



PHOENIX
Sister Cities

Discovery Changes Everything.

presents

Teach Abroad in Himeji 2015 Participants



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Alexandra Taylor grew up right outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota, in a beautiful river town called Stillwater. The youngest of three, Alex has adventurous siblings to look up to, with a sister in Edinburgh, Scotland, and a brother in Portland, Oregon. Alex moved to Arizona after graduating high school in pursuit of a Creative Writing Degree. With an interest in teaching as well, she took on a certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) through ASU. After teaching a semester of high school English in Northern Thailand in 2014, she knew that traveling and connecting with youth from all over the world was her destiny! Alex cannot wait to be immersed in Japan's rich culture, and meet all of the wonderful people that will become a huge part of her life.



Alec Gebhart moved to Phoenix in 2004 from the small town of Kenosha, Wisconsin, with his parents and two younger sisters. He will be graduating from Arizona State University in May of 2015, receiving his Bachelor's in English Literature and a TESOL Certificate as well. During his undergraduate studies, Alec worked extensively with ASU's acclaimed English-learning program, the American English and Culture Program, as a language assistant. Here, he facilitated conversations and other educational activities such as reading and writing with international students from around the world; this experience is one of the many things that have solidified his desire to be involved in the field of English language teaching. To have been given the opportunity to teach English in Himeji with a lauded organization such as Phoenix Sister Cities is truly incredible. He wants to apply all that he has

learned thus far in order to give his students in Himeji the best experience they can possibly have. While Alec is very excited to learn about the culture and language of Japan, he is also equally excited to share the culture and language of America with his future students as well.



Garrett Benson was born in Las Vegas, NV, but has spent most of his life in Phoenix. He has a younger and an older brother, and two very supportive parents. His mother, a high school English teacher, fostered in him a love for language and written word, and ultimately inspired him to major in English literature at Arizona State University. A voracious reader and writer, he blogs about the Phoenix Suns in his free time, and hopes to someday make a living as a teacher and a writer. He will graduate summa cum laude in May 2015, and he is thrilled with the opportunity to spend his first year out of college teaching in Japan. He hopes to see the entire world, but Japan has long loomed large in Garrett's heart; his Japanese

grandmother taught him to love and appreciate Japanese culture. Phoenix has proven to be a great place for him to grow up, but Garrett is ready to see the world, and he hopes Japan will be the first of many great adventures.

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Jason Short was inquisitive from the beginning. Born in Phoenix, Arizona Jason was broadly motivated “to become enlightened,” insofar as we can attain any wisdom in life. On this path, Jason has taught and tutored innumerable students, across diverse ages and perspectives. He graduated Summa Cum Laude at ASU in 2000, achieving his mission to graduate with a 4.0 GPA, attaining a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, with a Sociology minor. As a graduate student Jason taught a variety of undergraduate courses at Arizona State University including philosophy 101, critical reading and thinking, academic success focused courses and leadership in the liberal arts and sciences. Jason appreciates a global perspective and the opportunity of working together in partnership with other countries, building bridges and making connections, to “make the world a better place” and to have a good life in doing so. Having tutored English for elementary and middle school students, as well as community college students of diverse backgrounds, Jason is excited to have the opportunity to live and be part of the teaching team in Himeji, Japan.



Elise Burgess is originally from Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, and has an older brother and older sister. She attended high school in Park City, Utah and joined the Utah Ambassadors of Music symphony. Together with the symphony, she toured through Europe and performed concerts across seven different countries. It was a rewarding experience and she enjoyed learning about other cultures. In 2003, she moved to Arizona to attend college and graduated from Collins College with a Bachelor’s of Arts in Animation. During her time in school she managed and produced several short animation projects with her fellow students. After college she went on to work as a supervisor in video game production at D3Publisher of America, a subsidiary of the Japanese company Bandai Namco. By working with several Japanese video game studios and interacting with her colleagues overseas, Elise knew she wanted to learn as much as possible about the Japanese culture and life in Japan. She fell in love with teaching through her experience training and providing continuing corporate education to her co-workers. Since then she has worked as a software analyst for the United States Courts and a mutual fund and brokerage financial processor, all while providing English tutoring for Japanese students online. In her free time she enjoys studying Japanese language, writing, drawing and playing bass guitar. She is honored and excited to participate in the Himeji Teach Abroad program and immerse herself in the unique culture of Japan. Elise plans to join the language tutoring program for the Maricopa Community Colleges and ASU upon her return.

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Alexander Gerber is an English teacher. He loves the outdoors and spends much of his time in the Arizona wilderness. His lifelong studies include music, cinema, literature, and language. He was brought up playing piano, which translated to playing guitar (both bass and standard six-string guitar). After enduring an ordinary upbringing in suburban Phoenix, he traveled up and down New Zealand for three months with not much more than a backpack and a constantly replenished stock of bread, peanut butter, and jelly. After his time abroad, his bass playing skills led him to his first career as a touring musician. He spent three years playing with a couple different bands, and his travels took him to all but three of the United States. When the rock and roll

mountain grew too grueling to endure any longer, he matriculated at a community college before transferring to the lovely confines of Flagstaff, Arizona to pursue a degree in Secondary English Education. After a thorough liberal arts education up north, he came back to Phoenix to finish his studies with a semester of student teaching at his alma mater's rival high school. He now teaches full time at that school, but his sights are set on Japan. He is ready for his next great adventure, and teaching English in Japan will surely be just that whilst simultaneously fulfilling a life goal. This adventure will surely lead him into a new berth\like graduate school or another teaching job\but all in due time.



Jessica Terry was born and raised in Phoenix with her parents and two older brothers until she moved to the Los Angeles area to attend Azusa Pacific University as a recipient of a full academic scholarship. In 2014 she graduated magna cum laude with a degree in Studio Art – Sculpture, after which she moved back to the Valley and has lived there since. Growing up with a mother who worked for the Deer Valley Unified School District, she spent much of her time volunteering at local elementary schools helping teachers and staff. This cultivated a great respect and interest in education for our country, and for people across the globe. She brought this interest with her as she studied at APU and devoted a great deal of time considering

the issue in regards to art, which she eventually wrote her thesis on. During her time at APU she studied abroad in Rome for a semester and taught English lessons as a volunteer while there. Not only did she travel throughout Italy but she also spent time traveling to other European countries—France, Belgium, Germany, and Austria. This experience instilled in her a greater passion for international travel and relations which, combined with her passion for education lead her to apply for this opportunity. Currently a Substitute Teacher in the Deer Valley Unified School District, she looks forward to learning how Japan implements their education system and hopes to form friendships with the students and staff there. She is extremely excited to immerse herself in a culture vastly different from her own, to gain a mutual understanding and life long bond between our two cultures, promoting a more globally aware lifestyle. When she returns, she hopes to apply this knowledge to her art practice and future endeavors in the educational system, hopefully one day becoming a professor of the arts.

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Joanna Toronto grew up in Phoenix, Arizona with her large family, and credits her life long passion for traveling to her childhood. When she was younger, she and her family lived in Taipei, Taiwan for a few years due to her father's work. During this time, she also visited extended family living in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. After high school, she lived in Germany working and traveling to different parts of Europe. Additionally, she spent a few months teaching English in Ghana, where she first discovered how much she enjoyed working as an English language instructor abroad. Upon graduating with a degree in English Linguistics from Arizona State University in 2012, Joanna worked as a behavioral health paraprofessional with the Anasazi Foundation,

where she taught survival skills to at risk youth completing wilderness therapy programs in the Tonto National Forest area. She then left to the Republic of Georgia to fulfill her internship with the Georgian Ministry of Education teaching English and working with Georgian English teachers in the country's capital, Tbilisi. While she was there, she developed an Arts and English program for underprivileged and homeless youth living in Tbilisi. She has worked with similar projects since then in India and the Philippines, and hopes to pursue a career in international development after returning from Himeji. She is beyond ecstatic to be able to teach English in Japan and is honored to have the opportunity to learn firsthand about the people and the culture of Himeji.

