



City of Whitehorse

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Seeking Youth Ambassadors for the Ushiku Sister City Exchange Program

Do you want to travel to Japan? Are you a Whitehorse resident age 13 to 18? The City of Whitehorse is seeking Whitehorse Youth Ambassadors to participate in the Ushiku Sister City Exchange Program.

Who: Whitehorse youth, ages 13 to 18

When: July 5 to 15, 2024

Where: Ushiku, Japan

What: Live with a Japanese host family, visit attractions, and participate in cultural activities

How: Keep reading to find out how to participate and complete your application

Information Session

January 31, 2024 at 7:00 pm

Mt. MacIntyre Recreation Centre, Grey Mountain Room

Meet the program coordinator, find out more about the program and application process, and have your questions answered.

Description of the Program

The Sister City Exchange Program with Ushiku, Japan began in the 1980s to foster long-term and on-going interests in one another by providing first hand experiences with each other's cultures. It provides mutual understanding, increases leadership skills, and prepares youth to make a difference in their communities.

Every second year, an outbound group of Youth Ambassadors are chosen to represent the City of Whitehorse in a 10-day exchange with Ushiku, Japan. While visiting Ushiku the Youth Ambassadors partake in a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to live with a Japanese family and experience Japanese culture. The City of Ushiku provides an active itinerary for Youth Ambassadors to experience Japanese activities and attractions and create incredible memories and lifelong friendships.

The following year Whitehorse Youth Ambassador families host a visiting inbound exchange student from Ushiku to their homes and community to share with them what it means to be a Canadian and a Yukoner. For 10 days the Whitehorse host families are responsible for providing meals, accommodation and any activities or excursions during the weekend or evenings. The City of Whitehorse plans and provides weekday activities that encompass Canadian culture and





the Yukon's history. This completes the exchange cycle and reinforces the first-hand cultural experience the exchange program provides.

Outbound years Whitehorse to Japan	Inbound Years Japan to Whitehorse
2024	2025
2026	2027
2028	2029
2030	2031

How to become a Youth Ambassador

To participate in the program, you must submit an application and meet the following requirements:

- Age 13-18 as of July 5, 2024
- A Whitehorse resident
- Have a valid passport
- Provide travel insurance that meets the requirements of the program
- Be willing and able to cover the cost of airfare, travel insurance, and some meals
- Be willing to host an exchange student the following year
- Complete an application, essay questions, interview, and provide references
- Attend required training sessions prior to the exchange
- Participate in City of Whitehorse program related activities before, during, and after the exchange

Additional requirements:

- Be an Ambassador for the City of Whitehorse and represent the city while participating in the program
- Demonstrate civic pride in his/her community
- Be enthusiastic, open-minded, responsible and respectful of others
- Be cooperative and a team-player
- Have good communication skills
- Be prepared to live away from home for 10 days
- Be willing to be billeted with a Japanese Family
- Have the desire to experience Japan, travel and explore new cultures



Application and Selection

The application will be available at whitehorse.ca/japan by January 31, 2024. The application deadline is February 29, 2024.

- 1: Complete Application and Reference form
- 2: Application will be reviewed and screened and students selected for interviews
- 3: Interviews and reference checks
- 4: Final Selection of student ambassadors
- 5: Provide payment and proof of insurance

Selection Criteria

There are limited spaces available in the Ushiku exchange program. The selection process includes an application with essay questions, interview, and reference checks. To ensure the selection process is as objective as possible, a scoring rubric is used to evaluate the application, interview, and references. Two or three interviewers will conduct the interviews.

The application process will assess the following:

- Friendliness and enthusiasm
- Experience traveling outside the Yukon or abroad
- Demonstrated ability to handle stressful situations and conflict
- Communication skills - oral and written
- Group or teamwork abilities as demonstrated through application and interview questions
- Confidence
- Ambassador skills
 - Interest in Japanese and other cultures
 - Ability to represent Whitehorse, Yukon, Canadian culture in Japan

Program Fees

The cost of the program depends on the best available airfare. For 2024, the cost is expected to be around \$3000.



Expenses covered by the program participant:

- Airfare

Expenses covered by the City or Whitehorse and/or City of Ushiku:

- Training program and language classes prior to the exchange
- Admission fees for scheduled activities and attractions in Japan
- Billeting and meals with a Japanese host family
- Two City of Whitehorse staff member chaperones

Cost that are NOT included in the program:

- Travel insurance (proof of insurance is required)
- Lunch and snacks on travel days
- Personal spending money
- Excess baggage charges imposed by the airline
- Expenses resulting from travel changes caused by events beyond the control of the City of Whitehorse

*Each participant needs to bring some Japanese yen from home.
Order Japanese yen from your bank at least one month before travel.*

Application Deadlines

Applications for the 2024 exchange will open in January 2024.
(Timeline below is preliminary and subject to change.)

February 29, 2024	Application deadline
Early to mid-March	Interviews and reference checks
Mid-March	Final selection of student ambassadors
Late March	First information meeting for students and parents/guardians to discuss payment of airfare, filling in forms and waivers, details of cultural classes, and expectations.
Early April	Payment and forms due
April-June	Language and culture classes (5 weekday evenings TBD)



FAQ

What is the age range for Youth Ambassadors?

Age 13-18 on the first day of the exchange (July 5, 2024).

Who are the chaperones?

Two City of Whitehorse staff members (one male, one female) will travel with the group and participate in the activities in Japan. These staff members have experience working with youth and have completed criminal reference checks. You will meet the chaperones in the training and information sessions prior to the exchange.

How much does it cost?

The cost of the program is the return airfare to Japan. We work with a travel agency to get the best available price for group travel. For 2024, the expected cost is around \$3000 (TBD). Participants must also provide their own travel insurance and spending money.

What activities will we do in Japan?

The itinerary is created by program staff in Ushiku and is not yet set for 2024. In past years, they have included a mix of traditional and modern activities such as visiting a local high school, a tea ceremony, visiting Ushiku Daibutsu, shopping in Tokyo, and a trip to Disney Sea.

Who are the host families in Ushiku?

The host families in Ushiku are selected through an application process by Ushiku City staff. They complete criminal records checks (or the Japanese equivalent). All the families have one or more children/youth in the home. The families typically want to host a Canadian student because they are interested in Canadian culture, and some want to practice speaking English while hosting. Some may have hosted youth for this exchange in the past, or had their child come to Whitehorse on the exchange. You will be connected with your host family about one month before the exchange so that you and your family can get to know one another before traveling. Over the years, we've heard from participants that staying with a host family is the best part of the trip. Participants have created lifelong friendships, and some have returned to Japan to visit their host family in years after the exchange.

What are the benefits of participating?

There are many benefits, including:

- to explore the history and culture of Japan
- to participate in the daily life of your host family
- to gain confidence, responsibility, self-reliance and leadership skills



- to come home with a new appreciation of your own country
- to prepare for 21st century life in the global village
- to make new friends and contacts that will last a lifetime!

Is this exchange reciprocal? Will my family get to host a Japanese student ambassador in Whitehorse?

The exchange program alternates years of sending students to Ushiku and receiving students in Whitehorse. (e.g. in 2024 Whitehorse students are outbound to Ushiku, in 2025 we will host Ushiku students in Whitehorse). If you participate in the exchange in 2024, we will ask you to host a student in 2025 (July). However, the exchange is not directly reciprocal – you will not necessarily host the same student that you stayed with in Japan.

Can I become a host family in Whitehorse if I have not gone on the exchange?

Yes! Hosting is a great way to get involved with the program even if you have not gone on the exchange. Check back for more details about hosting in 2025.

Why does the application ask personal questions, such as shoe size?

These questions on the application are for informational purposes only, and are not used in scoring your application. The staff of the City of Ushiku has requested certain information to assist with their planning. For example, they need your shoe size and height for sizing of traditional clothing for a Tea Ceremony. Your information will only be shared with City of Ushiku staff if you are selected for the program.

Other information (such as likes/dislikes, pets, and family members) is collected to be shared with your host family, to help them get to know you better.

How can I increase my chances of being selected to be a student ambassador?

The selection criteria are described in the Application and Selection section of this page. Here are a few other recommendations:

- Do some research about Japan and Ushiku
- Join a youth group or team where you can gain leadership skills
- Become a host family for the program on an inbound year (2025)
- Reapply in 2026 if you are not successful in 2024

What training and preparation do the student ambassadors receive?

The ambassadors will participate in a series of training classes prior to the exchange. Topics covered will include rules and expectations for the exchange, Japanese language classes, cultural classes, and team building activities.