

JUNIOR B DIVISION (Years 9-10)

Imagine you are in Japan helping to prepare a Japanese student for an exchange trip to Australia. How would you describe some of the key differences between the two cultures regarding manners?

How to act in Australia

When you are going to Australia, it's alright to feel out of place. The Japanese way of life is different in Australia especially in manners. So just because an Australian acts in a way that would normally be rude in Japan, it does not necessarily mean that it is wrong in Australian culture and vice versa. As such, try to keep a very open mind. But don't worry; Australians are very easy-going in our attitudes and manners so they will not be insulted if you make a small mistake. This can be seen through the 'meeting' etiquette; 'gift giving' manners; the 'table' manners; at school and Australian 'modesty' and 'mateship'.

Whenever, you meet a person in Japan you would show respect and deference based on their status e.g. older, gender and your own as well as bowing to them. This 'meeting' etiquette is very formal and often offensive if the correct manners are used. Whereas in Australia, people simply greet each other by saying "G'day" or "Hello" and always prefer a handshake, a smile or even a 'fist-bump' (bumping usually the person's right fist with your own). As such, there is not really a correct way of greeting someone in Australia. If you are unsure, wait for the other person's response and follow their lead.

Another detail that you should be aware of is that many people will even ask you to use their first name or a nickname at the first meeting. If this occurs, do not hesitate to use it because it may insult the person if you do not. Also people may be confused by your name because of the way, Japanese people introduce themselves. In Japan, you would say your family name first, followed by your first name. As such, Australians may believe that your first name is your family name. So if a person does make this mistake, politely correct them.

During your exchange trip, your host family will most likely give you a souvenir to remind you of your experiences in Australia. Normally in Japan, you accept the gift and will not remove the paper. However in Australia, when you do receive a gift, it is a good gesture to remove the wrapping in front of them and admire their gift. In both cultures, people do not mind gifts which are not expensive as long as it is thoughtful and meaningful.

At the table when you are about to eat in Japan, as you know the honoured guest or eldest in the house begins the meal and there are rules when using the chopsticks; to ask for more food and drink and to show that you have finished eating. In Australia, it is the fork and knife that are used for eating: fork on the left hand and knife on the right. Whereas a specific person has to start the meal, anyone can begin the meal in Australia. If you want more food or drink just ask for more and to show that you have finished eating, just place the knife and fork on the plate.

As an exchange student, you will most likely visit a school during your stay. If you are actually going into a lesson, then you should know that the way lessons are run reflect Australian attitudes and manners. In Japan, lessons are generally very quiet and students will mainly copy down notes set down by the teacher. In Australia however, lessons are generally noisier with the teacher encouraging open discussion in class about a topic. Teachers purposely encourage open discussion because it shows to them that you understand the ideas and it engages the class so they will be more focused in class.

Another difference in the school is that in Japan, teachers are usually very strict when it comes to manners but in Australia, students and teachers tend to be very informal in the classroom. Students tend to speak to the teacher in a very casual manner and unlike Japan, teachers address students usually by their first name. As such, it is common to find that teachers in Australia form a much closer relationship with students because of this informality. In a way, this type of relationship is mutually beneficial because the teacher will be able to better assist them in their education and it promotes a sense of friendship.

The most important thing with Australian manners is this idea of 'modesty' and 'mateship'. This concept can be seen through all of the situations described above. This is why Australians are known throughout the world as easy-going, brave and value sincerity. One of the most famous examples of these values (manners) was during World War 1 when Australians were sent to Gallipoli. The Australian soldiers were willing to give their lives for the British. This moment in history represented Australia's greatest and saddest day, known as ANZAC Day. Even though about 90 years have passed since that fateful day, those soldiers' actions and attitudes are very much the same today. Current Australians still value honesty, sincerity and hate people acting better than they are. They enjoy a person who is modest, humble and has a sense of humour so they don't mind a good joke or a prank, just as long as it is just for fun. These people just want to be good friends with new people. They always try to be friendly towards each other and want everyone to feel like a winner.

Although this type of attitude and manners may seem too impolite when compared with Japan. For example: the concept of 'face' – personal dignity and having a higher status over another. Japanese people would never intentionally do anything to cause a loss of face to another so they avoid openly criticizing or insulting each other and are usually very polite and formal towards strangers. Whereas Australians will generally speak their mind about a subject (even though they could be insulting a person) and prefer being informal to just about anyone. So when you go to Australia, people may seem to be rude but they are just being honest. The informal language and the use of slang will probably confuse you so try your best to master as many of these as possible. For example: someone could say to you 'G'day mate', it basically means 'Good day friend', a greeting to a friend.

In conclusion, although in Australia, there are quite a significant number of differences in various aspects of our manners. It is alright if you struggle adapting to this way of life. You are only an exchange student from Japan so people will generally be more tolerant and

accepting. I stress this again; they will not be insulted if you make a cultural mistake and if you do make a mistake, just learn from the experience and move forward. If you are unsure about something, just ask politely and they will assist you as best as they can.

Bibliography:

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etiquette_in_Australia_and_New_Zealand Accessed: 24 July 2011

Kwintessential. <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/australia.html>
Accessed: 24 July 2011

Japan Guide. <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2005.html> Accessed: 24 July 2011

Japan Guide. <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2006.html> Accessed: 24 July 2011

Kwintessential. <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/japan-country-profiles.html> Accessed: 24 July 2011

The Japan FAQ. <http://www.thejapanfaq.com/FAQ-Manners.html> Accessed: 14 August 2011