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Japan is home—the place I got engaged, married, and gave birth to my daughter. It's the birthplace of my husband. I never expected Japan to become so special to me six years ago, let alone that the most important events of my life would happen there. It isn't a perfect country—no country is—but I love many of its quirks, traits and customs.

We didn't know what the future held and we had set up a life there.

A sudden turn of events and circumstances forced us to move back to the US in January of this year. We made the decision to move only two months before, as financially and emotionally we weren't in a place to stay.

I've been struggling with reverse culture shock since coming back. I'm not sure I've ever felt like I "fit in" here in the States, but I feel it even less so now. I'm trying to adjust while pining for Japan, despite the fact we had plenty of reasons to move back. So to those planning to repatriate from Japan anytime soon, here are some things I've learned that might help. As we're all different, I don't think we experience reverse culture shock in the same ways or to the same extent, so please feel free to share your thoughts.

**1. You might feel like you're in a foreign country even though you're moving back "home".** I walk around my hometown with a mix of memories playing in my head on repeat and nervous thoughts as I try to grasp what isn't familiar anymore.

**2. Even if you've kept in touch with family and friends, those relationships might be different now.** This depends on many different factors, but you may find that some relationships faded in your time away, while others you thought were long gone might suddenly resurface.

**3. People may see you the same way they did before you went to Japan.** If you have changed a lot, you might have difficulties relating. Family and friends might have an image in their minds of who they think you are that doesn't reflect who you have become. It takes time for people to see you in a new way, but some may not change their views.

**4. Be aware of your expectations.** For example, I thought returning to the US would mean our families would bend over backwards to help us, considering the dire position we were in. In some ways I wanted to return to the US if only to have family help, particularly with our daughter. Some family members are willing and happy to help, our parents in particular, but they also work and have their own busy lives, or live too far away. Some aren't interested in helping. And of course, it takes our daughter a while to warm up to people.

This was depressing at first and I sometimes wondered what the point of coming back was. Once I changed my expectations to match reality, things improved. So my advice: **don't give up; adjust your expectations; and don't be afraid to ask for help.**

**5. Give yourself time to rest if you need it.** It's a big transition. Get sleep and eat well. Do what recharges you, whether that's socializing with others, traveling around at "home", or devouring stacks of English books—finally!—from the library.

**6. Get involved with Japan-related projects to keep yourself connected to the country and to work through all those emotions.** Volunteer, put together photo albums or scrapbooks, get involved with [JETAA](#), read and

write about Japan for JETwit or other publications or blogs, and stay in touch with your Japan community.

**7. Going shopping may cause overwhelm and panic attacks, especially if you are prone to anxiety.** The sheer amount of “things” always jolts me when we go shopping, even still, six months later. Japan has plenty of “things”, too, but the US is overflowing with options. It’s nice to have more choices, but more choices also means more decision-making, and that can be stressful. Don’t berate yourself if you feel this way, and there’s also nothing wrong with shopping online.

**8. Your English might sound funny.** If you’re used to speaking Japanese a lot of the time, you may find yourself struggling for words more than usual when trying to communicate with others, or using the wrong ones. Treat this as you did when you were learning Japanese—laugh about it. Or you might be using words you didn’t use before Japan. Some people may not understand, but if they have never lived abroad, they probably won’t.

**9. Finding a job can be hard.** Depending on the economy, where you’re moving to and what your education/training is, don’t be surprised if it’s difficult to find a job immediately after returning. I recommend networking as much as possible before leaving Japan, whether you plan to leave or not, and make connections all over the world. It’s easy to do now with social media. (e.g., the various [JET Alum professional groups on LinkedIn](#).) If it’s relevant to your occupation, start a blog, become an expert, and brand yourself. And definitely join the [JETwit Jobs Google Group](#) for the most up-to-date, JET-relevant job listings, if you’re interested in staying in a Japan-related career.

**10. Realize the five stages of repat grief** (from [this video](#), based on the five stages of grief):

1. Denial — “What could be easier than moving home?” “Nothing has changed, I’ll fit right in.”
2. Anger — “It’s not fair!” “Nothing will ever be the same.”
3. Bargaining — “Just one more posting, anywhere!” Or in my case, “Why not move back to Japan?”
4. Depression — “My life may as well be over.”
5. Acceptance — “I had a great time overseas.” “I can make a good life here.”

It’s normal to feel these emotions. I’d be lying if I said I haven’t cried about missing Japan. Multiple times. It’s ok to wish you were there again even if you know you made the right decision to return home. And you can always go back, even if just to visit.

Returning home can be tough. Especially if you lived in Japan for a several years. But remember that you aren’t alone, and that you *will* be ok.