Upon my arrival at the University of Tsukuba I was admittedly a little concerned. I’m the type of person that loves to live in busy places. I want to be able to walk out my door every weekend and see or experience something new, and at first glance I didn’t know if I’d be able to manage that in Tsukuba. The campus is beautiful, honestly, absolutely stunning. It’s like walking around in a park all day. But I didn’t have immediate access to the city, and it was a twenty minute walk just to get to a restaurant that wasn’t linked to campus. I was afraid that I’d be stuck in a bubble with no easy way to sate my urge to wander and explore.

Fortunately, Tsukuba has risen to the challenge. It seems like there is always something going on in and around campus. After only eight weeks I’ve been to two different festivals and a party for the biggest language club on campus, been to and from the main bus center countless times for dinner, shopping and errands and been to the biggest mall in Ibaraki prefecture. There is also a shrine a short walk away from my residence hall, Mount Tsukuba is only an hour bus ride away, and easy access to Tokyo.
Another thing I’ve noticed about Tsukuba, but I would venture a guess to say it’s a common theme around Japan as a whole, is that when there is an event of any kind, it becomes a community affair. In early November my university held its annual student festival which took place over three days. There was an unbelievable number of tents and stalls run by various student groups selling food or crafts to raise money for their organizations (and when I say food I don’t mean cheap snacks, I mean there were students working grills and deep fryers and pasta cookers in every tent). I wanted to buy one of everything but that’s not how budgets work. And there was even a mainstage that had different performances going on practically the entire time. But what made it really special is that it felt like the entirety of Tsukuba turned out for the event. Families brought their children and danced and sang along with the traditional performances, and after the sun went down everybody of age queued up for their complimentary cup of sake.

I was afraid when I arrived that I wouldn’t be able to step outside my university bubble and explore the community around me, and I have been able to do not only that, but the community has also come to me.

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