



IMPRESSION OF A JAPANESE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI MEMBER

Written by:

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If there is one thing I learnt from being in Japan in the five years I was there, it is the depth of friendships made and the extent to which the circle of friends, who basically adopted me like family, have done their best to make life there a growing experience.

Life was, as it always is, not all peachy while in Japan. Whilst I truly believe that the perks have outweighed the downs of being a student in Japan, there were always hurdles to jump over, issues to muddle over and simply, things to ponder during the lengthy stay in the far eastern country.

The first and foremost hurdle was the language. Though a fun language to learn, one always had to practise, daily, hourly, to master Japanese. Getting time to learn new things in Japanese was not an issue in my first year there, mostly because I was enrolled in an Intensive Japanese Language program at Osaka University of Foreign Language. Practise time got tighter after I began my Bachelor's Degree program at Kobe University. Even though about 95% of classes were conducted in Japanese, and there were new terms to learn every day, and there was nary a chance to improve other language skills, such as in conversation.

Which brings me to a second hurdle - communication in general. Make no mistake, when all else fails, body language is the way to go. It would be a deception to say that mastering any language is easy and effortless. Whilst learning, one needs to use other avenues of communication to get through day-to-day while living in a foreign country. I cannot say exactly how many times simple hand gestures and facial expressions have saved me back in the ol' Japan days. Building up language skills certainly helps with communication, and knowing and understanding Japanese culture certainly helps with building interpersonal relations with friends, colleagues and basically anyone one might become acquainted with.

A third hurdle was the food. I got by rather well by converting to a semi-vegetarian (and by 'semi', I mean that I ate seafood as well). Finding halal food was surprisingly not difficult; with just a little bit of effort, it's not hard at all either! I lived in Kobe, (I studied at Kobe University by the way) and surprisingly, the city had a mosque! And even better, there were three foreign food stores that sold halal meat like chicken (boneless!), mutton and the occasional beef. I was surprised to find food stuff like *Indo Mee*, *kicap manis* & *santan* there too.

There were other issues one might encounter by living in a foreign country but I do feel there was no hurdle tough enough to discourage me at all from going back to Japan again one day. After all even with our differences, we are all one people. I do feel that Japanese and Bruneian culture are more alike than they are different, so it should not be difficult for any of my fellow Bruneians to fully immerse themselves in Japanese society. The higher the hurdle was, the deeper the sense of accomplishment at jumping over it. I have, and am still, enjoying the fruits of my studies in Japan.