

Message from JET Participant

JENESYS 2019, Sports Exchange (Hockey) in Okuizumo, Shimane Prefecture, Japan

Greetings!

I am Enna Gurung, working as a CIR under the JET Program in Shimane prefecture's Okuizumo town. I was a JENESYS participant back in 2014, and in December 2018, I got the opportunity to be a part of this program again, but as the host town's CIR.

Okuizumo is a small town of 13, 000 people, about 900 km from Tokyo, but has made a name for itself as one of the strongest bases of hockey in Japan, producing 4 Olympic and 11 national level players within a few decades. The town looks up to the Indian hockey team ranked no.1 in Asia, as an inspiration and looks forward to invite the Indian national team for a hockey camp targeted towards the promotion of local hockey and international exchange with India, before 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Amongst such promotional activities, Okuizumo also hosted 18 high school students and 2 hockey coaches from India for the JENESYS exchange program in December, 2018. Over a 4 day stay in Okuizumo, the students from India personally experienced Japanese culture and hospitality through homestays, local tours, and exchange opportunities to interact with the local community. Despite of being from very different countries, both the sides realized that there is always something to bond over if you open your hearts to each other- such as hockey in this case. For the locals, it lead to a common realization that irrespective of their nationality, the kids did not differ a lot from their Japanese counterparts.

And lastly, for me, as the town's CIR, it was a precious opportunity to work behind the scenes as an interpreter, translator and a coordinator. Also, as a part of the organizing committee, from planning an itinerary for their 4 day stay, finding host families, to attending to the host families' concerns regarding food and cultural differences, it was a great opportunity to closely observe how the Japanese people here poured so much efforts and thoughtfulness in making this program successful.

While assisting the whole program as a trilingual, bridging the linguistic barrier between the kids from India and the local community in Okuizumo, I realized how much of a powerful tool language becomes in order to bring two nations close, even if it is an international exchange at a grass root level.

I sincerely hope that, this exchange will unfold into something valuable in near future for the students who became a part of this exchange. And also, pave a path towards the realization of Indian hockey team's camp in Okuizumo, which might become a small impetus towards diversifying India-Japan relationship further into the field of sports.

※ The exchange as also featured in NHK world's NEWSLINE section.

Read the article:

<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/nhknewsline/backstories/fieldhockey/>



At the Yokota High School



Hockey in the snow



At the Minari Elementary School



Japanese food experience



At the Izumo-taisha