

Just yesterday I was looking at my calendar and couldn't believe that it's already almost halfway through the month of June. Even though it's already getting too hot outside for me, it's hard to remember that it's summer when we are still in the middle of the school term. I have about three more weeks of lessons to plan and teach, so it feels like summer vacation is still months away. To me, school summer vacation starts in June, so that would mean that now, on my internal calendar, it only feels like April or May. If I'd had a real office job before coming to work as an ALT in Japan, maybe it wouldn't be such a strange feeling. But I'd been on the American academic calendar for the last 20 years of my life before coming to Japan.

School summer vacation in America lasts for 2 to 3 months. It's totally different from vacation in Japan, which doesn't last nearly as long. Younger school children who aren't old enough to have a job get to do lots of fun things in summer. Most kids go to summer camp at least once in their life. When I was younger, I went to Girl Scout camp for one week once a summer. We slept in cabins and learned about some outdoor things like making a fire, riding horses, hiking, etc. It was fun to meet lots of other kids that weren't at my school, but I didn't like playing outside so much. I also took swimming lessons that met every morning at the local pool for three weeks at a time. Other times I took lessons with my brother at the art museum in Cleveland. My mom would take us to the art museum, we'd have a picnic lunch and then she went shopping or did errands while my brother and I were busy in our classes in the afternoon. It must have been more difficult for families where both parents were working. But there are many summer programs that are designed for kids whose parents are not at home. Also, many people hire babysitters in the summer!

When I was in high school but I wasn't old enough to have a real job, I worked as a babysitter across the street from where I lived. There was a family with 4 young children, and while the mother didn't have a job, she needed some time to do errands, go to the bank or sometimes just have time alone to do things in her house without having to watch the kids. I liked babysitting because it was close to my house and I only worked for a few hours at a time. But looking after someone else's children was always difficult for me. Especially when there were 4 kids of different ages! We played lots of games, played outside in their yard and sometimes went for a walk to the park. The kids were not so well-behaved, but their mom wasn't gone for so long so it wasn't too hard. Many high school students have jobs like this, babysitting for parents who have to go to work even during summer vacation. When I got older, I had other part-time jobs as well. Summer vacation is a good time for students to earn money to pay for their school fees. But the best part about it is having a lot of time to relax and have fun! I feel sorry for Japanese school students who have such a short vacation!