

I've been in Japan now for almost two years, so I think it's safe to say that the novelty has worn off. Of course when I'm riding my bike on a little road between rice paddies or when I catch a clear view of the mountains on my way to school, I think about how lucky I am to lead such an interesting life here. But in many aspects of life, it's easy for me to forget what a great experience this is. But as I've gotten ready for some friends for home to visit, I've started to re-evaluate my life and appreciate the little things.

For one thing, kimono and tea ceremony lessons have become such a regular part of my routine that I questioned whether or not my friends would actually want to come to tea ceremony or try on a kimono. But when I talked with them about doing it, they were so excited to try everything, that it gave me a new enthusiasm for the things that I've grown used to. And they're not even here yet! Planning a trip to show my friends around Japan has give me a chance to reflect on all the things I really like about living here, so hopefully I will be able to appreciate all of the unique experiences that are ahead of me in my last year.

To many Americans, and probably to my friends who are coming today, Japan seems like a very strange place. Customs are so different from at home, the people look different, and the language is incomprehensible. At least if we go to Europe, we can read the letters of most languages and not be completely confused. The unknown in Japan can be very intimidating to visit. I'm happy that I have had a deeper experience than this. I can read the words, the customs don't seem strange to me anymore, and I am not at all intimidated by my surroundings.

Sometimes it's easy to forget that this is not my home, and that in another year, I'll have to go back to America. I've met and get to work with so many nice people here that it's easy to feel at home (thanks to everyone here!). I know that a lot of foreigners living in Japan don't feel this way, so I'm very lucky. So starting tonight, I'm going to try to show that welcoming side of Japan to my friends. Hopefully, they will feel as comfortable and at home here as I have. I'll be sure to tell you how it goes!!