“Doki doki” went my heart as I stood – with a gift in my hand, outside my hosts’ apartment. 2pm on the 12th of December 2009 was the day I began my homestay with my homestay’s hostess, Y-san and her family. All worries about what to do and say flew away as she welcomed me warmly into her house and her family. Often, their Saturday afternoons were spent playing soccer or tidying up the house. But for that Saturday, it was a special day. Finally, it was time for me to fulfil my promise to Y-san and her family – guiding them on a trip around the National University of Singapore! As both her daughters have a sweet tooth, the Bengawan Solo Cake Shop in the National University Hospital was the perfect place to take a short rest before returning home.

As the clock struck 7, it was time for Y-san’s husband to dish out his Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki recipe. Me as the attentive student and Mr. Y as the jolly sensei, I soon learned the basics to making a delicious meal of okonomiyaki. Apparently, there are 2 styles of okonomiyaki: the Hiroshima-styled is served with noodles while the Kansai-styled has none in it. And of course, no okonomiyaki is complete without the okonomiyaki sauce. It is a die-die-must-have topping indeed!
Not only was the *okonomiyaki* delicious, the *oden* prepared by Mr. Y’s a day earlier was also finger-licking-good.

Quoting Mr. Y, this dish of *daikon* (white radish), potatoes, beef, boiled eggs, fried beancurd etc is usually prepared during chilly seasons like spring, autumn and winter. Since Singapore is always summer-like, *oden* has never been prepared till that day. I was truly touched as preparing the dish was no easy task. Thank you very much, Mr. Y!

Y-san herself was just as good a cook as her husband. Prepared by both Y-san and her eldest daughter, breakfast was a delicious spread of sesame seed-and-egg stuffed *onigiri* (rice ball wrapped with seaweed), egg, tofu and miso soup. All this was then followed by some slices of mango which I had brought back from home in
Malaysia. Truly, one has never really eaten Japanese cuisine till he or she has sampled food prepared by a Japanese!

13th December 2009 was an important day as that was the day Mr. Y will be participating in a Japanese volleyball tournament. Y-san and her children will be present to give their support to Mr. Y. Crowds cheered loudly for their respective teams when goals were made. Encouragements were given when each player did their very best to attempt a nice shot.

While Mr. Y displayed his skills in volleyball, his 6-year-old daughter was displaying rather artistic talents through photography. As she grew restless, I decided to calm the little girl by showing her the basics of picture-taking with my camera. Fascinated, she immediately went around and started taking pictures of every single object in the area. For her masterpiece, she fashioned a boat and a “passenger” out of a strip of leaf, some cotton and a rubberband before taking a picture of it. Here is that picture at the bottom courtesy of the little girl. Kawaii ne?