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So Many Discoveries!

– What’s normal in Japan,
yet unbelievable to the rest of the world

The Round Table

Our theme: What surprised you about Japan or another country? We invited three foreign residents of Japan to talk about their experiences of culture shock, and how Japan compares to their own countries.

Three different people, with three different stories – what surprises did they come across in Japan?

The latter half of our feature includes various stories from foreign and Japanese residents of Iwate.

– What was something that surprised you about Japan?

Geni You don’t see a lot of police. I was really surprised about just how safe it is. It is so safe that a girl can go walking alone late at night and still be fine. I would love for my country to someday become as safe as Japan.

Jon I agree with Geni; I haven’t seen many police here. I saw more in my small town back home than here. My town is about as safe as Japan at night, but it’s a little different on the weekends when everyone is out having fun and drinking.

—Are there differences in driving rules and etiquette?

Juana Once, when driving in Japan, a car coming the other way flashed his lights at me, making me think I was doing something wrong. About 100 meters later, there were police pulling people over. In my country, you need to keep your lights on even during the daytime. If you don’t, the other cars will flash their lights at you. The police will warn you if you haven’t put them on.

—How about bicycles in Japan?

Jon Japanese bicycles are pretty old-fashioned. They look like American bikes from the 1950s.

Juana Japanese bikes are all the same color and design. It’s kind of boring that they’re all the same.

Jon We don’t have anything like Japan’s “mama-chari bikes” in Iceland. We just have sports bikes and mountain bikes. And Iceland’s

bikes all have suspension on the front tire to absorb shocks. Nobody wears a helmet even though we go really fast (*laughs*). There’s no basket so you have to carry bags on your back or just do without.

—What is something you experienced in Japan that you had never seen before?

Geni Maybe the loud motorcycles in the middle of the night. Do other countries have that?

Jon Iceland doesn’t.

Juana Really? We have them in Paraguay. Biker fans get together and rev their bikes really loud. They do it around three times a year.

Jon They plan it, huh? (*laughs*)

Geni Cars don’t beep at each other all that much in Japan. (In my country), you have to beep your horn every time you make a turn. Japanese cars are quiet.

Juana That surprised me too. At first it made me really nervous, like I felt all stiff. There are a lot of cars in Japan, just like Paraguay, so I thought that everyone must be in a hurry. But then I looked at the speedometer and they’re just going 50 kilometers an hour. I was like, that’s so slow! (*laughs*) I was saying, hurry up, hurry up.

Geni Keram

Geni is from Turpan in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China, a historic strategic stop on the Silk Road. Four years ago he came here with his wife, who is currently doing research for her doctorate at Iwate University.





Juana Nishida

Juana hails from Paraguay, South America. She met her husband when he was on JOCV (Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers) in Paraguay, and came to Japan when they got married eight years ago.

—I hear that foreigners are often shocked at Japanese toilets.

Jon Japanese-style squat toilets, yep.

Juana And the slippers too.

Everyone So true. (*laughs*)

Geni Japanese toilets are so clean so it's nice to use them. You can use the bidet system (washlet toilet) to clean yourself too. I lived in Beijing for around two years, but I never saw a washlet toilet. Even rural towns in Japan have clean, pristine toilets.

Jon I still haven't used the washlet toilets here in Japan. We don't have washlets or Japanese-style squat toilets in Iceland. I was quite shocked when I first saw one. And sometimes the toilet seat is heated. Well, it gets quite hot actually.

Juana The toilet seats in Paraguay don't warm up, but they're not made out of plastic either. They're a rubber-like substance so they don't make a sound when you place the seat down.

Jon I didn't know how to use Japanese-style squat toilets when I first saw them, so I looked for Western-style. I lucked upon one but sometimes they don't have Western-style toilets at all.

Juana It's kinda like a museum here (because people still use Japanese-style squat toilets) (*laughs*).

—Any differences in customs regarding food?

Juana When I first came to Japan, I thought that maybe Japanese people don't eat or drink all that much. I finally found restaurants and large supermarkets, phew, but Japanese people are all slim.

Jon Certainly, Japanese are pretty skinny.

Juana They're too skinny! (*laughs*)

Geni And they live for a long time too. When you're slender, it's not that hard to go for a walk even at an old age. Foreigners get fat, so



their hips hurt when they're 60, 70 years old, and get sick in a variety of ways.

Jon Yeah, true.

Geni I've started telling my grandparents back home to lose some weight. I started thinking that way when I came to Japan. Japanese 70- and 80-year-olds are all so healthy.

Juana Senior citizens in Japan all ride their bikes around too. Sometimes I worry that it's a bit dangerous, though (*laughs*).

Geni I used to work part time at a restaurant washing vegetables. The owner's father was 94 years old, but I was surprised that he still drove his car and was fit and trim. In my country, people don't even move much after 90.

Juana They really do live for a long time. In Paraguay, it's great if you live that long, but most die before then. People don't care as much about leading healthy lives.



Jon Rafn Oddsson

Jon came to Japan from Iceland as an exchange student at Iwate University, where he enrolled in a master's program at the Graduate School of Engineering. He's currently studying media design, and has been in Japan for a year and half.

—What surprised you about relationships with others?

Jon Everything. There are so many rules about interacting with everyone here. Speaking styles differ between whether you are senior or junior in a group. In Iceland, none of that matters - everyone is the same and you don't use special language. Another difference is that you don't say things outright in Japan. In Iceland, if someone asks if you want to drink something, and you don't want to, you can just say directly, "No, I don't want it." But in Japan, you say, "Um, it's a bit...(*trails off*)" This is so different. I was surprised at first but after a year I'm pretty used to it.

There are times when you don't know whether someone has told you yes or no. For example, if I say, "Would you like this?" and you say, "I'm fine," does that mean you want it, or you don't want it?

Juana Today at work I felt a little under the weather. But when someone asked me, I just said, "I'm fine, I'm fine!" because I'm used to it here. In Paraguay, I would have said, "Yeah, I feel kinda sick so let me take some time off."

—Last, what do you like most about Japan?

Juana The safety!

Jon Yeah.

Geni Definitely, the level of safety.

Jon And how quiet it is. Even the New Year's holiday is quiet. In Iceland, places are and bustling and busy, and you set up off fireworks with your family.

Juana Paraguay is also very noisy! But it's fun. Everyone's all happy-happy

Geni Even Japanese festivals don't really feel like festivals. However, if you want to become something - if you want to study something - Japan is the best place to be. There are so many places to sit down and study.

Juana There are many places to borrow and buy books which is nice.

It'll be easier to speak with people of other countries if we are sensitive to the fact that there is a cultural component to the topics we talk about.

There was a comment specifically about our "northern country" of Iwate.

Iceland gets as cold as Iwate. But we don't have to empty out our water pipes, because they never freeze. Once, I forgot to empty out the pipes when I went out, and I had to frantically pour hot water on the pipes to thaw them out. It was also quite a shock when my washing machine froze and stopped working. (Icelandic)

It's common to use central heating systems to heat up buildings in the colder regions of Western countries. There were many respondents who were surprised that Japan only heats buildings room by room, but there were also a lot of people who absolutely fell in love with the convenience and coziness of the kotatsu table. A kotatsu is a low, flat table covered with a blanket and a heating element underneath, and is vital during Japanese winters.

Someone even said:

I'm definitely bringing my kotatsu back home with me! (Chinese)

The Questionnaire

In the second half of our article, we asked foreign residents of Iwate what surprised them about Japan, and Japanese who have lived abroad what surprised them about foreign countries.

Let's see what sorts of things came as a surprise to them.

■So this is the Japan I've heard about!

Every place welcomes you with an "irasshaimase (greetings to the store)." (Canadian)

When you tell the supermarket clerk you don't need a bag, they tape a seal with the store's name on it. (Korean)

I was surprised that the supermarket clerk reads of the price of every single item when he scans the barcode. (Canadian)

The polite attitude found at Japanese shops apparently surprises people.

Even the topics of daily conversations seem really Japanese.

In Japan, people often ask about your family. In Korea, we don't really have a tradition of asking someone we've just met about their family, so it's something I've never really thought about before. Once someone asked me about my family and I just didn't have an answer off the top of my head. (Korean)

■The Toilet Situation

A lot of foreign residents mentioned the different styles of toilets in Japan.

I first encountered a Japanese-style squat toilet at Kansai International Airport and the JR train station. I had no idea how to use it so I just looked for a Western-style toilet. (American)

The only place you can find squat toilets in Peru are in remote areas. I was so surprised to see one in a metropolis like Tokyo. (Peruvian)

While some people were weirded out by squat toilets, others talked about their culture shock regarding advanced washlet-style toilets.

I was surprised by the warmed toilet seats. There are just so many different functions that I still don't know how to use them. (Australian)

There were Japanese who were a bit troubled by toilets abroad.

They don't sell toilet seat covers in America so I had to bring them from Japan. (Japanese)

They don't supply you with toilet paper in Chinese toilets. Plus, the sewer pipes are tiny and clog easily, so you have to throw away the used paper in a bin by the side. I was not thrilled with this at first. (Japanese)

Also, the U.S.A., New Zealand, Australia, and other western countries apparently place toilet paper on the roll facing the other direction (so paper rolls out from behind) with alarming frequency.

My American roommate and I would keep switching the direction of the toilet paper. (Japanese)



←In Japan, the toilet paper faces this way...

...but some countries place it like so. →



■Be careful when going abroad!

When living in a foreign country, sometimes you are confused when the rules are different than in Japan. It's best to learn the "laws of the land" so that you don't get into trouble.

It's against the law where I lived (Pennsylvania, U.S.A.) to walk around with a clearly-marked container of alcohol. I was carrying a case of wine coolers when I was stopped by the police. That's when I found out it was illegal. (Japanese)

In America, you can turn right on a red light unless there's a sign saying "NO TURN ON RED." (Japanese)

Both foreigners and Japanese can be shocked at each other's customs.

At restaurants in China, you'll often see people place their food scraps and bones not in their plates, but in the center of the table. My Chinese friend told me I was the weird one to put something that was in my mouth back on my plate. But in the big cities and fancy restaurants, people have started placing that stuff back on their plates. (Japanese)

However, a Chinese resident of Japan worries about differences in etiquette.

When you're out eating somewhere, Japanese friends will wipe up soup they spilled, or place skin or shell scraps on a tissue, which is so different from China. Where I'm from, you don't clean up the table until you're done eating and washing the dishes. You just leave any messes until then. (Chinese)

Sometimes we can be perplexed by a country's strange custom, but then shift our perspective when we hear the reasoning. In Peru, they have one such tradition.

In Peru, we don't hand needles or chili peppers directly to each other; we place them in the center of the table for the other person to take. We have a superstition that we will start a fight if we hand them over directly, so I keep following the tradition even in Japan. (Peruvian)

Another person was surprised when going to China and seeing bottled tea.



All of the bottled teas in China, green or black, are all way too sweet. They say that it would be meaningless to sell plain tea that you could make in any old teapot. (Japanese)

It looks like an average bottle of tea, but the contents are very sweet.

It's the custom in China to carry around a thermos of tea so that is perhaps why they think this way. On the other side, Chinese students in Japan were surprised by the bitterness of our bottled unsweetened oolong tea.

■Lots of interesting things to learn from

Respondents also mentioned foreign customs that Japan can benefit from.

In Oregon, U.S.A., you can attach your bicycle to the front of the public buses, so you can still take the bus even when you have your bike. (Japanese)

In Changchun, China, senior citizens have smart cards they can use when boarding a bus that results in free fares and an automated announcement saying, "A senior citizen has just boarded the bus; please give up your seat." Then young people give up their seats. (Chinese)



↑ An Oregon bus with bicycles attached

When you look abroad, you see a lot of cool ideas that have been developed.

■Conclusion

Here are some interesting comments about unique country traditions.

In Mexico, you can choose which type of horn your car has when buying the vehicle. Some people choose cow moos, emergency sirens, or even rapper voices. (Mexican)

There's a lot of Japanese language still being used in Palau, like "bento (lunch box)," "daijoubu (I'm okay)," "gomen (sorry)," "denki (electricity)," and "denwa (phone)." They also use "tsukarenaosu" to mean, "Let's go for a drink." So there's some Japanese being used in a unique way. (Japanese)

TV commercials last so long in England! Sometimes they'll play for 15 minutes during a soccer match. During those commercial breaks, all of the houses in the area go and put some tea on, so then the breakers go out because of the rise of electricity consumption. (Japanese)

Starting Now!

The Association's Projects for 2014

Let's meet up!

World Fair Trade Day in Iwate

Date and time: May 10 (Sat) 11:00-16:00

Place: Aiina 5F International Exchange Center

The event is a way to experience the concept of international cooperation through the Fair Trade initiative. There are a variety of programs, including a goods sale by Iwate Fair Trade shops, a café selling fair trade coffee, a gathering with people from countries heavily involved in Fair Trade, and a workshop envisioning what the world would look like if it was only a village of 100 people.

* Fair Trade: An initiative that increases opportunities and independence for poor residents of developing countries by continuing to buy their products.



Chatland

This event provides an opportunity to casually interact with foreign residents of Iwate. Each Chatland invites a foreigner as a guest speaker to talk about a number of topics, including their country's culture, tourism, and relationship with the world. This year we will hold 8 Chatland events at the International Exchange Center and two other places in Iwate. The first Chatland for the fiscal year will be held at the same time as the Fair Trade Day in Iwate.



One World Festa in Iwate

This is our biggest international exchange festival for the year. This year the festival will be held at the International Exchange Center in November as well as two other places in Iwate. Volunteers and foreign residents will come together to hold the event, with programs like the foreign country booth section where foreigners from many countries will talk about their homelands, areas where Iwate international groups talk about their activities, and fun workshops where you can deepen your understanding of international culture and events.



Aiina Reconstruction Bazaar

The Reconstruction Support Bazaar event is held by various organizations within Aiina to support the areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. This year it will be held twice, on June 15 (Sunday) and October 5 (Sunday) in the Citizen's Plaza on the 4th floor of Aiina.

Where I can I get more information on events?

We post notices on our bulletin board at the International Exchange Center, as well as in our bimonthly international exchange and information newsletter, "jien go." We send copies of "jien go" to Supporting Members of the Association.

New Learning Opportunities Await You

Iwate Glocal College

These seminars are held from a global perspective to increase awareness of Iwate's efforts to internationalize and become a multicultural society. This year, we will hold three seminars in the International Exchange Center (in conjunction with the Iwate Youth International Seminar).



Iwate Youth International Seminar

We hold seminars and workshops for the young people of Iwate (high school and college students) to help raise them into the next generation of citizens who can perform in a global economy. We aim to improve skills that will be important to global workers like language ability and communication skills, and we also give out information on study abroad and working holiday programs.



(Details)

○ Basic format (Held in a seminar-style, in conjunction with Iwate Glocal College)
Students learn about the qualities needed for living in a global society

Place: International Exchange Center

Times: Three times (planned)

○ Overnight Camp

We hope to encourage students to study abroad and develop their communication skills through discussions with exchange students, other foreign residents, and Japanese with experience abroad.

Place: A facility within Iwate

○ Study Abroad Seminar

We supply information on study abroad programs as well as stress the importance of experiencing the world.

Place: International Exchange Center

Seminars on Starting a Japanese Language Class

We hold seminars for people volunteering at local Japanese language classes.



Intermediate Japanese Language Class

We have a Japanese language class for the intermediate level, held at the International Exchange Center.



Sending out Teachers and Facilitators!

Foreign culture seminar - Teacher dispatch

We send out guest speakers and teachers to international exchange and understanding events/seminars held throughout Iwate. The guest speakers are usually Coordinators of International Relations, international trainees, and foreign exchange students on scholarship. Please invite them to international events held at daycares, schools, regional cooking classes, and many more!

International Understanding

Workshops

We send out facilitators for school classes, citizen seminars, and other workshops that deepen awareness of foreign cultures and multicultural society. You can use the Association's "International Understanding Handbook" to create seminars about helping out foreign residents in your region, the acceptance of the International Linear Collider, and many more.

We also hold workshops to improve the skills of our facilitators.



Please apply to and use our supporters!

Japanese Language Volunteers

Japanese language volunteers help foreign residents improve their Japanese ability through conversation and testing. When a foreign resident applies for Japanese language help, we introduce them to teachers with Japanese language teaching qualifications and experience as well as conversation partners who are all listed in our records.



Multilingual Supporters

The volunteers support foreign residents and their lives in Japan with interpreting and translation services. People who can translate in a number of daily living situations, such as medical checkups and driving license procedures, sign up to our list, and we match volunteers with foreigners and organizations who need them.



International Network

We keep a record of talented people (foreign and Japanese) with international experience/skills and superb foreign language ability. We then match them with international events like foreign culture seminars, cooking classes, interpreting/translation, and other services.



Host Families

When you sign up for this list, we can match foreign visitors and Iwate households who want to experience a homestay or home visit.

How do I volunteer? How do I apply for support or a teacher for my seminar?

Fill out one of our supporter application forms or request forms. You can receive the forms at our Association desk, or download the file and send it to us through email or fax.

Always feel free to send us your questions.

Foreign consultation services

We can help foreign residents in a number of ways: Japanese language study, medical/welfare information, child-raising and more.

This year, we have even hired staff to help with our residents from the Philippines.

● General Consultations (Japanese, English, Chinese)

Every day 9:00-21:00

※ English and Chinese help are not available at certain times.

● Consultations in foreign language

Chinese: Tuesday – Friday 12:30-18:00

Korean: Wednesday 15:00-17:00

English (for the Philippines): Thursday 15:00-17:00

※ Please inquire beforehand, because there are certain times when staff are not available.

● Periodic Foreigner Consultation Day

Staffs well-versed in administrative procedures like visas and other issues are here to take your questions. (Reservation required, free of charge)

Consultation day: Every third Wednesday of the month, 15:00-18:00

Come visit us at the International Exchange Center!

We have information for both international, domestic, and Iwate events and services.

We will supply you with this information on international exchange. We also have message boards on various topics, and we also give out information on language partners and foreign language teachers.



We lend out foreign cultural goods.

We have foreign books, flags, costumes, and magazines available for rent. Please use them for your international event, class, or seminar. We also have many books regarding study abroad, working holidays, international understanding, and teaching Japanese language.



* Pictures were taken at events held in 2013.

* We publish information on our projects and budget on our homepage under the "Iwate International Association" heading. (Some information is Japanese only)

”World Connections”

Many countries around the world share ties with Iwate. This feature showcases an Iwatean living in one of those countries.



Wait, Singaporeans like ramen? Surprising Japanese cuisine trends

Chikanori Yoshida

Country of Residence: Singapore



I currently live and work in Singapore, an internationally-focused city-state and strategic stronghold for the world’s transportation and trade networks that is home to numerous branches of foreign companies. Because of this, Singapore is a place where you can enjoy food and ingredients from a number of different countries. Of course, Japanese food is one of those options. There are around 900 Japanese restaurants in Singapore (as of February 2013), as well as branches of the large Japanese department stores Isetan and Takashimaya. You will have no trouble finding Japanese food here.

The demand for Japanese cuisine comes not just from Japanese residents, but from people of all nationalities.



The night life of Shenton Way seen

Japanese cuisine is known for being healthy, safe, and reliable, and spans over many different genres. You can get staples like sushi, tempura, wagyu beef, and sake, as well as outdoor stall food like ramen, takoyaki, and yakitori.

Ramen has exploded in popularity in recent years, and ramen shops selling tonkotsu ramen, a ramen with a rich soup made from pork bones and/or a seafood base, are doing very well. Many famous tonkotsu ramen shops in Japan have set up shops in Singapore, with Singaporeans lining out the door for a bowl at lunch time. According to Japanese TV programs, Chinese tourists in Japan absolutely love going to eat ramen while in the country. Around 75% of Singapore is made up of ethnic Chinese so I think the rich soup and



Marina Bay Sands Hotel and the Merlion

unique flavor makes Japanese ramen a particular fresh and appealing dish to them. Incidentally, ramen in Singapore is a little bit more expensive than Japan, with the cheapest bowls still costing around 13 Singapore dollars (=¥1,040 in February 2014).

As you can see, Singaporeans are very interested in Japanese cuisine. Because Singapore tends to be a “store window” influencing its adjacent southeast Asian neighbors, it’s become a stage where many Japanese regional governments, including Iwate, are increasing exports of their specialty products every year.

Orchard Road, Singapore’s main street, is home to the Isetan Scotts Store where every year a Tohoku Fair is held. There, businesses from Iwate Prefecture come to show off and sell their seafood products, sweets, and noodles. You’ll see something particularly Singaporean during these fairs: their purchasing power. On the eve of Chinese New Year, bags of dried scallop adductor muscles priced at ¥60,000 sell like hotcakes. Singaporeans will buy a good product even if it’s a little pricey. Additionally, there



Isetan's Tohoku Fair (December 2013)

are periodic promotional events where Iwate’s prized rice, beef, sake, and other foods are sold. Iwate-produced food has even shown up as a staple item in various high-class restaurants throughout Singapore.

However, Iwate Prefecture is still not very well-known compared with other regions of Japan. As a worker of Iwate who has been sent here, I hope to raise the profile of “IWATE” in Singapore.

Written February 12, 2014

■ Singapore at a Glance

Area: Around 716 square kilometers

(the same size as the 23 wards of Tokyo)

Population: Around 5,400,000 (as on September 2013)

Ethnicities: Chinese 74%, Malay 13%, Indian 9%, Other 3%

Languages: The national language is Malay, but the official languages of government and commerce are English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil.

(Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs homepage, as of March 2014)



Chikanori Yoshida

A worker for the Iwate Prefectural Government, Yoshida was dispatched to the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) Tokyo Headquarters in 2010. Due to the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, his dispatch was cut short and he returned to the prefecture to work on anti-disaster measures for the General Disaster Prevention Office. In April, 2012, he returned to CLAIR and was sent to their office in Singapore. There he worked mostly on southeast Asian initiatives led by local Japanese governments, international relations support work, Japan tour seminars for southeast Asian local government workers, and tourism/product promotion for Tohoku and Iwate. He returned to Iwate in March 2014.

Supporting Members Sign-up Campaign!

The Iwate International Association is looking for supporting members who support our mission statement and activities.

Right now, as a part of our membership campaign, we will present a gift to all new members who sign up before June 30th.

We look forward to your support.

■ Yearly Dues

The yearly dues from our Supporting Members support the projects we do for the public good of Iwate involving international exchange, cooperation, and the creation of a multicultural society.

- ① Student members (including minors) ¥ 1,000
- ② Individual members ¥ 3,000
- ③ Groups ¥ 10,000

■ Perks of being a member

We'll send these to you as soon as possible!

- Association publications
- Event information



↑Yearly organ "Iwate International Exchange"↑



Bimonthly newsletter "jien go"↑

You'll also receive these discounts!

- Special discounts on Association events
- Special service at a number of cooperating shops

Example of a special service: A 3% discount on a travel tour package



You'll receive a map listing cooperating restaurants, shops and travel agencies

You also will qualify for special tax measures (rebates)!

You can list your dues to the Association as a donation to a special entity for the public good, which will make you eligible for special tax measures for income and organizational taxes.

▶ A wonderful present for you!



Questionnaire Corner

Thank you for reading our Yearly Organ "2014 Iwate International Exchange" (Spring Vol. 76). We would deeply appreciate if you filled out our questionnaire. Your answers will be used in our future plans and

improvements.

We will select 10 questionnaire answerers by lottery to receive "Café Africa Cookies." You can fill out the questionnaire on our homepage or by email.

<http://iwate-ia.or.jp/?l=jp&p=4-3-publications-kikanshi#questionnaire>

- ※Must be postmarked by July 31, 2014 (Thursday)
- ※Winners will be notified by receiving their present in the mail.

▶ Iwate International Exchange – Available in English, Chinese, and Korean

Iwate International Exchange is available in other languages (English, Chinese, Korean) for download on the Iwate International Association's homepage. This issue will be available for download in June so please take a look.

<http://iwate-ia.or.jp/?l=jp&p=4-3-publications-kikanshi>

Cover photo: Chatland in Esashi (March 2, 2014)

■ International Exchange Center

(5F Aiina Citizen's Cultural Center)

- Open: Everyday
- Hours: 9:00-21:30
- Closed: During the year-end holidays

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