

I LIVE IN JAPAN

Interview Series of
Foreigners Who Live in Japan

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University Professor

Gary J. Wolff

From Houston, Texas, United States

How long have you lived in Japan? 24 years, 7 months

Why do you live in Japan?: I came to Japan after my divorce in America to start a new life & to begin a new English teaching career in Japan.

What is your occupation?

I'm an adjunct university professor, teaching 270 students at 4 different universities. Through the years I've also worked as a corporate trainer, children's entertainer, and part-time actor & model, appearing on Japanese TV a number of times.



Why did you choose that job? How is it?

Sixteen years ago, the university where I first started teaching had an opening for a professor in their College of Science and Technology. Because of my background in engineering with both bachelor's and master's degrees in civil engineering, I was uniquely qualified & recommended by a colleague, the timing was right, and I was fortunate to be hired. Though the years I've been blessed to be offered similar opportunities at three additional universities. I'm guessing that Japanese university students are in many respects like university students in any other country; easily distracted in the classroom with their smart devices, but for the most part are very hard working. I've found teaching at the university level very rewarding & uplifting.



How do you think Japanese working conditions compare with your country?

For over 15 years, I had the pleasure of working in the international operations department for one of Japan's top 10 construction companies and it was a very culturally rewarding experience. The

Japanese work ethic is very organized, strict, and even rigid to some extent, with a lot of regulations & paperwork. However, one cannot help but admire the punctual nature of meetings, work schedules and other company functions.

What do you find different about living in Japan over the term compared to when you first arrived or came as a tourist?

I believe that when most foreigners arrive on Japanese shores, they tend to look at the country through rose-colored glasses, choosing to focus only on the exciting, cool and wonderful aspects of the country. However, after one has lived in the country as long as I have, one tends to realize that Japan in many respects is like any other country with its own fair share of shortcomings and negative aspects. Having said that, though, I can honestly say that I will always, forever and a day, appreciate the wonderful kindness of the Japanese people, beautiful scenery (especially the mountains), delicious food and the ultra convenience of modern Japanese society.

Which places in Japan do you recommend that foreigners visit?

For anyone who enjoys the great outdoors, one would be remiss not to take the opportunity to experience Japan's wonderful mountain scenery which makes up 70% of the country.



Are there any aspects of the Japanese culture or its people that you find bizarre or unique?

One of the biggest culture shocks I had when I first arrived in Tokyo was how seemingly



overdressed business people were on trains and subways. I was thinking to myself, "Wow, do all these people work on Wall Street?" With the exception of summer, when Japanese business people gear down with a more relaxed dress code

called "cool biz" (for example, where men are not required to wear coats or neckties during the ungodly hot and humid Tokyo summers), for the most part, Japanese

business wear is much fancier than in the States. The one thing I've never adjusted to after all these years is the overwhelming propensity for most business people to wear black suits, black coats, black bags, black shoes... and of course, black hair. So when you navigate the trains and subways on your everyday commute, it's a sea of black. No offense, but as one who comes from the States, it'd be nice to see a bit more color.

What do you appreciate most about Japanese culture?

In no particular order, a few of these include the clean, safe, and efficient train/subway network, national health insurance, a very safe & honest country (almost zero firearms), over 2000 onsen (hot springs), and the absolutely stunning cherry blossoms and brilliant fall colors, neither of which we have much of in my home state of Texas.



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