



# Sister City News

Palmer, Alaska - Saroma, Japan

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2018

Inside this issue:

Quarterly Calendar of Events	2
Treasures Around Every Corner cont...	2
Palmer to Saroma - Exchange Highlights	3
Saroma to Palmer - Exchange Highlights	4
Sister City Elementary Schools Update	5
Gifts of Friendship	5
Raku Pottery Classes & Annual Meeting	6

## Treasures Around Every Corner

by Carla Swick

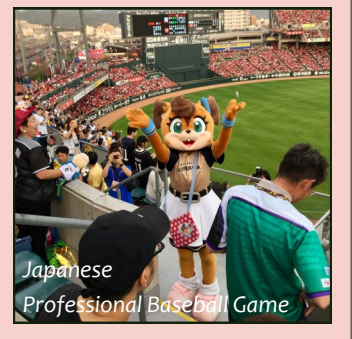
Japan is a country with countless delights and treasures, and one of the them is the Japan Rail Pass. Tourists can purchase a one to three week pass that will give unlimited travel on JR trains, busses, and ferries. Prior to arriving in Saroma, we embarked on an adventurous 10-day journey. For roughly \$300, our 7-day pass carried us from southern Honshu up to northern Hokkaido for a total of 3, 286 kilometers or 2,042 miles.

After sending our suitcases by takkyuubin (a very useful delivery service) we left Kansai Airport with only our backpacks. We were like turtles, traveling with our homes on our backs. Our first destination - Nagahama City, Shiga Prefecture — Miharu Hayazaki's hometown. After co-teaching with Miharu-sensei for two years at Palmer High School, it felt surreal to enter her everyday world.

calligraphy then stamp it with vermilion red ink stamps that are unique to that specific temple. Instead of collecting Pokémon, we were collecting unique original artwork that traced our journey through Japan.

The highlight of Nagahama was having dinner with Miharu-sensei's family in their 100+ year-old traditional Japanese home. Bundle Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's into one meal, and that was our smorgasbord. There was enough food for over a hundred people - literally! The love and respect put into her family's food preparation could be felt in each bite. Before dinner, the neighborhood kids followed us to Miharu's local temple, where we met with the priest. As a child, Miharu-sensei would come to the temple every day during school vacations for morning rajio taisou (radio exercise) and prayer. We ended our day with a visit to another Japanese treasure — onsen, the local hot spring. After relaxing in the Anegawa's various indoor and outdoor pools, we rehy-

On our first day, Miharu-sensei took us on a boat to Chikubushima, also known as the Island of the Gods. Located on Lake Biwa, the largest freshwater lake in all of Japan, the island is thought to have its own benevolent spiritual energy. The spiritual history of Chikubu Island dates back more than 1300 years. Benzaiten, one of seven Buddhist deities of happiness, is said to have descended on the island. Just outside of Hogonji Temple, we bought perhaps our best souvenir: goshuinchou (honorable red-stamp notebooks). For a small donation, temple monks hand-write the name and date in Japanese



## Treasures Around Every Corner cont...



Raku Pottery

## Upcoming Calendar of Events

### Annual PSK Meeting & Raku Pottery Classes

Sunday, Jan 13th, 2019  
Annual meeting from 1 pm - 2pm, free.

Two pottery class times, 11am - 1pm & 2pm - 4pm, sign up required, **cost \$25.**

At the Art Café  
131 E Blueberry Ave, Palmer

**See the back page of the newsletter for more details.**

### Yuki Fest Anime Convention

Saturday, Jan 26th, 2019  
from 12 - 8 pm at  
Palmer High School  
1170 W Bogard Rd, Palmer

**Cost \$10**

### Elementary Japanese II

Jan 14th - May 4th, 2019  
at Mat-Su College  
8295 E College Drive, Palmer

Tues & Thurs - 7 to 8:50pm

For more info visit:  
<http://matsu.alaska.edu/>

drated with cold chocolate, strawberry, and coffee milk from the vending machines. Ahh- perfection!

Next stop — Hiroshima! The connection between paper cranes and peace can be traced back to a young girl named Sadako Sasaki, who died of leukemia ten years after the atomic bombing. After visiting the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, we assembled our 1000 cranes from Palmer and presented them as a our wish for peace at the Children's Peace Monument. A trip to Hiroshima isn't complete without eating and experiencing okonomiyaki (literally means 'grilled as you like it'). This savory Japanese pizza-like pancake is made with flour, eggs, shredded cabbage, meat/protein and topped with a variety of condiments. We visited Okonomi Mura, a 3-floor building with 24 Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki restaurants. Every restaurant had its own unique flavor and atmosphere. Interacting with our two young gregarious chefs and watching each step of the cooking process made the meal personal. It was like dinner and a show! Not only was it delicious, but economical. Where could you feed 10 high school students and 3 adults a hearty, healthy, and entertaining meal in Alaska for \$115?

As luck would have it, the Hiroshima Toyo Carp were playing the Hokkaido Nippon Ham Fighters at the Mazda Zoom

Zoom Stadium and we were able to get tickets! Japanese professional baseball is fascinating. There are original cheers and chants for each player, and fans really get into it. We, of course, sat in the cheering section for the Hokkaido Ham Fighters, hoping to catch a glimpse of Taisho Tamai, one of the pitchers born in Saroma.

Seventeen miles from Hiroshima, is the island of Miyajima, which is considered one of the top three most beautiful spots in Japan. Directly in front of Itsukushima Shrine (a World Heritage site) is a gigantic torii gate built far out on the beach. At high tide, it looks like both the shrine and torii gate are floating. After touring this incredible shrine complex, some of us decided to ride the ropeway up Mt. Misen, and hike the sacred mountain. From the ropeway and summit are breathtaking views of the rugged landscape and surrounding Seto Inland Sea, or at least that's what we saw on the postcard. During our hike, we were enveloped by thick fog, which made it feel like we were walking in the clouds of heaven. It was magical. One of my favorite memories. We rested at the Daishoin Temple which houses the eternal flame, a holy fire that has been burning since 806. It was also used as the pilot light for the "Flame of Peace" of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. Hundreds of round-headed monk-like stone statues called jizo were every-

where — welcoming us to Mt. Misen, and perhaps protecting our travels.

Onward to Kyoto and Nara — the heart of cultural Japan. You could live in Kyoto for years and still not see all its temples and shrines. It is estimated to have over 2000. We were fortunate to stay at Myorenji, an exquisite working temple established in 1294 by one of the disciples of Nichiren. Sleeping on futons in tatami rooms and awakening to the gong of the 6:00 AM morning worship bell, transported us back to the old and traditional Japan. A dry landscape garden designed by the same Buddhist priest who designed the world-famous garden of Katsura Imperial Villa, was just a sliding door away. I still marvel that we were allowed to stay here. What an honor.

These are just a few highlights of our 10-day journey. There are many more — our layover in Honolulu with Sean's uncle, exploring Himeji Castle, the sacred deer of Nara, eating ekiben (station lunch boxes) on the bullet train, shopping at 100 Yen stores, singing karaoke in Sapporo, etc. Arriving at Engaru Station, however, the closest railway station to Saroma, was like coming home. We were ready to change gears from tourist to family member and friend. Being able to become a Saroma citizen for two weeks and go to school, will always be the most valuable part of this exchange.



Itsukushima Shrine



Mt. Misen Hike



Myorenji Temple

# Palmer to Saroma - Exchange Highlights

## Joey Davis

Traveling to Saroma, Japan in June 2018 was one of the best experiences of my life. A trip highlight was going to the Abashiri Prison Museum. It was really interesting because I saw how the prisons were run and learned about the history of Hokkaido. The best part of my visit to Saroma was being able to talk to my host family. I will never forget these precious memories.

## Jacob Creer

I told my host mother and brother, Satomi and Haruki, that one of my favorite sports was volleyball. Little did I know that Satomi was a part of a mini-volleyball team. Mini-volleyball is basically the same as volleyball, except it is played with a beachball. She took me to games and she and her friends officially welcomed me as a part of their team. On my last night in Saroma, Satomi took me to our final volleyball game. As a going away gift, I received the mini volleyball. Being a part of my host mom's team made me feel very at home and welcome in Saroma.

## Ashton Brown

In Saroma, my host family and I drove up Mt. Horoiwa to watch the sunset. We took a short hike to a viewpoint that looks over Saroma Lake and the Okhotsk Sea. We explored the hiking trails around the mountain while waiting for the sun to set. I took a few pictures of the amazing views of Saroma Lake, which is the third largest lake in all of Japan. I had so much fun in Saroma and I hope that one day I will have the chance to go back.

## Parker Glastetter

I was fortunate to be a part the student delegation in 2018. My host mom was a sweetheart; she was the type of person who would always take care of you no matter what. I love to sleep and I fall asleep easily too. One night I was riding in the car,

with my host mom and brother Yusuke, to a big shopping center about 1 hour from Saroma to buy gifts for my family in Alaska. I fell asleep and my host mom got all of the gifts for me. I thought that that was pretty cool.

## Lexi Jasek

My Saroma trip has been the highlight of my life. My best memories are evening talks with my host mom, and the night I took a walk during a lightning storm with my host brother, Kento. My family, the Kifune's, are scallop fishermen, so we lived right by Lake Saroma. While walking to the lake, the extremely loud thunder and bright lighting made their debut without warning. We got so scared, that we didn't even make it to the lake. Instead, we ran home. Exhilarated. It was our special adventure.

## Connor Herren

My host family, the Watanabe's, took me to different onsen three nights in a row. Each one was super nice and relaxing. Onsen are natural hot springs found all over Japan. One of my favorite memories from Saroma is eating a meal with my family right after relaxing in the onsen. It's not common to go to an onsen multiple nights in a row, so I'm thankful that my host family did that for me!

## Kristin Mayer

I love the people in Saroma because they made me feel so welcomed, especially on my birthday. I was born on my dad's birthday and we never celebrated it apart until I went to Saroma. I was surprised by songs and smiles when I went to the high school. Plus Swick Sensei and Yuko Hirouchi brought in a birthday cake. Later, my host family made takoyaki for dinner and gave me another cake. Even though I wasn't in Alaska, I felt like I was with family.

## Sophia Dick

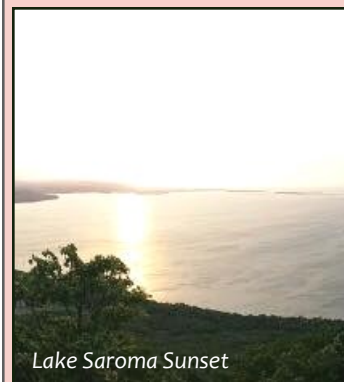
Visiting Saroma was a wonderful experience for me. My host sister, Mei, is an extremely talented musician and singer, and I was able to see one of her live performances with her band in Kitami. We discovered that we listened to a lot of the same Japanese songs and artists. She shared her YouTube channel where she sang covers of a lot of the songs we both liked. Months later, I'm able to listen to her new songs and talk to her about them. I'm very grateful for that. Check out her YouTube channel, ほすとん.

## Kassidy Kaiser

Palmer students planned one meal to make for their host families. I chose to cook spaghetti. My host sister Shiho invited some friends over and we all made it together. We didn't have all the ingredients, but we improvised until we were happy with our creation. After we were done eating we played cards and taught each other games. It was fun and I loved getting to know some of Shiho's friends.

## Emily Mack

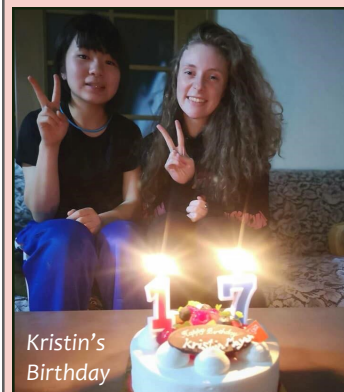
I enjoyed my stay in Saroma, Japan including going to Saroma High and observing everything. I am a very shy person, but I want to make new friends. I liked how the students approached me and wanted to talk to me. I was really nervous because I always thought I would mess up my words when I spoke Japanese, but they would be so kind and help me with words. Many of the students wanted to be my friend, which made me very happy. The students taught me new Japanese words and I taught them new English words. The students asked me if I was half Japanese, which always made me laugh. I think the Saroma High students are very kind and friendly. I was very honored to go on this trip and make lots of new friends!



Lake Saroma Sunset



Relaxing after visiting an Onsen



Kristin's Birthday



Mini Volleyball



Mei Singing

# Saroma to Palmer - Exchange Highlights

In September, eight Saroma students and two chaperones visited Palmer. They attended classes at Palmer Jr/Middle School and Palmer High School, visited with students at the Swanson and Sherrod Elementary Schools, and visited sites around Palmer and elsewhere in Alaska. As always, we love hosting these annual visitors and look forward to meeting new students next year.

This page includes thoughts from two of the students and some photos from their visit.

### Natsuho Nishioka

It was cold in Palmer, but I spent these days with warm family and pets.

My host mother always served good meals for us. I especially liked pancakes. My host father is also good at cooking. Especially salmon he cooked was really delicious.

Chris talked to me with a gentle smile. So my anxiety became smaller. Kylee and Adam played Mario Kart with me almost every day. I enjoyed it very much.

I really appreciate Emily. I didn't get used to the environment of only English, but then she talked to me in Japanese. She also introduced me to her friends. So I enjoyed my school

life and I could make some friends at Palmer High.

Japanese classes by Mrs. Swick were very interesting; other students looked happy, too.

My favorite memory at Palmer High was dance party. I enjoyed dancing with the students. I spent good times in holidays too.

We went camping in Seward. We went to the aquarium there. All pictures we took were beautiful because there were many kinds of marine lives. I also could get a cute souvenir there. Also, I learned two English words: jellyfish and crab.

I love Palmer people, view, and culture. I'll never forget a lot of memories and I want to make good use of them for life in Japan. I'm looking forward to seeing everyone again sometime. Thank you.

### Haruki Shimizu

I enjoyed my stay very much. I enjoyed going to Alaska Sea Life Center with my host family. I enjoyed playing board games with Jacob very much. I saw many beautiful sights in Palmer. I was surprised that P.E. is very different from ours in Saroma. I want to come here again. Thank you so much.



Palmer Sister City Monument



Radio Free Palmer Interview



Lunch at Palmer City Hall



Sightseeing



Touring Palmer High School



Saroma Delegation

# Sister City Elementary Schools Update

by Sean Williams

The first Skype session of this school year occurred on December 4th. This marks the 8th year that students from Sherrod and Saroma elementary schools have had the opportunity to meet online.

The sessions can't start until after the fall time change in Alaska, which creates a one-hour overlap of Palmer and Saroma school hours. There are four sessions scheduled between December and February, although it might be possible to squeeze in one more before Alaska "springs forward" again in March.

Through skits, games, and simple verbal exchanges, the students try to exchange details about themselves, their schools, and their cultures. These sessions are meant to be just the start of a meaningful connection between the students of Palmer and Saroma, that can lead to further study of languages, and being part of the Palmer Saroma Kai exchange program.

Last June, I had the opportunity to travel to Saroma as a chaperone of the Palmer student delegation. And, I got to experience Saroma Elementary first-hand. As engaging as it is to meet the Saroma students, and English teacher Kazuo Nagasaki,

through Skype, there is no substitute for visiting in person. I got to tour the whole school, see the students enjoy lunch in their classrooms, served by them from rolling carts, and even participate in a short recess in the gymnasium.

All students, from the first graders (same age as kindergartners in the US) to the sixth graders, participate in English language instruction, although it isn't an assessed subject until 4th grade. Nagasaki-sensei's classroom is the science lab, so the groups of students coming for English sit on stools around traditional lab tables. The Saroma students learn English through video-based lessons produced by the Japanese education system. The videos feature kids, and some adults in goofy character roles, going about their lives, focusing on vocabulary and phrases. The videos feature a lot of songs, dancing, and a few fanciful plots. From my brief encounter, I could see that the Saroma students really enjoyed the lessons. Helping Nagasaki-sensei is Mrs. Audrey Holder, the ALT (assistant language teacher) for the Saroma area. Mrs. Holder is from Palmer and will spend several years teaching in Saroma.

The whole Palmer delegation also had the opportunity to visit Wasaka Elementary, and Hamasaroma Elementary. Wakasa is a small farming community, while Hamasaroma is a fishing village on the shores of Lake Saroma. At both schools, the Palmer delegation was greeted warmly, and welcomed with a ceremony. One common custom for Japanese students is to make personalized cards to hand out to guests. These cards ran the size of business cards, and were as fun to receive as it was for the students to make. The Wakasa and Hamasaroma students move on to Saroma Middle school, and both schools have been represented in past Saroma student delegations.

Getting a chance to visit in person the place that I've only seen on a projector screen was a fabulous experience. I feel I have a much better understanding of Sherrod's sister school students, and I'll be able to better equip to prepare for the Skype sessions this year. I hope that the encounters in elementary school continue to encourage the participants on both sides of the Pacific to stay connected through their school years and beyond.

# Gifts of Friendship

by Lee Henrickson

One important aspect of the Sister City relationship with Saroma is the exchange of gifts. Every five years a delegation travels between Saroma and Palmer and the cities exchange gifts with each other.

The City of Palmer has nearly 40 years of wonderful gifts given to them by the City of Saroma. Sadly, there is not space to display all the gifts, so many are in storage at City Hall. Some are

on display at the museum and other places around town. The gifts are curated and managed by the Palmer Museum of History and Art.

This is August, the museum hosted a two-month display for some of the gifts given to the City of Palmer by the City of Saroma.

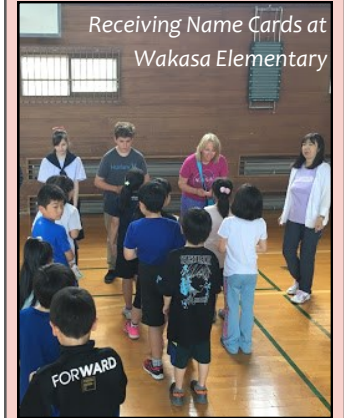
Items displayed included a Mikoshi Shrine, a wooden carving of a bear, a traditional Japa-

nese drum, and a koto - a beautiful stringed Japanese instrument.

The exhibition coincided with the visit by the students from Saroma. Yuko Hirouchi, Saroma's Sister City coordinator, accompanied the students. She's an accomplished koto player and gave a short concert on the koto at a reception for the opening of the exhibit.



Skype Session at Sherrod



Receiving Name Cards at Wakasa Elementary



Nagasaki-sensei & Mr. Williams



Student Gift Name Cards



Yuko Playing the Koto



Mikoshi Shrine

# Raku Pottery Classes & Annual Palmer Saroma Kai Meeting



The Palmer Saroma Kai annual meeting will run from **1 pm - 2pm on January 13th** at the Art Café in Palmer and will include board member elections and a report from the board president and treasurer. If you would like to run for a board member seat, contact Carla Swick at 775-0807.

We are going to bookend the meeting with two Raku Pottery classes taught by local artist Sandra Cook at the Art Café (131 E. Blueberry Ave. Palmer). The cost for a class is \$25. Limited to 16 people per session.

**Raku Pottery Class 1**  
**Sunday, Jan 13<sup>th</sup> 2019**  
**11 am – 1 pm**

**Raku Pottery Class 2**  
**Sunday, Jan 13<sup>th</sup> 2019**  
**2 am – 4 pm**

Raku ware (楽焼 raku-yaki) is a type of Japanese pottery traditionally used in Japanese tea ceremonies. During the class you will learn more about raku, select a ceramic pot, glaze the piece and watch as kiln temperature reaches 1900 degrees in 20 minutes. Red hot pots are removed from the kiln and put in buckets with newspaper and organic materials. The hot pots ignite the paper and a lid smothers the fire, causing the air starved flame to take oxygen out of the glaze, creating beautiful iridescent glazes. Pots are then removed from the buckets and plunged into water for finishing to go home. To sign up visit [Theartcafeak.com](http://Theartcafeak.com), stop by The Art Café, or call 745-6100.



The Sister City Program , established in 1980, works together with the Sister Schools Program in the cities of Palmer, Alaska and Saroma, Japan, to promote cultural enlightenment, student and teacher exchanges, international good will, and lasting relationships between cities.

This newsletter is published by Palmer Saroma Kai, an organization that provides encouragement and support for the relationship between the Sister Cities of Palmer, Alaska and Saroma, Japan.

To submit articles, photos, or items of public interest, please contact Carla Swick at [carlaswick2010@gmail.com](mailto:carlaswick2010@gmail.com) or by phone 907-775-0807.

Your comments, suggestions, and constructive feedback are welcome!

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