

## The Naked Truth

Leigh Harris

Trying to describe living in Japan is like being twenty five years old and trying to explain what it's like to be twenty five to a thirteen year old. The thirteen year old has ideas and impressions of what it is like to be your age, but will never quite understand until it reaches twenty-five for itself. Regardless, twenty five is never quite how you pictured it, because it is impossible to picture your experience through someone else's, you must experience it for yourself. I believe this is how the Japan experience goes, as well. Consider and appreciate all the advice that your friends and family give you, but remember that your experience will be completely unique. It will be amazing, and it will be your very own.

With that being said, there are some facts that I think the ALT's could all agree on. For example, the sun does rise around 4:00 in the summer. I never thought I would do it, but I now sleep with an eye mask on. It was free from the airline on my flight to Japan, and it has been a life saver. Japan has four, beautiful, and very distinct seasons, and their culture very much reflects these changes. You find yourself looking forward to and anticipating the next season's festivals, celebrations, and dishes. Summer is hot, fall is colorful, winter is cold, and spring is gorgeous. You can also count on getting a lot of experience riding a bike in Japan, as well as falling off a bike in Japan. No matter where you are going or how nicely you are dressed, you will be getting there by bike. Although, I have flown off my bike, flipped off my bike, rolled, and dropped, and have, unfortunately, not always made it to my destinations. Some ALT's have bought cars, but if you are not one of the lucky few, then you should expect to leave the house a little earlier because bikes don't go as fast as cars. I could tell you a million more fun facts about Japan, like expect awkward moments, get comfortable with karaoke, you will never fit into their pants, and expect to try natto, but I think it would only be fair to get right down to the brass tacks. What are your feelings on nudity?

Before I moved to Japan, the only person I was comfortable being naked in front of was God. Little did I know that a large part of the "Japanese Experience" is the bath experience. The first time I was invited to a bath I took my swim suit, but it didn't even make it out of my bag. No, they do not wear swim suits, they DO NOT wear anything. I have never been so scared, but as is true with most things in life, once I did it I realized that it is not that bad. It is actually quite good. Now the baths are one of my favorite ways to fill up free time or warm up on a cold winter's day. They are a great place to chill out, relax, and catch up with your friends, and yes, it is all done in a very

natural and naked manner. I can honestly say that the baths are one of the many things I will miss dearly when I leave.

Speaking of things I will miss dearly when I leave...I will miss the friends I have made at my junior high school and definitely all the students. One of the things you can absolutely count on loving in Japan is the time you spend working. I am serious. Who loves working, right? Well, I have found that my happiest times in Japan, thus far, have been spent at school or at a school event. The students are amazing and you will find yourself becoming more and more attached to them everyday. The teachers are also amazing. They possess an incredible talent for taking care of you and treating you like family. It is when I am at school that I feel I have found a home in Japan. I enjoy being different, and I try investing most of my energy into the time I spend at school.

There are many things in life that you can not control. For example, you can not choose where you are born, when you are born, or who you are born to. When living in Japan, it is important not to try and control the things that you can not change. You will not ever be able to change who you are, just as you will never be able to change Japan to fit you better, but you can make the choice to embrace the differences and have fun with them. None of us wanted to move to Japan because it is exactly like home. I imagine we all wanted variety and a new perspective on life. It is easy to complain and resist foreign culture, and you will have some bad days, but it is so important to choose to appreciate the differences and laugh about them. Remember: think small (everything is much smaller in Japan), have an open mind, and no swim suits allowed in the bath!