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Some Japanese customs that may confuse foreigners

There are many customs and behaviors that are natural for Japanese people for various reasons. To foreign visitors, some of these customs can be a bit confusing. Website MADAME RiRi offers a few examples.

1. Making the peace sign (vee)

Many young Japanese people form a vee with their fingers when they pose for photos. In many other countries, this is the sign of peace. But there is no such meaning in Japan. Fortunately, Japanese make the vee sign with the palm of their hand facing the photographer and not the back of the hand, which might get them in trouble overseas.

2. Sitting on the floor

Many foreign people wonder why Japanese people sit on the floor. It is very rare to see people sit on the floor in Western countries, where tatami mats are not common. Many foreign visitors to Japan find it hard (and painful) to sit on the floor, and prefer to sit on couches or chairs.

3. Drinking barley tea

If you open the fridge in most Japanese homes or look at any vending machine, you'll probably see barley tea. It's a refreshing drink that goes well with meals and is particularly good in hot weather. It doesn't have a lot of caffeine.

4. Slurping ramen

Japanese people usually slurp when they eat noodles such as ramen, soba and udon. Although slurping noodles is considered rude in Western countries, in Japan it is an expression of appreciation for the meal.

5. Nodding response (Aizuchi)

When you communicate with Japanese people, you often see them nodding their response with words like "He," "Un," "Soso," "So nanda" and so on. This type of nodding response is called "Aizuchi" in Japanese. "Aizuchi" is also a good way of looking like you are taking part in a

conversation. Foreign people seldom use these words, perhaps because they feel it will look like they are not listening seriously.

6. Double-eyelid surgery

Perhaps this one applies to many women in Asia, not just Japan. Double eyelid surgery is common because young women want to have bigger eyes. Have a look at the girls who on the covers of fashion magazines, or pop diva Ayumi Hamasaki. Foreigners may wonder why Japanese women get cosmetic surgery for their eyes but don't do anything about their teeth.

7. Walking pigeon-toed in high heels

Some Japanese girls cannot walk gracefully in high heels and end up walking pigeon-toed.

8. Bowing

Bowing is an important part of Japanese society, for saying hello, goodbye, apologizing or expressing condolences. Some Japanese people even bow while talking on the phone. In Western countries, handshakes, hugs and kisses are more common.

Questions

1. Why do you think so many Japanese people make the “vee” sign in photos?
2. Do you prefer to sit on the floor or on chairs? Why? Why not?
3. Do you think any of these Japanese customs are strange? Why? Why not?
4. Are there any other reasons for slurping ramen? Why do you think slurping is considered to be bad manners in some Western countries?
5. What do you think English speakers do instead of *aizuchi*?
6. Why is dental surgery so rare in Japan?
7. Why are big eyes popular in Japan?
8. What do you think about pigeon-toed girls in heels? Are they ungraceful or do they walk that way intentionally?
9. Do you bow when you're talking on the phone? Why? Why not?
10. Do you ever shake hands, hug, or kiss your friends? Family? Why? Why not?
11. What Western customs do you think are strange? Why?

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