

I'm back! It feels weird to be back in Japan already, writing about my trip to the United States. I came back on Saturday night, but I'm still a little bit jet-lagged and feeling overwhelmed by everything in Japan. At the end of my last journal, I wrote that I was happy to be going home, but almost as happy to come back to Japan. But by the end of my visit, I had gotten used to seeing my family and friends and it was easy to drag my feet about coming back. Even so, I was so tired by the end of my visit that the thought of coming back "home" to my place in Japan was refreshing.

One great part about going home after a year is that I saw my home through slightly different eyes. There were so many things that I had forgotten about, or just never noticed before I came to Japan. I was surprised to see that watermelons were huge and yet so inexpensive. I forgot how many different kinds of cheese there are at any grocery store. When I was driving across country with my mom, I couldn't believe how wide the roads were. I kept thinking we were going to hit another car, but there was always enough room. Even food at restaurants was too much for me to handle. I ate at restaurants a few times at home, but was never able to finish my meal. The only good thing is that at home, we have "doggie bags," which means that the restaurant will pack up what's left of your meal so you can take it home and have it for lunch the next day.

I was also a little bit shocked at American service. Flight attendants, store clerks, and people in the service sector in Japan are always so nice and polite. The same people in America are nice, but there isn't the same idea of politeness. Often a store clerk will talk to the customer as if they are friends, which can be nice but also sometimes seemed rude to me. This was something that I had never noticed before I came to Japan.

At the same time, I noticed a lot of similarities between America and Japan that I never noticed before. There were a lot of bugs around my parents' house, but in the past year I had pretty much convinced myself that there were so many bugs here and none in America. Not true. I even had some ladybugs in my bedroom while I was at home! I was also surprised to feel that, at least in the few days I spent in Washington, DC, the US can be just as hot and humid as Japan in the summer, if not worse! My friends had a birthday barbeque and it was so hot that most people couldn't even go outside unless we were in the swimming pool. I feel bad that all this time I have been telling people in Japan that it is so much hotter here (I still think it feels hotter in Japan to me because I ride my bicycle everywhere, but that is a different story).

These were just some impressions that I had on my trip home. I went to

Indianapolis, Washington DC, Baltimore, New York City, Pennsylvania, and Cleveland before I got on the plane back to Japan, so I am still reeling from all the traveling I did while I was there. Next week, I'll try to tell you a little more about what I actually did at home, and maybe bring some pictures, too.