

JCAL (Japanese Culture and Language) Japan Camp, 2014

JCAL (Japanese Culture and Language) is a student-initiated club at the University of Otago focused solely on learning about the Japanese culture and language through hands on experience right here in NZ. The overall aim of the club is to provide events, entertainment, and opportunities for anyone interested in Japanese culture to participate and learn through experience. Participants interact with one another to improve their language, deepen their cultural knowledge, make new friends, and enjoy the awesome experiences that Japan has to offer right here in NZ! JCAL's first ever "Japan Camp" was held on May 3rd-4th, 2014, at Waiora Scout Camp in Dunedin, New Zealand. The two-day experience involved a range of Japanese culture and language related activities (as outlined below) and provided participants with a chance to meet others with similar interests in Japan and explore the exciting culture and language together.

Upon arrival at the campsite on Saturday, May 3rd, participants were first split into bunk rooms (boys and girls separate) before being assigned to a group within which they would complete the day's activities. After time getting to know one another, the four teams battled it out in a range of team-bonding challenges. The first activity, a group obstacle race (障害物競走), involved such aspects as a net crawl, sack race, egg & spoon race, ball balancing, ame-kui (飴食い= hunting for a lollie in a bowl of flour), and pan-kui kyōsō (パン食い競走= biting bread off a hanging rope), in which one member of each team was assigned to a specific race section. Teams then engaged in a tug of war (綱引き) and kibasen challenge (騎馬戦), and were given points for each activity with the winning team choosing which of the Camp's meals they would most like to cook: curry & rice (Saturday night dinner), Yakisoba, and Gyoza (Sunday lunch). With nightfall came the last of the day's activities, including the scary kimo-dameshi (肝試し= 'test of courage' ghost walk), as well as a camp fire with drinks, snacks, and marshmallows. The following day started fresh with a group session of rajio taisō (ラジオ体操= radio exercise) and a hearty 'Kiwi breakfast' before participants took part in the final Cultural Workshop, which included karate, shodō (書道= calligraphy), archery, and traditional Japanese games. The workshop ran on a rotational basis with groups spending 30 minutes at each station before moving on to the next. At the conclusion of the workshop, participants refueled with a lunch of yakisoba and gyoza, before heading home late Sunday afternoon, buzzing from the experience overall.

The idea for Japan camp came from our own desire to engage with the amazing and enjoyable experiences that Japan has to offer right here in NZ. The more we thought about ideas the more ideas began to come up, and before we knew it, we had a solid foundation upon which we would base the entire camp. The organisation process was undoubtedly time consuming, but following the plan made things easier and less stressful on the whole, and knowing that we would soon be able to share certain aspects of Japan's culture and language with other enthusiastic students was a motivational drive that kept us going throughout. For those looking to hold something like Japan Camp themselves, I would certainly recommend giving the above-mentioned activities ago; majority of which can be purchased/built from materials here in NZ without the need to be in Japan. The team building activities on the first day was a great way to get participants interacting with one another at the same time as learning and experiencing some unique cultural aspects of Japan. One thing we feel as though Japan Camp did lack, however, was sufficient things to keep participants entertained in the 'down time' that occurred when we were busy setting up for the next activity. However, looking back, I believe this can easily be resolved by simply taking along extra board games, books, cards, or similar activities, or even by instructing participants to bring along their own entertainment to prevent them from becoming bored in their 'free time'.

The following link will take you to a Youtube video of what participants at Japan Camp experienced: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxG9zLHAD74>. For more information about what JCAL gets up to in Dunedin, please visit our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/JCALNZ>.