

Japan on the must-revisit list

Matt Bartlett *

"WHEN will you be going back?" was the main question asked as students from the years 11 and 12 Japanese classes at St Paul's Catholic College, Manly, touched down in Australia at the end of April after a whirlwind two-week trip around several major cities in Japan.

The trip's first stop was in the bustling metropolis of Tokyo, where the youth-orientated shopping districts Harajuku and Shibuya and electronic paradises such as Akihabara and Shinjuku were high on the priority list.

The accommodation was a traditional hotel with tatami flooring and futons, which provided a retreat from the neon-density of Tokyo's streets.

For many students it was their first time experiencing this almost-overwhelming culture.

And you can't get much more overwhelming than a bullet train that can go at speeds of up to 300km/h. The students and teachers travelled on it several times, including to get from Tokyo to Mount Fuji for a day of sightseeing around the natural marvel; then to Odawara City, where the students home-stayed for the weekend; and then on to the cities of Osaka and Kyoto, where the group managed to see



The St Paul's students pause for a photo on their Japan tour.

the famous "Golden Pavillion" temple and spot two geishas.

The tour became more sombre as the group visited the city of Hiroshima and the Peace Memorial Museum, which details the horrific effects of the world's first atomic bomb and

encourages a world without nuclear weaponry.

The last two nights were spent back in Kyoto either resting or doing a bit of last-minute shopping.

As the group flew out of Osaka, there was a lasting

impression of awe, exhilaration and reflection on the time spent improving their language skills in one of the most diverse cultures in the world.

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