



May 2026

friendship force

CENTRAL
NORTH CAROLINA

Outbound to FF Kumamoto, Japan

If it's Tuesday this must be.....the arrival day, April 7, in Tokyo for our FFCNC ambassadors. But wait! Where is everyone going? They are splitting up! Luz Kharabi and Barbara North remained in Tokyo with Tomoko Thornburg where they visited friends and family of Tomoko's. And the others? The Glicks and the Johns were guests of the Western Tokyo club of FF. David and Melody Glick stayed in Yokohama; Charles and Marilyn John stayed in Astugi. These two cities are about 23 miles apart and both are within the metropolitan area of Tokyo. There they all remained until.....

Friday, April 10 they reconnected and traveled by train about 200 miles where our six ambassadors were hosted by the Aichi club. The Johns stayed with a host family in Nagoya and everyone else stayed with hosts in Handa. But wait! Where is Tomoko? She remained in Tokyo.

After three nights of hosting by the Aichi club, on Monday, April 13 our ambassadors hopped on a train again and traveled about 87 miles to be hosted by the Osaka club. The Johns and Luz lived with separate families in Kyoto; the Glicks, and Barbara lived with families in Osaka about 35 miles from Kyoto.

After two nights with the Osaka club, on Wednesday, April 15, Tomoko reconnected with our six ambassadors in Osaka and they all traveled by train to Hiroshima. The group of seven ambassadors spent one night in a hotel in Hiroshima and one night in a hotel in Miyajima. In Hiroshima they visited the Peace Memorial and Museum. Miyajima means "Shrine Island" and is known for Itsukushima, the UNESCO World Heritage Site pictured here.

By now it was Friday, April 17 and our FFCNC group was ready for the home stay week. They traveled about 233 miles by train to Kumamoto where they connected with their host families. If you have followed this journey carefully, you may be wondering where are the Briggs? They were supposed to be on this journey! They joined the group in Kumamoto and brought the total FFCNC complement of ambassadors to nine ambassadors. The Briggs, having spent years living in Japan, opted to participate in the home stay experience only.



Our FFCNC ambassadors were met by their home hosts at the Kumamoto train station. The next day was spent visiting Suizenji Park and Kumamoto Castle. Suizenji Garden is a spacious, Japanese style

landscape garden in Kumamoto. It was built by the ruling local lords, the Hosokawa family, in the 17th century. The garden reproduces in miniature form a small representation of Mount Fuji and the 53 post stations of the Tokaido, the road which connected Edo (today's Tokyo) with Kyoto during the Edo Period. Kumamoto Castle is considered one of the three premier castles in Japan. Other activities during the week included a Bunraku puppet theater demonstration, a tea ceremony presentation, and a boat ride to observe dolphins.



Our ambassadors posed for a group photo after their tea ceremony. On the back row (left to right): Luz Kharabi, Richard & Valerie Briggs, & David Glick. 2nd row (kneeling & standing) Melody Glick, Tomoko Thornburg, Barbara North, Marilyn & Charles John. Front row: Their three aeisha hostesses.

Valerie and Richard Briggs pose with their hosts while visiting a museum.



Marilyn Moniquette-John with her hosts



Melody and David Glick model their Yukatas. A yukata is a casual, unlined summer cotton garment worn to festivals with bare feet, while a kimono is a formal, layered garment usually made of silk and worn with socks and intricate accessories.



Throughout April, different districts (such as Kami-Handa on April 11–12, 2026) parade ornate, 200-year-old traditional floats. Specifically in the Kami-Handa district, this festival features float parades and the launching of two "Chintoro" boats with lanterns onto the Miyaike Pond.



These Buddha statues represent Jizō Bosatsu, a protector of children and travelers. They are often dressed in red to repel evil and sickness.

Divine Coincidence by Barbara North

Friendship Force is about making friends around the world, and this was certainly brought home to me while in Japan. Eating lunch on our first day in Aichi, the club member, Haruhisa Yamada, sitting to my left, mentioned he had been to North Carolina many years ago. When I asked where, he said it had been too many years ago and he could not remember. But he had brought his small photo album to share pictures of his journey. As I opened his album, I was curious to see if I could recognize any landmarks in his pictures and help him remember perhaps what town he had visited. The first couple of pictures were group pictures and nondescript. Then the next picture caught my eye! He said the couple were his host family. The couple could have been a double for someone in our club! Charles and Marilyn confirmed my suspicions. I was looking at a picture of Leroy and Valerie Stokes!! I was so excited – Haruhisa had visited our club those many years ago. In fact, the Aichi club came to Greensboro in October 2007; almost 20 years ago. No wonder he could not remember! (You can see pictures of that inbound journey on our FFCNC website.) As I continued to look at his pictures, I recognized many of our previous and current members (their much younger versions of course) – Margaret Griffin, Patti Sylvester, Jane and Ralph Cauthen, Marcia Meis, Carol and Fred Andresen, Pam Kahl, Marvin Scherl, the Lennons. I even saw a picture of Jim and me and the couple we had hosted - Masayo and Yasuhiko Ando from Nagoya City. In fact, I had tried to contact Masayo when I knew I was going to Japan but got no response. Later a current member of the Aichi club tried to call Masayo who was no longer a member but there was no answer. But what fun I had at lunch that day reminiscing with Haruhisa, seeing all his wonderful pictures, and talking about his experiences in Greensboro those many years ago. Before I left the luncheon, he presented me with some gifts which will be given to Leroy and Valerie to remind them of the friendship they fostered over 20 years ago



Haruhisa Yamada

STILL Wanted: Club Treasurer

When you see or talk with Ray Kiszely, please give him a big “Thank you!” for serving as our treasurer **until** the position is filled. To reiterate, the duties of this position are not extremely time-consuming, requiring about 3 – 6 hours most months. Occasionally more such as when annual dues are remitted. Our club cannot function with this position vacant and, if you know Ray, you know he assists FFCNC in many other ways such as planning Open World programs. As the saying goes, “Many hands make labor light.” Let’s lighten the load a bit for Ray. If you can spare a few hours each month, please consider contributing your time to FFCNC’s operation. You may contact Ray for a more detailed description of the role. Text him at 301-580-3253 or email him at RayKiszely@yahoo.com.



Upcoming 2026 Social Activities

We have had tremendous response for the Seagrove trip. It will begin with a pottery demonstration at the NC Pottery Center. Then our group will visit three potters: Ben Owen III, Dean & Martin and Jugheads. Lunch will be at Cagle's Diner. There is still time to join the group. Contact Lucy Kaplan (336-768-7186, 336-971-6446, or onecake@aol.com) by **May 11**.

Fourteen members have signed up for dinner circles with a strong preference for lunch gatherings rather than dinner. If you signed up, look for more information by May 9th. If you did not sign up and are interested in participating, please contact Lucy Kaplan (onecake@aol.com, 336-768-7186, or 336-971-6446.)

Following our pottery exploration in May, we will be on the road again in June. This time heading to Whitsett. (If you are not on top of your NC geography, this is a small town on the north side of Interstate 40 between Greensboro and Burlington.) SAVE THE DATE FOR WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17TH when we will visit Peacehaven Farms. What, you may ask, is Peacehaven Farms? Peacehaven was founded in 2007 as a residential community for adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities. We will have a chance to meet the current residents, learn about their programs, tour the farm, and see the progress on their new multipurpose community center. There will also be an opportunity to participate in a service project as well as enjoy a catered picnic lunch. Look for details of the upcoming trip soon.

Membership Update

It's not too late to renew your FFCNC membership for 2026! "Full membership" dues is \$100 and the "social membership" dues is \$35. As a reminder, any members who may wish to travel on outbound journeys, international or domestic, should sign up for "full membership."

Ken Ostberg will be contacting all members to verify mailing address, phone numbers, email address, etc. to ensure that our records are current and accurate.

If you have any questions regarding your membership status, please contact Ken Ostberg at ken.ostberg@gmail.com or 336-391-2752.

FF Pikes Peak Journey

Members of the FF Pikes Peak club will visit the Triad in or around October of this fall. Dates will be finalized soon. There will be lots of opportunity to host, so please give that some thought. This club hosted FFCNC in 2013 and they put together a wonderful program for our ambassadors. In the meantime, if you have any questions or suggestions, please contact Roger Poplin at 336-337-4434 or rogerpoplin@gmail.com.

2027 International Journeys

Unfortunately, FFCNC did not receive either of our two requests for a 2027 international journey. However, we are exploring other options that the FFI staff in Atlanta has shared with us. These possible options are Brazil, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Mongolia, and Azerbaijan.



2027 Domestic Outbound Journey

If you are on top of your knowledge of California's 58 counties, you will recognize that the county highlighted in green is Kern County where FFCNC will be hosted by FF of Kern County in the fall of 2027. This is the southern end of the Central Valley. Bakersville is the county seat and home to almost half of the county's population of 900,000+. Agriculture and petroleum extraction are the drivers of the county's economy. There is also a strong aviation, space, and military industry present in this county. We have all watched one or more of the fifty-nine space shuttles land at Andrews Air Force Base in this county. With a heavy Hispanic population, we can expect meals to include corn, rice, and beans. Merle Haggard and Buck Owens called Bakersfield home.

As always, if you are interested in assisting with the planning of this journey, please contact Roger Poplin at 336-337-4434 or rogerpoplin@gmail.com.