

Yusuhara a Home from Home: 30. A Final Hello and Goodbye

Stephen Woodard

I guess this is it. My last newsletter.

Even though I've known I would be leaving for a while now and I had planned things that I wanted to say, sitting here to write this is quite upsetting and seems almost impossible. My heart is heavy from the thought of having to say goodbye and leave which brings me to tears every time.

I have been living and working here in Yusuhara for five years now, which is one sixth of my life, and it's hard to believe that it's coming to an end very soon. I will be returning to the U.K at the end of July and I want to take a moment to talk about my time here. I could never imagine that I would have been here for so long or that I would love it so much. When I found out that I was coming here I tried searching online but at the time there was very little information available in English for Yusuhara. This made me a little nervous but not enough to make me worried. I was right to not be worried as Yusuhara might just be the most wonderful place in the world. Yusuhara has changed since then, nowadays the information is plentiful and the amount of people that know about Yusuhara is increasing as seen by the increase in tourists.

As an ALT at Yusuhara Gakuen the majority of my time has been spent here. I am so grateful that this school, its students, teachers and parents have treated me with the level of kindness and respect they have. I cannot begin to express just how much the students here mean to me, from the current youngest in nursery school to the oldest former students who are now in their second year of university or out in the workforce. Each and every single one of them has been a pleasure and joy to teach over the years. Leaving and not seeing them again is what will hurt the most. I love them all so much, truly I do. The local community has also been so supportive and welcoming of me. Helping me whenever I've needed it, stopping to talk with me and just trying to learn more about other cultures.

I called this series of newsletters "Yusuhara a home from home" as when I first arrived I wanted something that could relay my feelings towards my time here. However, now at the end of my time here I don't think this is suitable anymore. It is not a true reflection of me or my feelings. Yusuhara is not my home-from-home. It is my home. It has been my home for a while now, one that I'm happy in. The noises, colours and smells of nature. The peaceful tranquility of evenings and weekends sitting outside in my garden watching the river. Walking and being part of the land are all things that have become a comfort in everyday life for me. I will miss it. If you see me around the next few weeks please stop and talk. I want my last few weeks to be



My favorite place in the world!! The town above the clouds.

full of happy memories. Please excuse any emotions I may have, this is by far one of the most difficult things I will ever have to do.

My sincerest and heartfelt thank you to everyone in this town, my students, teachers, coworkers, parents, town workers and everyone else. I will never forget you. Thank you all so much. I could happily stay here in Yusuhara forever. I don't want to go.

- Stephen Leslie Edward Woodard, Yusuhara Gakuen ALT 2019 – 2024