

## Culture Shock

Maria Cicci

I love Japan and I love traveling. So far my time here has been amazing! I have made new friends, went sightseeing, partied a little, tried taiko, joined yoga and Japanese classes, and have settled into my new apartment. Sounds like I'm still in the ecstasy stage of culture shock, right? Wrong. Lately, according to my senpais (and every book written on the subject), I have hit the stage immediately following it. This is the stage in which negative emotions start to take over. The worst part about these emotions is that you can't really describe them or explain where they are coming from. You just know that you don't feel right.

So, with all these kinds of feelings, how is it that I still am able to love every moment of being in Japan? Partly it is due to the fact that even with my current emotions, I have come to realize that this is all a part of the process. I believe that through my frenzied emotions, I am becoming a better person for it. Without the downfalls of everyday life, humans would be very weak creatures. The hard times help us to grow and learn from our trials. True, when a person is actually face to face with these frustrations, the last thing they will be thinking about is how much stronger they will be as a person. However, if we can keep this knowledge in the back of our minds, the hard times might be a little easier to swallow.

It also helps to have a few friends and mentors along the way. The beautiful thing about the Ashikaga-Springfield sister cities program is that it forms an excellent support system. It has reassured me knowing that the other ALTs are here to help me and have gone through similar times. After all, we all have our own bike stories! There are also other people available to us through the program such as any of our English teachers and our vice principal. All of these people are great outlets through which we can express our concerns.

So, my humble advice to those of you who might hit this point during your stay is to don't let it get you down. Don't stop the activities that you once loved to do. You might even have to push yourself a little harder than you are used to, but it is so important that you do! The more you get out and let all the negative emotions go, the faster you'll feel like yourself again. Remember that these negative emotions will pass with time.

Who knows, you might not even hit this phase of culture shock. But if you do, know that it won't last, and be grateful for the time that you get to live in this beautiful country. Keep ya head up!