

The Duke of Edinburgh Challenge

The last patches of slushy snow are melting here in Hakuba, giving way to the gorgeous greenery that will soon carpet the valley; Spring is in the air.

For those of you unfamiliar with Prince Philip's Duke of Edinburgh Award, it is simply an incredible initiative for young people to get out into the great outdoors. In order to attain the award, participants are required to learn a new skill, a sport, volunteer in the community and complete a self sufficient, self guided expedition. These goals stimulate responsibility, leadership, perseverance and independence, as well as giving them a skill set which will stay with them for life. Designed for those aged between 14 and 24 and broken into three awards, a bronze, silver and gold it is the optimum opportunity for our young people to take charge of their ambitions and achieve their goals. Since this award's creation in 1956, it has extended to 140 countries around the world, and luckily for us Japan is one of them!

We are very pleased that Tokyo's British School runs the 'D of E' awards program, and we are excited to have been a part of that over the past few years. Just this last month, two of our guides went to assist with their bronze hiking expedition. The participants had carefully pre-planned their route, and by exercising their newly acquired map and compass skills, successfully guided themselves on a two day hike, up and over the mountains west of Tokyo. Their heavy packs containing their camping and hiking equipment did not weigh them down, evident by their admirable camaraderie, great team work and enthusiastic energy!

Hakuba has provided an idyllic location for 'D of E' in previous years; with peaks just shy of 3000 meters, permanent snow fields to scramble over and hundreds of hiking trails. These Alps have provided the challenges and adventures sought after by those participating. Alongside the expeditions themselves, those doing the awards have also been working alongside our outdoor guides in pursuits such as mountain biking, kayaking or canoeing. Once they have a good grasp of the sport, our guides teach them how to lead the activities, which they then do for the younger students. In just a few days they are developing their confidence, communication skills and capabilities. The level of leadership and maturity displayed by these youths is really something! The vision behind this award is something that we here at Evergreen fully support, as we too love to see young people engaging with their surroundings and developing an aptitude for adventure and activity; there is a lot of potential for this program here in Japan. I thoroughly look forward to working once more alongside the British School of Tokyo for their next 'D of E' trip to Hakuba.

We live in a day and age that is so heavily inspired and influenced by modern technology that sometimes it can be easy to lose sight of the natural world around us. We can 'see' the world through the screen of our ipad, and 'socialize' with our peers over Facebook. As a result of this, the incentive and desire for young people to go out and acquire these outdoor abilities and develop their social skills is becoming less and less; perhaps it is time to nudge our youths off of the couch and out of the front door, and the Duke of Edinburgh Award is an excellent way to do that.

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