

It's not actually summer vacation yet in Japan, but as far as I'm concerned, it feels like the middle of summer! In America, our summer vacation usually lasts from the end of May/beginning of June until the end of August, so it's much longer than in Japan. In America, the event that usually marks the halfway point through summer is the 4th of July. This is an American holiday that celebrates the end of the American Revolutionary War and the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Some people refer to it as "America's birthday." Now that I live in Japan, a country with such a long and rich history, it seems almost absurd that my country has only existed as America for 230 years!

Whereas towns all around Japan have their fireworks displays at different times through the summer, towns in America all have theirs on or around the 4th of July. In the capital, Washington, DC, where I lived before I came to Japan, there is always a big fireworks display over the national monuments to America's first presidents. I never think of myself as a very patriotic American, but when I see these fireworks, or even pictures like this one below, I get goose bumps! I've never missed fireworks on the 4th of July until these two years that I've been in Japan.

Families and friends also get together on this holiday to have barbecues or picnics, to play friendly sports and just to spend time together outside in the nice weather. It's not such a serious family holiday like Obon in Japan, but it is very characteristic of an American summer. I have many fond memories of sitting with my family on a blanket in the park waiting for fireworks, or having a party with my friends on the roof of our apartment building in Washington DC, waiting to see the biggest fireworks show in the country. It's too bad I missed it this year, but I still got to shoot off my own fireworks with some American ALTs here in Mie. It's a little late, but happy 4th of July!

