
IMPRESSIONS OF TOKAI

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Having been in Tokai for nearly four months and having settled comfortably in, it is a good moment to contemplate life here in its various aspects, especially in comparison with other places where I have lived or even made brief visits. Although I wish to do much more than post a quality-of-life index on this page, any such rating would be very high.

My first impression is that Tokai is in many ways unique, and it appears to me that it may be so even within Japan. The nature of the town, itself, with many large company offices and laboratories related to the nuclear power industry, is quite reminiscent of a place like Los Alamos, New Mexico. Like the latter, Tokai is somewhat dependent on neighboring towns for shopping in the broad sense, but not for restaurants oddly enough, which are better and far more numerous in Tokai than in Los Alamos.

Unlike Los Alamos in another important sense, Tokai is within range of an easy day trip to a large city (Tokyo) with immense resources for shopping, culture, and entertainment. This circumstance is similar to my New Jersey home near Princeton, which is equidistant (~75 km.) from New York and Philadelphia. And going back to my early days, Tokai with its picture-perfect vegetable gardens and wide-open spaces, is strongly reminiscent of the small community of farmers and suburbanities where I grew up outside of Minneapolis, Minnesota. This arrangement suits my notion of ideal living conditions.

As far as resources within Tokai, itself, are concerned, my experience to date is somewhat limited in scope. Nonetheless, one such resource which has already made a profound impact on my life experience here is the Saturday morning Japanese language class at the Tokai Cultural Center. Not only is the level of instruction high, but

the program is run by some very enthusiastic and dedicated people who volunteer their time to this worthwhile endeavor. This is a valuable resource to the students - foreigners like myself - and to the community at large. Through this activity I am not only progressing in my Japanese language study, but also I have become acquainted with a lively and cosmopolitan group of people, both native and foreign.

To those who may not even think about such things, some ability to communicate in Japanese is important here, just to deal with trains, taxis, buses, stores ... and banks. In this regard, the people of Tokai have been very helpful to me. I had an amusing experience at my bank the first time I went to make a money transfer to another bank. The charming ladies who help you at the counter were having some difficulty communicating to me how this was to work. Finally, one with a pocket dictionary pointed to a few critical words and I quickly understood. We all smiled in relief, and she bowed a deep bow, partly deferential and partly triumphant. It was a priceless moment.

Finally, I have to say that it is a special treat to be able to live by the sea. Even though it is not easy to find a place in Tokai where you can actually get a view of the water, the cool breeze that blows inland almost every day is an unmistakable sign of its presence. The wisps of fog that drift through the trees outside of my office window are highly reminiscent of the six years that I spent in the San Francisco Bay area. Even the name "Tokai" itself refers to the sea. The sea confers many benefits upon the residents of Tokai, even though one does not often speak of it. Without it, the special aura that surrounds Tokai would be greatly diminished.

All in all, my feeling is that I have taken up residence in one of the truly privileged places on our globe.