobe beef, expensive as go
but simply great — meat from steers that are nu
tured on beer.

**Taking my shoes off before entering inns
and homes has only revealed the urgent need
for new pairs of socks. Learning to use a face
cloth before every meal, to drink tea as part of
every official or even informal meeting, to
exchange business cards everywhere all the
time — all these things are part of Tokyo and
Nippon.**

If there is much anti-Americanism here, it
not visible. The Japanese character exudes cou
tesy, charm, warmth, respect and an almost su
focating desire to make the stranger feel at home
Whatever else is below the surface is not reall
worth worrying about.

Even references to soybeans have been minima
and in good humor. I have rarely had to use m
chief conversation dodge: "If you don't say any
thing about soybeans, I'll be quiet on Watergate" —
which is, of course, big news here.

And I love the literal translations of the ancien
Japanese tongue and attempts to Nipponize non
Japanese words. To say you took a taxi from th
airport, passed an inn, a park and a zoo on the wa
to your hotel where you bought postcards you are i
fact saying you hopped a takushi from the sky har
bor (kuko), passed a travel hall (ryokan), a public

garden (koen) and a moving thing garden (dobut
suen) on the way to your hoteru where you
purchased picture leaf writings (ehagaki).

NEXT WEDNESDAY. . . .

Chairman Gus Moore with exchange leaders, Mrs. Jack Harger and Bob Morris and exchange student Bob McCullough, the son of our member Bill.

"Spirit of Friendship" was the theme program put on by the Sakai Student Exchange. We were fortunate to have fifteen of the sixteen students who recently returned from a visit to Sakai, Japan.

Mrs. Jack Harger told us that the Rotary Clubs of Sakai were the guiding forces behind the activities that were provided for the youth. There are six clubs in Sakai and they had bus trips and lunches for the students each day.

Bob Morris, Assistant Leader, felt this was the greatest group of young people Berkeley had ever sent to Japan and they were all outstanding examples of Berkeley youth.

Lynne Koll told us the most exciting part of the trip was not the tours but the chance to live with a host family. She won't remember what she saw as much as the experiences she shared with her Japanese family.

Marcelle Moruza explained that when they arrived in Sakai they were each given a Yukata and an Obi (In case you don't remember, that's what they were wearing today) and assigned to a Japanese family. The following day Mayor Takeo Godoh welcomed them in his office and told them the City was their's. After a tour of City Hall they were taken to a gym and taught judo and a form of bamboo sword fighting. Another highlight of the trip was a five-hour fireworks display.

Robert McCullough told of their visit to a steel factory, shipyard, a Sony plant, and a Minolta plant. They were very surprised to see assembly lines where people did nothing but put in one or two screws in a radio.

Dorothy Wedemeyer told of the newspaper in Osaka, that had a circulation of 8 million and put out seven editions a day in English and Japanese.

Beverley Hasting became part of the first medical emergency to hit a student exchange. She had an appendectomy and spent eight days in Osaka's Yodogawa Christian Hospital. She learned to count in Japanese by counting her stitches.

A most interesting program, and our thanks to all who took part in it.

Dick Savage

29 August, 1973

aug 29 '73

**SAKAI ROTARACT CLUB**

SAKAI, OSAKA, JAPAN
August 15, 1973

To Berkeley Rotary Club

Gentlemen:

We, Sakai Rotaract Club member, are very glad you could come. Sakai Rotaract Club is sponsored by Sakai Rotary Club and was organized on May 11, 1972. Sakai Rotaract Club is a young men's group of service for the community. We hold meetings regularly and we make very efforts for developing our community. Sakai Rotaract Club co-operated with Sakai Alumni Club for program of exchange students. The trip for Kyoto was successfully over in co-operation with Kyoto Rotaract Club. I hear you don't have Rotaract Club, but I hope you'll establish Rotaract Club in Berkeley City. I expect that your club and our club will become sister clubs. I'm sure that exchange students will be promising and friendly relations between Berkeley-Sakai will be promoted. I entrust this message to Exchange Students.

Yours very truly,
Sadanobu Yasuo
President of Sakai Rotaract