

'Unbounded'

Exploring the World with Ashley Rath '07

The Floating Torii at Itsukushima Shrine in Miyajima, Japan, have been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

ASHLEY RATH '07

By Michele Reed

When she came to Oswego, she had never been west of Buffalo, but now Hamlin native **Ashley Rath '07** says she won't stop traveling until she "sets foot on every single country on the planet."

A Presidential Scholarship was the impetus for Rath to attend Oswego. "When making the decision of which college to attend, it really took the pressure off," Rath says. Not having to worry about student loans, thanks to the donor-funded scholarship program, made all the difference.

"And it wasn't just the money, but the whole program," Rath recalls. She appreciated the Presidential Scholar mentors to guide incoming students, the special activities and the whole support system in place for scholars. The scholarship was the deciding factor in her college choice.

Little did Rath know that that decision would set her on the path to an exciting adventure, thanks to the encouragement and support of the professors and friends she would meet at Oswego.

The graphic design major hadn't thought much about traveling the globe until her sophomore year, when Art Professor Lisa Langlois convinced Rath to accompany her to Japan for a week-long research foray.

Travel is expensive, especially on a student budget, so a grant from the Provost's Office, which receives support

through *The Fund for Oswego*, provided help for Rath to make the trip.

"I'd never been out of the country," Rath says. She admits to being a little nervous about the whole proposition.

But all the worries had evaporated when the one-week trip was over. "I got to interact with other people and stand on my own two feet," Rath says. "No fear — I'd wander the big cities, taking in the graphics on the billboards and everything."

At about the fourth or fifth day, Langlois challenged Rath to take the train on her own. She was nervous at first, but Langlois was pleased with the change in Rath when she returned.

"When she came back she was just beaming," the professor recalls. Rath had been able to travel around the city, taking the subway and speaking with strangers in shops and on streets. "By the end of the trip she was convinced that she could speak Japanese and it was just a matter of exposure," Langlois recalls.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ASHLEY RATH '07

Ashley Rath '07 (front row, second from right) and her outdoors activity group, Yakatsu, relax at the summit of Mt. Tsukuba after camping and climbing the peak.



Ashley Rath '07 edits her photos of Japan in Penfield Library's Lake Effect Café.

BIG PLANS

That first short trip solidified Rath's desire to seek a longer study-abroad experience. She had already taken a Japanese class with Yoshiko Butler, modern languages instructor at Oswego, and planned to spend a year at Tsukuba University near Tokyo.

Again, funds would be an issue. But Rath was surprised at the amount of support that came her way. "At the first mention, the whole campus got behind me for it — friends, professors, the administration," Rath recalls. "They were welcoming to me and encouraging. It was great to have that support and know they were behind me."

The graphic design department held fundraisers and a friend put out a jar that other students filled with coins. Professor Bennet Schaber of the English department helped her edit her essays for scholarships.



Rath also earned three very competitive scholarships — Bridging Scholarship for Japan, the Freeman-Asia Scholars Program and a Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarship — which provided about \$11,000 for her travels.

Soon the trip would be a reality.

LIFE LESSONS

What did Rath learn in her year abroad? Plenty, it turned out.

"I learned how to interact with a lot of different people, and how important it is to learn a second language. I got to swap stories about my hometown in Hamlin with students from around the world," Rath recalls.

10 Questions for Ashley Rath '07

- Q. What kind of people did you meet while traveling?**
- A. I met some of the most intelligent, sincere, and fun people of my life while abroad. I still keep in contact with most of them, and look forward to seeing them again someday.
- Q. Favorite food?**
- A. Okonomiyake (Japanese pancake)
- Q. Fave place to eat it?**
- A. Hamazushi, a restaurant where sushi came out on conveyor belts.
- Q. How did Japan change you the most?**
- A. I can't answer this briefly! Ha ha...
- Q. Where do you want to go next?**
- A. EVERYWHERE.
- Q. What was your favorite Japanese island?**
- A. I only stayed on Honshu, so I guess that would be it!
- Q. Favorite city?**
- A. A toss up between Tokyo and Hiroshima.
- Q. Favorite side trip?**
- A. In October, a few friends and I took a road trip to Nikko. It is a World Heritage site, and probably one of the most beautiful little nooks in all of Japan. This is especially true in the fall, where the temples and hot springs are buried in the burnt orange forests of autumn.
- Q. Worst travel moment?**
- A. When I flew on a 13-hour non-stop flight from Detroit to Tokyo while extremely sick with a sinus infection (sinus infection + high altitudes and pressure + Northwest Airlines = not fun).
- Q. When you go back, where will you visit first?**
- A. I will likely mill around Tokyo. Most of my Japanese friends have graduated and that is where they work.



ASHLEY RATH '07

“The thing I remember most was the smell of Tokyo. It was warm there, really humid,” Rath says.

Oswego has a long history with Tsukuba, beginning with its founding by Oswego graduate **Hideo Takamine (1877)** for whom Takamine Drive on campus is named. Takamine came to Oswego to learn Edward Austin Sheldon’s object method of teaching. He returned to his native country and founded a teachers college, the forerunner of Tokyo University of Education, which eventually became Tsukuba.

The Oswego students in the Tsukuba program have a tradition all their own. When one group of Oswego students finishes the program, they leave room

Shoppers bustling through the streets of Tokyo (left) are favorite subjects for Rath’s camera, as are visitors to the Heian Shrine in Kyoto (below).

Ashley’s Itinerary

Fall 2003: Hamlin to Oswego

March 2006: Spring break trip to Japan (first international flight)

August 2006: Tsukuba, Japan

March 2007: Bangkok, Thailand; KoSamui, Thailand; Penang, Malaysia; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Singapore

April 2007: Kyoto, Himeji and Hiroshima, Japan

July 2007: Seattle, Wash.

Sept 2007: Back in Oswego

June 2008: Move to Los Angeles



supplies for the incoming group, who do the same for those to follow.

Being an international business minor, Rath paid a lot of attention to marketing trends. While she was in Japan the cell phone industry was having a big promotion, where people would pick their own cell phone color out of the hundreds of Pantone colors available.

"I loved meeting new people," Rath says. She made friends from all around the world, among the other international students at Tsukuba's program. "I can go to Poland, Egypt, and have a place to stay." She made friends from Slovenia, England and Thailand.

Rath didn't confine her travel to Tsukuba. Every chance she got, she'd explore a new area of Japan and make side trips to other parts of Asia, including a visit to the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the largest twin towers in the world.

SHARING THE WORLD

They say technology makes the world smaller and it certainly did for Rath. She kept in touch with friends back at Oswego through blogging and a video podcast.

Art Professor **Cara Brewer Thompson '02** bought a webcam, and scheduled times for Rath to speak to classes back at Oswego.

"I had a little camera on my computer and did Web conferencing with graphic design classes," Rath says. Because of the time difference, sometimes she "broadcast" to her classmates in her pajamas.

The exchange didn't end there. "When I came back I shared as much as I could, and encouraged other students to do so as well," Rath says.

Another way she shared her experiences was by producing a video, "Unbounded: What It's Like to Study Abroad (It's Awesome)" as part of her scholarship requirements. Rather than just share her own experiences, Rath interviewed students from all over the world. The resulting movie gave a full and enthusiastic portrait of the study abroad experience.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ASHLEY RATH '07



Rath shoots video from Sunshine 60, one of Tokyo's tallest buildings, which opens up its 60th floor to visitors to view the city.

Associate Dean of Oswego's School of Business Pamela Cox coordinates the international business minor, and she concurs with Rath that study abroad is essential for today's students. "It allows them to become more marketable," she says of their chances in the job search.

"There's a certain amount of bravery involved" in study abroad that increases students' self-confidence, she says. "When they return, any kind of new challenges we might throw their way or when they go to work for a company or organization, these are some things they can feel more confident they can do."

Rath urges all students to follow in her footsteps. "You see things from a different perspective," she says of travel abroad. "It's actually harder to come back than to go over."

Travel abroad has changed Rath. "My future goals have changed a lot," she says. "I want a career that will allow me to travel and explore as many countries as I can."

Her Tsukuba experience set the stage for that. Wherever she decides to travel, she says, "I have a huge global network. I can pick up the phone and have a place to stay."

For now, Rath is certainly on the move in her budding career in the television production industry. Based in Los Angeles, she is currently working on post-production of television's "The Apprentice."

Where she will go from there is anybody's guess. One thing is certain: **Ashley Rath '07**, world traveler, will be exploring the globe, thanks to encouragement and help she received at Oswego. 🌸