

The Small Things

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After four months in Japan, I am still learning and experiencing new things everyday. I only wish my vocabulary was expanding at the same rate! What probably amazes me the most about living in a new culture is all the small things that I will forever remember.

Obviously one of the first things I noticed upon arriving in Japan was the toilets. I have never seen so many buttons in a bathroom in all my life. I swear I was like a little kid who wanted to push all the buttons just for fun and the idea of a heated toilet seat even made me laugh. Of course since the cold weather has come, I am no longer laughing. Instead, I have gained a much greater appreciation for the heated seat. My only question now is, "Why don't I have one of these in my apartment?"

A second thing that I quickly learned in order to survive was how to walk up and down the stairs with guest slippers on. Okay, I'm still working on this one and yes it still requires complete concentration to avoid slipping. Now this may seem like a simple task, but for all of you whose feet are too big for those things, I know you know what I am talking about.

Thirdly, and a very important one, don't forget to turn on your hot water. A cold shower is never a good surprise! Of course I haven't quite figured out how to remember to turn it back off.

Another important survival skill that I have learned is how to ride a bike, and I thought I knew the rules of riding! Yep, that's right, riding a bike isn't just for fun anymore. Now I need the best engineering skills to figure out just how much I can cram into my little basket without it popping out on my ride home. Don't forget to maintain a good balance either, especially if you are using your handle bars to hold your groceries bags. One thing is for sure, it definitely keeps shopping to a minimum, especially when you buy twelve rolls of toilet paper. Try fitting that in your basket with the rest of your shopping!

Furthermore, biking can be dangerous too. It's like a sport; it takes total concentration because once you stop paying attention, you are sure to get blind sided. Lastly, I have learned that while biking, fashion attire is of no concern. I have worn a rain suit more in the last four months than I have in my entire life and never been so happy to do so.

So while I may have exaggerated a few of the above facts, I swear the following ones are completely true. I have learned that I love the mountains and hiking them with good friends. That karate is a lot of fun, even when your legs are burning, because you are not only building muscle but also relationships with the people around you. Thirdly, learning a language is fun when the people teaching you are amazing. Additionally, some of the best lessons seem to come from new experiences, which often lead to a better understanding of the surrounding environment. Still yet, the most important lesson that I have encountered is that a kind heart can overcome almost any language barrier to create a lasting connection between cultures. Last and not least, I love being able to see the light in my students' eyes when they finally get it. If you have figured out how to make this happen frequently, please feel free to fill me in! Sometimes I swear that I must be speaking French.