

# United Planet and Valley Christian High School Collaborate on Life-Changing Cultural Exchange Program in Japan

*Students from Valley Christian High School join United Planet in Japan for a powerful week of cultural exchange, service, and spiritual connection.*

CHANDLER, AZ, UNITED STATES, April 29, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [United Planet](#), a leader in global experiential learning and volunteer abroad programs, recently partnered with Valley Christian High School for a transformative 7-day cultural immersion and volunteer experience in [Okazaki, Japan](#). The program, which brought students and educators into the heart of Japanese tradition and community, was a resounding success—marking a milestone as the [first Japan visit for Elissa Allen](#), Director of International Programs at United Planet, who accompanied the group.



The exchange was part of United Planet's Faculty-Led Program, a curated travel and service-learning initiative designed to foster meaningful cross-cultural connections. For this journey, Valley Christian High School students participated in a broad range of cultural activities and hands-on volunteer work—exploring the rich heritage of Okazaki while engaging in service projects that deepened their global awareness and compassion.

The itinerary blended immersive cultural education with community engagement. Students volunteered at local kindergartens, worked on a sixth-generation organic tea farm, participated in traditional Japanese dance and tea ceremonies, visited a centuries-old drum-making company, and connected with local faith communities through shared worship. Each moment served to bridge cultures and build relationships through shared values, creativity, and service.

“This trip to Japan was an extraordinary reminder of what makes our Faculty-Led Quests so powerful,” said Elissa Allen, Director of International Programs at United Planet. “To experience Japanese culture not just as a tourist, but as a participant—serving, learning, and laughing alongside our hosts—was deeply moving. From dressing in yukatas to harvesting matcha at the tea fields, every activity was grounded in connection. Watching our students grow more curious, respectful, and open-hearted each day was one of the most rewarding experiences of my career.”

The group was welcomed warmly by local coordinators and families, who created opportunities for genuine interaction and cultural exchange. One of the teachers, Deneen Mackey, documented the trip through a series of blog posts that reflected the spirit of exploration and the strong emotional impact of the experience.



“Saturday was a special day,” Mackey wrote. “We learned a Japanese dance with fans that told the story of the Aoi Cherry Blossoms. Our teacher was so patient and sweet. Later, we celebrated a classmate’s birthday with sparklers and cake—arranged so thoughtfully by our host. So many beautiful memories in one day!”

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*Elissa Allen, Director of  
International Programs at  
United Planet*

The group also attended a Sunday Mass at a Japanese Catholic Church, where they shared music and fellowship with local parishioners and received handmade gifts from local nuns. Following the service, students helped with environmental cleanup along the street outside the church—a powerful moment of shared faith and service.

The program also included visits to historic and artisanal institutions, such as the Maruyamagoshi drum company, where students learned the intricate process of crafting taiko drums and enjoyed a live performance. At the Miyazakien Tea Farm, students harvested tea leaves, learned the process of steaming and shaking them, and prepared their own matcha tea—offering a deep appreciation for the artistry and patience behind a single cup.



With United Planet's local team providing 24/7 in-country support, customized logistics, cultural workshops, and reflection time, the trip gave students and faculty a seamless, safe, and deeply engaging experience abroad.

"Our trip, which was organized through United Planet, was a once-in-a-lifetime experience!" said Carla Morgan, the lead sponsor of the trip. "The students' lives were changed through the experience of Japanese culture. Naoko and Elissa began planning the logistics for our trip a year in advance,

considering the history, culture, and welfare needs. Our daily activities for the week were very well planned out. The students maintained a schedule that never wavered but accommodated changes when needed. We went to Japan to serve the Japanese people, but in return, they served us!"



The cultural immersion was matched by a deep focus on service and sustainability—pillars of United Planet's mission. Through environmental work at the tea plantation and hands-on activities with children at local kindergartens, the group embraced the importance of humility, responsibility, and relationship-building.

The trip concluded with a traditional tea ceremony and a heartfelt farewell dinner, where students reflected on their weeklong journey of personal growth, cross-cultural understanding, and spiritual connection.

This collaboration exemplifies United Planet's commitment to empowering youth as global citizens through experiential learning. By engaging directly with local communities, students build empathy, adaptability, and a greater appreciation for diverse perspectives.

United Planet continues to expand its Faculty-Led Quest programs across more than 40 countries, with tailored experiences for middle schools, high schools, universities, and adult groups seeking impactful and ethical global engagement.

For more information about United Planet's school programs and global partnerships, please visit <https://www.unitedplanet.org/faculty-led-programs>.

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