



Dear UWP Alumni and Friends,

When I ended my years with UWP in 2000 I was ready to settle after a long time of travelling.

While I enjoyed sleeping in my own bed every night and setting up a "regular" life, I still had the chance to take in some UWP-atmosphere here and there, Alumni-meetings, visits of casts in the area etc.

Yet I missed the time, the friends of course and the excitement I always felt before getting into a new city, family and country.

But leaving the regular life is not always easy and I sure did not want to give up too much. I've heard about the WCI program but for some reason I didn't think any emails with information really applied to me. When I received another email with the new program dates in 2009, I read through it more thoroughly and surprisingly (to me) realised that 30plus is not too old for the program. And that it was possible to join a WCI program by taking off for only two weeks. That sounded doable in regards to my work-life. And Japan was very high up on my to-be-visited-list anyway. And I knew a foreign country is best experienced by staying with families.

It took me a few weeks to actually sign up. I had some doubts about taking part in the host family event; haven't been on stage since my student year in '95 and somehow stepping out of the comfort zone gets harder the older you get.

So I left in March 2009 for spring program #2 of WCI. It was quite a weird feeling when I met the WCI-group at the airport. But not for long...after not even an hour my mind was "back on the road". The set up of travelling with WCI and meeting the families is similar to UWP, so it was all very familiar.

Japanese host families seem to take rather just one guest into their house, so the focus is on you – alone! As I was (and still am) so interested in the Japanese culture, I asked questions all the time, about almost anything. Any food that was served and looked unfamiliar I wanted to know the name for, I observed any family rituals, just wanted to take in as much as I could. Not everything was answered as I knew close to no Japanese and my families knew only very little English. But we found great ways to communicate somehow. I was lucky to have families that taught me the do's and do not's. And they were really easy going when I accidentally did something you shouldn't do in Japan. Besides my wonderful families I really enjoyed the people we got to meet in the communities.

They all wanted to share about their local activities and loved having us there.

It is hard to pick a highlight of my two-week Japan-tour. It was a 2-week-highlight. Personally I think it was one of the best things I did in a long time. For 2 weeks I got my mind totally off my busy work-schedule and focused on something absolutely new. As I knew how it feels going to a foreign country and entering some families house, I was not stressed about anything at all. It was a vacation of the normal, sometimes too busy

life and an inspiring experience. It felt a bit differently than UWP as I was a lot younger then and at a different point on my life. Now I had my settled life which I am very happy with but yet I had the chance to have this wonderful time away from the Norm. I can only encourage anybody who is interested in the Japanese culture to join the program; 2 weeks or more...it is worthwhile. Yes, you will have little sleep once again, yes, you will have some program rules and yes you will have close to no alone-time. But it is for a short time and very doable.

It's two different programs but if you enjoyed UWP, you will enjoy WCI just as much.

Through WCI I had real access to a culture and country I thought was too different from mine to feel home. I was proved wrong, in all aspects. From day one on, I felt extremely comfortable. The program offered a great variety of things to get to know Japan – culture events, visits of businesses, nature walks.

My time in Japan was intense and I really fell in love with the country. Can't join the next WCI-program due to timing problems but my next trip to Japan is already scheduled for March, and can't wait to see my Japanese families and friends.

Birgit Leidenberger

Cast C'95, Cast A, C, D, E'96(Event Coordinator,) Cast E'97, Cast E'98, Cast A'98, A'99, C'99, E'99, E'00 (Finance Trainer & Tour Manager)

