

JAPAN: A CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

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Since coming to Japan, I have had the good fortune to discover many wonderful things about its culture. Some aspects of Japanese culture are similar to that of American culture, for example elements of the school system or the presence of Kentucky Fried Chicken. But mostly Japanese culture is completely foreign to me, and rightly so, inducing such emotions as amazement, enlightenment, and of course shock. Many times I find myself mystified asking profound questions such as, "What?" or "Huh?" Sometimes my questions are answered, but many times the mystery of Japan prevails, and I'm left to wonder. In this essay, I would like to take the time to explain some of my favorite parts of the Japanese culture.

Seeing as I work at a junior high school, I feel I should take the time to discuss the cultural aspects of the Japanese school system that will amaze me for the rest of my life. The first is the act of eating lunch in the classroom while other classmates serve your meal. Another observed cultural aspect is the idea of having "cleaning time" for twenty minutes everyday. While both of these are great ideas that I think should be instituted in American school systems, they would be too revolutionary in America and would never work out. But, my favorite event of all in the Japanese school system is the emergency fire drills. I don't know if these are particularly Japanese, or if they are just way better than American fire drills, but I do know that they are great fun. The day my school had it's drill, they informed me that it would happen in the afternoon and the firemen would come. So far this seemed about the same as the American fire drills that I knew, which simply involved the alarm going off, and each class standing in it's designated spot on the playground until the firemen turned off the alarm and told us to return to class. What they didn't tell me was that we would all run screaming from the building at the sound of the alarm, seeing as the fire department had set off smoke bombs and flares throughout the building. What a great effect! It really got my adrenaline pumping! Then when we were all out on the playground, we were taught how to use fire extinguishers. And some of the students even got the chance to try them out... on a real fire. If I ever get the opportunity, I will suggest this method of "fire-drilling" to the school

b o a r d b a c k i n A m e r i c a .

Everyday, I discover new things about life in Japan. The things I learn and the experiences I've had here have had an impact on my life; or they at least make for good stories for my friends and family back home. All in all, I'm glad that my stars were aligned and the planets in the right place when, a year ago, I asked my psychic friend whether or not I should move to Japan. I will treasure the experience I've had here for a lifetime.