

Travel Advice for New AETs

Arranging Travel:

- Look at multiple travel sites to compare prices on flights and hotels, or go directly to the official sites if you have a specific airline and/or hotel in mind
 - Personally, I go through Airbnb because 1) it's quite cost effective and I have a teacher's salary and 2) I like having the opportunity to stay in the homes of locals, it makes me feel like I'm being more immersed in the culture
 - ✧ If you do go through Airbnb, do your research by looking at all the information the hosts and the site provide, especially look at where their homes are located, read previous guests' comments, and scrutinize the cancellation policies; even though these homes are under the Airbnb name, they almost operate as their own establishments because of the freedom given to the hosts
- My best piece of advice on arranging travel is to read everything carefully; I've heard horror stories about the policies of airlines which led to people not being able to board the flight at all or Airbnb cancellation policies that only gave 50% of the down payment

Where to Go:

Here are a few options to help you decide where to go in Japan:

- You can search "where to go in Japan" and read lists of places recommended by other people
 - In the beginning, I did this option and actually found a list of amazing places to visit in Japan; it's definitely something I recommend doing if you have free time
- You can research the forty-seven prefectures in Japan and see if any prefectures stick out
 - Admittedly, I never did this, but I will say that it pays to just look at a map of Japan
- You can ask other people in the AET program about their own travels over the years
 - Sometimes they will just tell you and you'll think, "Um...I didn't ask for this."
- You can ask your Japanese teachers about what they recommend seeing in Japan
 - I think that this is the best method to help you decide where to go, what better way than asking the locals themselves? Plus, virtually every Japanese person I've met is extremely proud of their country so they'll be more than happy to recommend places to you, but make sure they're not busy when you ask them!

The Do's/Don'ts of Travel:

Wherever you go, whether it's the next town over or another continent, remember that you are a guest, I cannot stress that enough; you are an ambassador of your country so don't perpetuate the stereotypes, break them to demonstrate that their image of all Americans is wrong

Do's:

- Make a list of places to visit beforehand, or have an itinerary with every minute

- planned if that's your style
- Check Pinterest and other sites if you are an over-packer, like me, and need help just sticking to the essentials
 - Check that you have everything multiple times over the multiple days leading up to your departure and arrive at the airport at least an hour before your flight; personally I arrive 2-3 hours before my flight (I blame my father) in case there are long lines at the check-in desk and at security and if the gate is far away
 - Talk to the locals as much as possible, study the language beforehand or bring a phrasebook if you must; many will appreciate the conscious effort to speak in their language, even if you do butcher it beyond comprehension...unless they're French, then there are many factors that are taken into consideration and you may or may not have a pleasant experience
 - If you find yourself in a foreign culture, adapt as much as possible by observing from the background; if you really want to experience and learn about that culture, try to blend into it, watch how people speak, behave, and dress
 - Enjoy yourself, within the parameters I just mentioned above, because you have a chance some may never have
 - Be vigilant, even though Japan is one of the safest countries I've experienced, you can never be too careful
 - Try the local cuisine, but maybe it's better to not ask what you're eating

Don'ts:

- Don't be bound by other people, i.e. if you want to travel somewhere, but nobody can or wants to go with you, go anyway; I've travelled by myself many times (what are friends?) and even though the downside is not being able to share your experience with anyone, the upside is that you can do whatever you want for however long you want
 - When I lived in France, I spent five days by myself in London and it was wonderful; I did everything I wanted to do, including visiting museums and taking my sweet time; personally, I prefer to visit museums, especially art museums, by myself
- Do not go around asserting that your culture is better than theirs, remember what I said about being a guest in their country
- Being comfortable is a priority, but dressing too casually has the potential to put a target on your back, especially in European countries where they can tell who's European and who's not; foreigners are the main targets for pick-pocketers so be extra vigilant if you're still going to be rocking your Nikes and selfie stick 24/7
- Don't let taking pictures become more important than being in the moment; forget about getting as many likes as possible on Instagram and take out the earbuds; I'm almost relieved every time I see the "No Photos" sign because I won't be distracted with taking the perfect picture
- Don't just speak a louder and slower version of English to the locals, I don't know why people keep doing this; if the locals don't speak any English, slowly yelling at them won't make any difference

Advantages of Travel:

Traveling is one of the greatest pleasures and privileges in life. If you find yourself faced with the chance, take it. Swallow any fears and just go for it. It's absolutely incredible what can be learned and experienced by being immersed in a foreign culture.

- You obtain a kind of confidence after a successful trip; there's a special set of skills required in planning a trip, adapting to a foreign culture, having fun, and coming back in one piece
- Travelling is a lot of fun
- You can meet people and make memories you'll always remember
- You can make your dreams come true by visiting a place you've always wanted to visit
- You can learn something new, either by learning a new language and culture or having your original perception about that place proven wrong
 - Personally, this is one of my favorite things about travelling because I learn that the entire world has false notions about each other; stereotypes are obviously false, but perhaps they exist because it's impossible to accurately portray any culture with something you see on a screen or read on pages; the French don't wear berets and eat pastries all day and Japan isn't only filled with technology-crazed fan boys, and I never would've known that, as a fact, if I didn't grab the chance to travel to, and then live in, both countries

Travelling will break your preconceived notions. It humbles you like little else could because you realize how big the world is, and how small you are. It would be a great shame if you prevent yourself from learning such a significant lesson in life.