

Why Japan?

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Why Japan? This is a question that all the ALTs get asked a lot. Why would we want to leave our home county and what made us choose Japan out of all of the countries in the world. We all have different answers for this question as to why we came to Japan and why we wanted to teach English. Some of us wanted a break from before going onto graduate school, some want to learn Japanese, and some of us are not sure what we want to do in life so they are taking a year to think about it.

However, for me this question becomes harder to answer once people find out more about me. Once they learn that this is my fourth trip to Japan and that my major in college was East Asian Studies it becomes next to impossible to just shrug my shoulders and say, "I don't know". Next question is usually, have I been to any other countries? To which the answer is yes I have. So then people want to know what is so special about Japan that this is the country I choose to keep returning to. After people find out that I spent a year working in Tokyo, they ask why Ashikaga. People also ask if I have seen a good portion of the United States of America. Again the answer to that question is yes I have. Then they typically ask if I like the US as if maybe that is the reason why I wanted to come to Japan. But I tell them that I like the United States. This brings me back to square one with whoever I am talking to. And I still have the question, why Japan to answer.

The truth of the matter is that there is not a simple answer to this question. It is a lot of different things and events that have combined over my life time that caused me to develop my fascination with Asian culture, especially with Japan. My parents were the first ones to foster my interest in other cultures. They had lived in Japan for three and a half years before I was born. So I always grew up hearing their stories of what was like to travel around Asia and to live in Japan. Because my parents thought it was important to expose me to different cultures, my family has hosted nine exchange students. The vast majority of whom are from Japan, for some reason the Japanese students just seemed to click better with my family. Therefore, when at the age of thirteen my parents asked me if I would like to go on a one month home stay in Japan, I jumped at the chance. After that the rest was history, I was hooked. The culture and the people were so different from anything I had seen in the United States of America or in Europe. I simply fell in love with all of it. Two years later I returned to Japan again. This time I spent a month traveling around Japan by myself. After this I knew there was no turning back, I simply loved everything that I saw. At this point, I know I would major in East Asian Studies at college. After high school graduation I went to Wittenberg University where I majored in East Asian Studies with a minor in Sociology. While I was in college I spent a year studying and working in Tokyo. One of the classes I took while in Tokyo was Nihon Buyo. I was the only foreigner in my dance class, so this gave a unique look into the Japanese culture that most foreigners never get the chance to see. I was fortunate enough to live with a wonderful host family that I consider to be my family just as much as I do my real family back in the States. When my year was up and I had to return to Wittenberg University it was very hard to leave them, but I knew I would be back.

So when people ask me "Why Japan?" There is simply no easy answer. It has been a long string of events in my life that have cultivated my obsession with Japan.