

P.E.I. resident ready to learn on the high seas

Jennifer Whittaker to participate in cross-cultural exchange program, The Ship for World Youth, which takes place on cruise ship in the South Pacific



Passport in hand, Jennifer Whittaker will soon be travelling to Japan to participate in a cross-cultural youth exchange program that takes place on the Ship for World Youth cruise ship.

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CHARLOTTETOWN, P.E.I. – An Island woman will be spending part of the winter on a cruise ship in the South Pacific, participating in a cross-cultural youth exchange program.

Jennifer Whittaker, 25, from Charlottetown is one of 12 Canadians and the only one from Atlantic Canada, selected to participate in Japan's Next generation Global Leaders Program entitled The Ship for World Youth.

The program aims to provide participants with the opportunity to enhance leadership skills necessary to excel in an increasingly globalized world, while cruising around the South Pacific.

Program objectives include broadening international awareness, promoting friendships between Japan and participating countries and helping develop youth who can contribute to the development of youth in their own countries.

“The overarching goal of the program is to connect next-generation leaders from around the world, give them a chance to put in to practice things they may already know, learn from other countries and share skills with other countries,” says Whittaker.

There will be about 240 young leaders on the ship with 120 coming from Japan and the remaining 120 from the other 10 participating countries.

“The overreaching goal of the program is to connect next-generation leaders from around the world, give them a chance to put in to practice things they may already know, learn from other countries and share skills with other countries.”

Jennifer Whittaker

Canada has been invited on 12 voyages since 1989, but it hadn't been invited in five years.

“The application process was pretty intensive,” says Whittaker, adding there were a lot of questions relating to previous leadership roles and international and cross-cultural experiences.

“They really want the participants to be teaching the other participants.”

Whittaker wants to share her knowledge of agriculture, board games and Ultimate Frisbee, which she thinks will be interesting to bring to the table, she said.

Having Japanese background is not a requirement, however, Whittaker can speak Japanese and her mother is from Japan.

She had to choose a variety of classes to take while on board the ship, and has to attend seminars and workshops. The schedule is complete and every hour is dictated, she said.

Whittaker has previous experience in similar programs. Atlantic Canada can be underrepresented in these types of programs, and it's important to have representation from all across Canada, she says.

“If we're going to be a Canadian delegation, I wanted to make sure as many voices as possible were heard.”

The Canadian delegates engage in weekly Skype meetings with each other. Each delegate has a task to work on, and Whittaker is in charge of preparing a Canadian-themed party.

She is looking forward to expanding her knowledge of different countries and cultures, and learning different skills.

“A lot of it is skill-sharing and knowledge-growing on a cruise ship.”

The ship departs from Yokohama, Japan, but delegates must first participate in one week of on-land training in Japan, as well as homestays and other activities.

“Canada and Egypt are going together to central-west Japan and will be there for a few days doing activities.”

The ship departs on Jan. 30 and makes stops in Vanuatu, New Zealand, Fiji and other areas in the South Pacific before returning to Japan on March 3.

Whittaker expects the quarters to be pretty cozy.

“You're going to make friends really fast. I think we're going to learn a lot from each other.”

The program is supported by the UN and sponsored by the government of Japan so a lot of costs are covered, said Whittaker.

Don't hold back from applying to such programs if you're interested in travelling and experiencing new things, she says.

“It's worth the effort to apply.”

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