

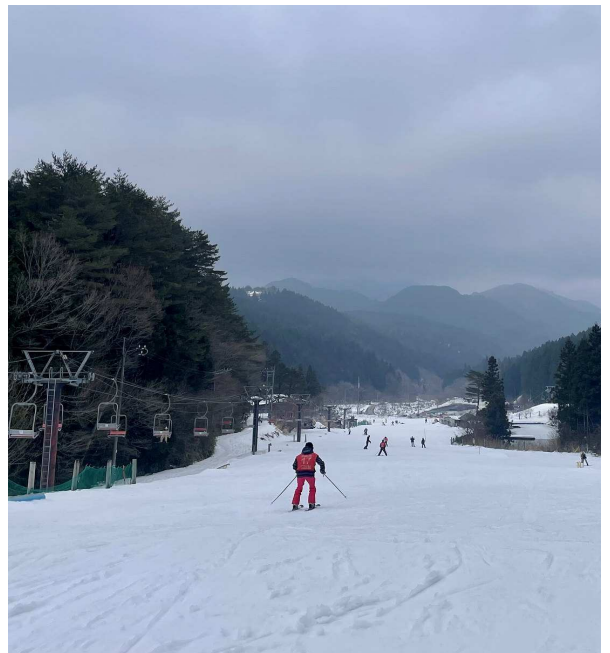
Sky Rising in Yushara: #4 Weathering Through Winter

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My first six months of living in Japan have been filled with countless of new experiences, and winter has been no different. This is because winters in Southern California are much warmer than in Japan. The average temperature during winter is around 18 degrees Celsius, it never snows, and many people do not have heaters in their homes. Some days are so hot that you might even think it is summer. For instance, several years ago on Christmas Day, it got as hot as 35 degrees Celsius. However Southern California is an exception, many areas of the U.S. have brutally cold winters, and even parts of Northern California experience heavy snowfall every year.

With all of that in mind, I would say that this winter has arguably been my first real winter ever, and that it has been a season of many firsts. Things like snowy weather, icy slick roads, sub-zero temperatures, and school snow days have all been firsts for me in my life. Despite having to adjust to this type of weather, I have enjoyed the challenge of it. Moreover, partaking in winter-exclusive activities has been a blast. The most memorable activity was getting to go on the 7th grade ski trip. It was only my second time ever skiing, and my first time skiing in Japan. It was tremendously fun and all the students looked like they had a great time. Another unexpected yet delightful aspect of winter is the natural scenery. I was astonished when the first snowfall of the season occurred. Overnight while everyone slept, it was as if someone had painted the entire town and surrounding forest white. I felt fortunate to be able to witness such a stunning sight because I had never seen anything like it before in my life. The beauty of Japan's countryside never ceases to amaze me.

However, the hardest part of winter has been missing my friends and family back home, especially on American holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas, which are very family-centric. Since moving to Japan I have always missed my family, but I think winter has intensified these emotions. Thus, as a way to combat these feelings, I try to stay connected to American culture whenever I can. Fortunately, because I live in the age of the internet, this has not been too difficult. Things like watching classic American movies or listening to 90's grunge music are comforting because I get to hear English spoken with an accent similar to my own, and I get reminded of life back home. Thus, the sounds of home, with some help from my heater, have kept me warm as I weather through the challenges of my first real winter. Furthermore, as the temperature starts to warm up, I look forward to seeing how the landscape evolves with the arrival of spring!



A shot on the ski slope. I never thought I would get to go skiing on a school day!