

Article for Wheel Write: **Kishiwada**

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Kishiwada is one of 5 South San Francisco sister cities. Located 250 miles west of Tokyo, Kishiwada is a suburb of Osaka, and has a population of 200,000. Although roughly three times larger, Kishiwada has the same "small town" feel that South City has, with a comfortable balance of industry, agriculture and residential areas combining to give the city a vibrant yet relaxed atmosphere.

Every two years, the South San Francisco Rotary club sends a delegation of high school students and chaperones to Kishiwada for a week-long unique cultural exchange experience involving total immersion in the daily lives of local host families. In alternating years, the City of Kishiwada reciprocates by sending a similar group here, and we offer the same sorts of activities and experiences, San Francisco Bay Area-style.

This past week, we played host to 16 Japanese students and 4 chaperones, and provided a diverse range of activities and experiences that gave a taste of our culture and geography to the group. Those experiences included:

- Tuesday: visited *CuriOdyssey* (formerly Coyote Point Museum); explored Tanforan; met host families
- Wednesday: toured San Francisco by bus with a Japanese tour guide; had lunch and shopped at Pier 39; visited the new Exploratorium
- Thursday: toured Torani Syrup; visited the Mayor; attended and performed at Rotary Club lunch; toured fire department; toured police department
- Friday: visited South San Francisco and El Camino High Schools; enjoyed dinner hosted by the Sister City Committee
- Saturday: took a bus tour to Muir Woods and Point Reyes with Interact and leadership students
- Sunday: enjoyed a free day with host families; attended a farewell dinner hosted by Kishiwada

Interestingly, according to a survey taken by the Japanese students, the most popular of all of the activities and experiences on the list was the trip to El Camino High School. As someone who led last year's delegation to Kishiwada, I think I can see why that might be. Tourist destinations and outdoor hikes, although fun and interesting, are not unique to our area. After all, we share the same ocean with Japan, and shopping centers and fire stations are much the same in both countries. But seeing - and more importantly, sharing - the everyday activities of students in another country has no counterpart back home.

Last year, when we spent most of a day in the Industrial High School in Kishiwada, we sat in classrooms with the Japanese students, and participated in a wide range of exercises and games, and had lunch in the cafeteria with the entire school. That is such an incredibly powerful type of immersion, and I hope we can take the lesson learned and apply it the next time we host a group from our sister city in Japan.

It was an honor to have played a small part in this year's effort, and I look forward to many more.