

The Joys of Being a non-American.

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I do not wish for people reading this to mistakenly think that my time in Japan has been a bad experience. On the contrary, I have enjoyed and relished this opportunity to live and work in a different country and culture. Admittedly, some of the school lunches were a bit difficult to swallow (especially those with 'fermented' in the description) but on the whole, I thoroughly recommend this experience to anyone who is interested in having an overseas experience.

There are however isolated events which I found interesting (for lack of another word due to living in a country where the most basic English words and sentences are required in order for people to understand you).

One of these events occurred when all the ALT's had been asked to teach at one of the many elementary schools in Ashikaga. The kids were lovely, as were the teachers however one remark had me pondering. This came in the following form:

"Do you speak English in New Zealand?" (delivered in a loud, clear, slow voice - all necessary skills for teaching English in Japan).

Another of these 'events' occurred when I was teaching in one of my Junior High Schools. Now, I like all of my schools and all of my teachers however one day I was team teaching with an ichinensei class and the class was doing standard repeating exercises (e.g. I say the word and they repeat it - very involved). Suddenly the teacher breaks out this statement in Japanese that can be roughly translated as the following:

"You have learnt to say this word as (please insert any English word in an American accent). Kiri has a British accent. This is a little different than the taped lessons. Please say it like the tape."

Thirdly (like any good essay I have three points an introduction and a conclusion) I will now refer to an experience which has occurred a few times over the past year. Undoubtedly it will occur a few more times before the end of my contract. This involves New Zealand's close proximity to Australia. To understand this more you have to realize that in schools the students learn about Australia (do you see where this is heading?). Following along with this particular piece of Japanese logic, people here think that New Zealand is actually an extension of Australia. Therefore I know about Australia and can talk about it.

As two of my esteemed American friends contextualised the situation:

“That’s like asking me to talk about life in Canada?”

“Why don’t you ask them what it’s like to live in Korea - they’re close enough.”

In conclusion, (told you I was good at writing essays) my status as a non-American is one which has been an interesting and eye-opening experience. It was not until I came out of New Zealand that I realized how small and isolated New Zealand is, and how much I enjoy the uniqueness of being a kiwi in a different country.