



Dispatches From **Kyoto**

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PART ONE

Getting caught up to now.

I remember being nervous as hell in the airport terminal. The time had come to leave and all the hard stuff should have been behind me. The only thing that I had left to do was get on the plane. See, I hate flying and sixteen hours in a 747 maintained by the lowest bidder is not my idea of a good time. Thank the heavens for Zanax, which at least makes it so that every time the plane is bumped I don't freak out like William Shatner in *The Twilight Zone*. When the plane doors finally closed behind me, all I had left to do was wait. Well, wait and watch whatever god awful in-flight movie I was going to get.

On overseas flights, the airlines usually show three movies. One of them is good. One of them is a family movie. One of them is garbage. This can only be intentional. It's like the airlines asked themselves "how can we make a flight lasting more than half a day feel any longer?" The answer apparently involves making a captive audience watch anything starring Mathew Perry. I recommend coughing up the five bucks for the little bottle of vodka and an orange juice. This should let you sleep at least until something decent is on.

My flight left Detroit at 3:40 PM and landed in Osaka Kansai airport at 7:05 PM the next day. There is a weird feeling that comes with flying that long with the sun always in the window. It's hard to sleep in a plane anyway but add to a constant feeling that time has slowed down or stopped and you can just forget it. You do, however, have plenty of time to think. For fifteen hours

I questioned what I was doing. I had only been to Japan once before, and only stayed for a month. Could I make the transition to living there full time?

I had been exposed to the same stereotypes of Japan as everyone else: big eyed cartoon characters, small but efficient cars, sushi, Zen, etc. I know that these things are preconceived notions about a different culture, but they are reinforced so often in American programming that it's hard not to look for them at least a little. In all fairness, the last time I was in Japan I learned that the Japanese have a few stereotypes about Americans.

Japanese stereotypes about Americans:

1. Americans carry guns. (And yes just about everyone in Japan knows Detroit. You get pretty much the same look in Japan as you get in the U.S. when you talk about living in Detroit. That "how often do you dodge gunfire" look.)
2. An American's entire diet is hamburger, fries, and a Coke.
3. Americans give two shits about the environment.

Of course, even in Japan, not all stereotypes of Americans are bad. I heard many times that Americans are very generous and bright. After fifteen hours of unrelenting sun, however, I could no longer tell myself that I was afraid of the culture that I was throwing myself into, but that after living, working, eating, and sleeping in that culture, day after day, I would never be able to look at my own in the same way ever again.