

My summer at Ryokan Kagaya is definitely the most memorable experience in my entire college life. During my internship there, I worked mainly at two divisions: the reception desk (フロント) and room service division (客室係部). My daily responsibilities spanned from greeting to banquet preparation, and from providing translation service to itinerary planning. No two days at Kagaya were ever the same as we got to meet over 400 guests on average every day. During the two months spent at Kagaya, I received training in tea ceremony, wine tasting, flower arranging, and most importantly, kimono wearing as it was an indispensable part of my daily routine. These training not only helped improve my Japanese dramatically, but also furthered my understanding of the unique Japanese hospitality culture and business etiquette.

Contrary to the image of a small, traditional hot spring inn, Kagaya is really a grand, splendid hotel with four annexes, three public baths, an indoor shopping lane and over twenty banquet rooms. What I liked the most out of them is the wide collection of art pieces that it houses, including fine porcelain and paintings on precious fabric at every corner of the hotel. That's why working in Kagaya almost felt like working in a museum and I never failed to appreciate some newly-discovered beauty of the hotel every day. Another favorite part of the internship was chatting with my co-workers and guests. Most guests were incredibly pleasant to talk to even when my Japanese was not far from being fluent. They made me perfectly feel at ease being the only foreigner among the hundred over staff at the hotel. My co-workers were also great mentors and caretakers and they took me to fishing, dolphin watching, and various other interesting events.

If I were to put everything I learned at Kagaya into one word, I would say “おもてなしの心” (heartfelt hospitality). I think it is really the central concept behind many aspects of Japanese culture and philosophy and being acquainted with this idea definitely helped me communicate more seamlessly and effectively with people from all cultural backgrounds. I would highly encourage interested Japanese learners to look into this internship opportunity and to spend an unforgettable eight weeks at Kagaya.

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