



## Travel Journal: Japan

On June 4th, 2008 I traveled to Japan for what would be a six-month visit. There, I studied as a visiting researcher at Hokusai University in Sapporo and performed around the country. It was a very rich educational experience. I had the opportunity to speak and sing professionally in Churches, Buddhist Temples, concert halls and Universities. My new Japanese friends took me out to sing karaoke on a few occasions. It was great fun!

The many peace builders in the country impressed me. Their Buddhist teachings reinforce the idea that peace begins within each person and leads to world peace. The Japanese gardens and temples of Kyoto foster this idea as one can find peace in the beautiful atmosphere while sitting in peace and solitude.

Japan is a quiet culture that values the small and the beautiful. I was impressed with the Japan aesthetic. It was possible to find art everywhere as I moved around the country. Food was displayed with great care and artistic beauty. There is attention to detail there that I have not witnessed in any other country that I have visited. Precision would be the proper adjective to use when thinking about Japanese culture.

The collective sense I felt there was noteworthy as individualism is frowned upon and group harmony is encouraged. This sense of group-ness is fostered in schools, the workplace and in families. What a wonderful value.

One highlight was appearing at the International Indigenous Peoples summit. There I had the opportunity to meet indigenous peoples from around the world. They have a common story in that all of them had been forced off their land and marginalized in their native countries.

I met many American natives and shared with them the fact that my great grandfather was a Cherokee Indian from Georgia. I felt great empathy for those gathered for this summit. I was pleased to learn that they have come together for one purpose and that is to support each other in their efforts to gain equality and dignity in their respective countries.

Another highlight was my two-week visit to Hiroshima. I was so amazed by the kindness of the people of that city. They reminded me on many occasions to be sure to tell the story of Hiroshima when I return home to insure that it never happens again. When walking through the peace museum I was overcome with sadness as I saw pictures of the devastation brought on by the atomic bomb. I made friends at the World Friendship center and hope to perform in Hiroshima in the future when the special annual ceremonies are held remembering the dropping of the atomic bomb and its victims.

Spending time in Buddhist temples to sing and speak for peace was also memorable. Here I found common ground with people of a faith different from my own. Sharing the stage with Buddhist chanters and sharing food together with meaningful conversation is in part what we need to do more of in the world. Interfaith connections will be necessary if we want to live in a peaceful world. I am reminded of John Kennedy's words when referring to the human family. "We all breathe the same air, we all cherish our children's future, and we are all mortal."

I have been changed by the experience of Japan. The mindfulness of many of the friends I made will remain with me. The ancient wisdom coming from the culture that stresses oneness with the earth and with each other will remain with me. Like many other countries I have been in, I found solidarity with the Japanese people, as we were able to connect around the universality of suffering.

They loved the spirituals. I have never performed where there were so many people crying in the audience. Like so many others, the Japanese live with the pain from the past and present and music both soothed and healed them. I also connected with them around their passion for peace. It was energizing to meet so many peace activists.

To read more about this trip, visit [anthonybrownbaritone.com](http://anthonybrownbaritone.com) and view my blog.