

How should we present Japanese culture on our first day abroad?

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Good morning everyone. My name is Shota Tanada. My name is Yuki Morita. I'm Sachiyo Tsutsuguchi. We belong to the Department of International Trade and Transport. We mainly study computer literacy, business management, English and we choose Korean, Russian or Chinese as an elective language. Today, we are going to give a presentation on how we should present Japanese culture on our first day abroad.

We'll concentrate on four issues: first, regrets from senior students: second, research we carried out: thirdly, gap between experience and expectation and finally, our practical suggestion to the students who will go abroad.

Do you know how fast bullet trains are? How high is Mt. Fuji? What's the difference between a shrine and a temple? I was asked a lot about Japan on my first day abroad. Haven't you had an experience like me when you were abroad?

Before I went to the U.K., I thought I knew a lot about Japan because I am Japanese. But I couldn't answer all the questions that I was asked in the UK. They asked me about religion, history and culture.

When I arrived in Canada, I had no problem introducing myself in English: I could say my name, my birthday, members of my family and so on. But that was all. I couldn't answer any questions about Japanese culture, or history. As I am a kind of representative of Japan, I regret that I had so little knowledge.

I was in the United States for a year. I also experienced the same thing. I was asked about World War II. Some of my American classmates blamed my country for a historical event that I didn't know much about. I cried at home.

Are we the only people who lack knowledge about Japan? How about other students from our college who studied abroad? Did they have similar experiences like me?

So we decided to do some research. We asked two questions to 24 students who had studied abroad for at least half a year or more. We asked, "Have you had the experience of not being able to answer questions about Japan well?" Then, 92% of the students answered, "Yes!" What couldn't they answer? 36% of the students answered that they couldn't explain about Japanese culture. 20% of the students replied that they had a hard time in explaining about Japanese history. 19% of the students couldn't even explain about modern Japan, such as fashion trends in Harajuku, celebrities, or even Japanese schools.

The next question was, "What do you think you should have done before going abroad?" The graph shows that 54% of the students who studied abroad for more than half a year answered, "Yes, I should have had a better knowledge of Japan." They had a feeling of regret.

Then, are the younger students aware of the senior students' bad experiences? Do they recognize that they should learn more about Japan before going abroad?

So we asked two questions to 17 younger students at my college who are planning to study in Australia for four weeks next summer. The question was, "What do you think

is the most important thing to do before going abroad?” 94% of the students answered that they need to improve their English. Only 12% answered that they should learn more about Japan. They are mostly worried that their English is not so good.

On the other hand, as I mentioned before, 54% of the students who experienced studying overseas emphasized that they needed to understand Japan more and they should know their country enough to explain their culture in English. Otherwise, they would not be able to make themselves understood in English and enjoy a long conversation.

There is a big gap between the experience of senior students and the expectation of the younger students. If I knew enough about Japan, I could have answered many questions even with a small vocabulary. So, what does this gap mean?

There are a lot of books written in English which introduce Japanese culture. But these books use difficult words so they are not easy for students like us. They are not practical for college students to use them in explaining about Japan.

So, today we'd like to introduce “Easy Introductions Using Your Own Words.” Our secret is the use of five simple words, five key words. Beginners can avoid feeling regretful and have better communication with a home stay family through the use of five key words.

We chose three concrete examples from our daily life to introduce Japanese culture.

The first example is a Japanese food, natto. Natto is a typical food for breakfast, so with only five key words, you can explain it like this: Natto is a fermented food. It is made of soy beans. It is slimy and smells strange, but it is often eaten at breakfast in Japan.

For hinamatsuri, the five key words are girls, display, doll, pray and happiness. You can explain it like this: Hinamatsuri is a day for girls. We display dolls at home. And we pray for children's health and happiness.

The third example is tatami. Five key words are traditional, flooring, soft straw, size and number. Tatami is a traditional style of Japanese flooring. It is made of soft straw. In Japan, the size of a room is measured by the number of tatami.

Is this simple English actually helpful when you're asked things about Japan on your first day abroad? We gave a presentation to the first-year students to show how we can introduce Japanese culture in easy English with five key words. After the presentation, we asked them two questions.

The first question was, “Do you think you can introduce Japanese culture or customs on your first day abroad with five key words?” 74% of the students answered, “Yes.” The next question was, “Are you going to practice the three examples with 5 key words when you go abroad?” 97% answered, “Yes.”

Here are some comments from the students. “I learned that easy expressions were enough to explain about Japanese culture or customs.” “Concrete examples are easier to describe Japanese events.” “The presentation seemed practical and simple.”

From their comments, we found out that using five easy words we already know is very helpful. If we use the words we know, and learn more about Japan, we can communicate better with our home stay family.

Then, how do you explain about bullet trains, the Shinkansen?

The bullet trains run faster than 200 kilometers per hour. The fastest one is 300

kilometers per hour. It takes 3 hours from Tokyo to Osaka by Shinkansen.

OK. Then, how could you explain the difference between a temple and a shrine with only five key words?

Five key words are “religious, church, respect, spirit and ancestor.” For example, a temple is a religious place and works just like a church. We go to a temple to respect the spirit of our ancestors.

Also, I can explain a shrine with five key words like this: we go to a shrine to pray for our success, happiness and health on the first day of the year. So a temple and a shrine are deeply connected with our life.

We knew that we hadn't known much about the world before we went abroad. However, we didn't realize we had known very little about Japan. Let's learn five key words to explain about Japan, because they are very practical.

And let's use concrete events and places because they are easier to show the Japanese way of life. So we'd like to pass our suggestion to the younger students before they go abroad.