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Tamara Browning: UIS invites public to join students for Ashikaga trip

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The UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SPRINGFIELD invites the public to join degree-seeking students for two study-abroad weeks in Ashikaga, Japan, in June.

The global experience has been a program UIS has held in Springfield's sister city for ten years.

The public has always been invited on the trips, but over the last few years, primarily students have gone, said JONATHAN GOLDBERGBELLE, director of the Office of International Programs at UIS.

"This year, because it is the tenth year of the program, we just want to get the word out again," GoldbergBelle said.

"We're also looking this fall to be doing some kind of a gala within limited state budgets. We would like to invite people who have been part of the program over the ten years to participate in some kind of event when the students and faculty from Ashikaga come here in August and September."

UIS's Global Experience program will offer a short course on Japanese language and culture in Ashikaga.

The daily schedule in Ashikaga will include instruction in Japanese language and culture at Ashikaga Institute of Technology, UIS's sister university in Japan. Participants can experience a tea ceremony, Japanese cuisine, flower arranging, Buddhist meditation, calligraphy and Japanese martial arts.

Field trips will include trips to the mayor's office and city hall; Civil Engineering Department and Environmental Studies Program at AIT; Kurita Porcelain Museum; Ashikaga Gakko, the oldest university in Japan; Bannaji Buddhist Temple; a farm or factory and a public school. Participants also will attend field trips to the Nikko Nature Preserve and Shinto Temple complex and to Tokyo.

GALE MYERS, who has taken trips to Ashikaga with UIS in 2004, 2005 and 2006, became involved through her daughter, Quinne.

"My daughter was interested in everything Japanese, so she wanted to take Japanese language class, but she was only 15," said Myers. (Quinne is now 21.)

"I had to go with her. I went with her, and I thought, 'Well, I'll take the class, too. I don't want to just sit there and do nothing.' It was really fun.

"It was so much fun that we took several semesters of it at UIS and through there we learned about the trips, and she and I both went."

Myers said people in Ashikaga are willing to help others get to know their culture.

"They want to introduce you to everything that they have -- all the different food. They really take pleasure in having you eat octopus, for instance. We had octopus on pizza all the time," Myers said.

Myers went to Ashikaga her first time with a group that included high school and college students and two women in their 80s.

"Anybody can go. It's not just a college-student thing. I would encourage everybody to go just because I loved it so much," Myers said.

LESLIE REUTTER, a UIS senior who went to Ashikaga three summers ago, said people are never too young or too old to go on the trip to learn something new.

Reutter encourages students and the public to go to Ashikaga because it can be an "eye-opening" experience. It was for Reutter, who comes from Cissna Park, a small town of 800 people in northeastern Illinois.

"It's predominately white, middle-class, farmers, working-class citizens. I came to college and met with all these events and student organizations that were very diverse," said Reutter, 21, who is majoring in criminal justice and will graduate in May with a bachelor's degree.

"I was able to go over to Japan and see firsthand -- actually be with the minority in a country that I've never ever been to, I've never even studied before.

"It was very eye-opening to see firsthand the living, working people of a different culture."

All expenses, lodging, meals (with the exception of a few lunches), local and international travel and entrance fees are included in the program fee. Lodging will be a combination of hotels, guest houses and home stays.

Tuition and university fees for degree-seeking students aren't included in the program fee, which will be about \$2,500, dependent upon international airfare.

Deadline to sign up for the course is March 26.

For more information and application materials, contact the UIS Office of International Programs at 206-8319 or email intprog@uis.edu.

For more information, visit www.uis.edu/internationalprograms/globalexperience/index.html.

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