

Home Sweet Home

After living in Japan for four years, I finally got a chance to visit my home country of Tunisia. I had forgotten how long the trip was – it took 20 hours on planes from Tokyo to Paris, and from there to the capital city of Tunis. Thankfully the last plane ride, from Paris to Tunis, was short – just two and a half hours, because, although the countries are on two different continents, they are actually quite close to each other.

My mom was super happy to see me, and she cooked my favorite foods – of course I had lots of lamb and mutton, with a variety of breads, both of which I don't get much of in Japan. She also made several couscous dishes for me, with lamb of course, but also fish and vegetable couscous dishes. She had also kept my bedroom just the way it was when I left. It still had my baby blanket, toys, Gameboys, and a lot of my clothes, including my *cosplay* outfits – I used to cosplay characters from my favorite games and movies, like *Mononoke Hime*, Luffy and Nami from *One Piece*, and also Samus Aran from *Metroid*.

There was also a bunch of my old schoolbooks in my room. Looking through them brought back memories of my school days. The school days were long in Tunisia – we had classes from 8a.m. through to 6p.m., and after that, we had even more lessons! These lessons were essentially like a bit of extra school, but they were held at a teacher's house. We would focus on one subject for two hours at a time, and we did this not only on weekdays after school, but also on weekends. We called these lessons '*Études*,' a French word that means 'studies.'

We use a lot of French in Tunisia, even though for most of us, our native language is Arabic. Arabic is an interesting language, because standard Arabic – kind of like *hyōjungo* – is understood in all Arabic-speaking countries, but it is only used in news, books, and some classes at school. In our daily lives, we use the Tunisian dialect. In fact, each Arab country has its own dialect. Sometimes we can understand each other, but sometimes other dialects are incomprehensible.

Although young people have started using English more than French in their daily lives, French is still an important language at school. Scientific subjects such as mathematics, physics, and biology are all taught in French. On the other hand, humanities subjects like history, geography, and philosophy are taught in Arabic. Of course, we have language classes, too – we study Arabic, French, and English from elementary school through to high school, and we could also choose a fourth language at age sixteen – I chose Italian, although I never really used it, so I didn't get very good at it. Anyway, French is also important at the university, and apart from a few majors like law or philosophy, where Arabic is necessary, all of the classes are in French.

In my daily life in Japan, I mostly use Japanese and English to communicate with my colleagues and friends, so I was really happy to be able to use French and Arabic more during my stay. But the first few days were very hard. Every time I tried to say something to my friends, I would start using Japanese by mistake! It was pretty hilarious – any time they said something to me, I would reply with '*naruhodo*' – even if I understood them, they didn't understand my Japanese!

Overall, my stay was very relaxing. I enjoyed my time with my family and friends and tried to rest as much as I could. I would wake up around 8 or 9a.m, eat breakfast with my family, make lunch with my mom, eat, and then go out with my family or friends to a café or restaurant. One thing I was very excited to do was to visit my favorite place, *Sidi Bou Said*, a famous white and blue city on the ocean, where you can enjoy sweet donuts called *Bambalouni*, while enjoying the view of the blue sea. The food was really delicious. I particularly love the sweets – Tunisian crepes are very sweet, even compared with crepes in Japan. I loved drinking the mint tea, too, which was also surprisingly sweet.

On my last day in Tunisia, my mom made one of my favorite dishes – Tunisian *tajin*. Some people have heard of *tajin* in Japan, which is kind of like *nabe ryōri*, but that *tajin* is actually from Morocco. Tunisian *tajin* is kind of like a savory cake, baked in an oven, and made with eggs, potatoes, parsley, tuna, and cheese. I love *tajin*, and always want to eat it, even in Japan. My Japanese friends also often asked me to make it, but I didn't have an oven, so I tried making one with my rice cooker! It was

actually the first time I had ever made *tajin*, and it was a huge success – all my friends loved it!

I felt a bit sad leaving my family and friends to come back to Japan. But seeing my pet dog and my friends here was also a happy feeling. Now, I can say that I have two countries that I can call home, and a part of my heart will always belong to both. After two weeks filled with fun and good memories, I've come back to Japan, feeling thankful for the amazing time I had in Tunisia.

Questions, Answers and Hints:

1. How many languages does the narrator speak fluently?

Answer: Four or five (Arabic, French, English, and Japanese).

Hints/Clues: The narrator mentions several languages throughout the text, including Arabic and French: « We use a lot of French in Tunisia, even though for most of us, our native language is Arabic, » suggesting she is fluent in these languages. She also mentions Japanese and English: « In my daily life in Japan, I mostly use Japanese and English to communicate with my colleagues and friends, » and is likely that she is fluent in these languages, too. She mentions Italian, but that « I chose Italian [as a fourth language], although I never really used it, so I didn't get very good at it. »

2. What languages are commonly used in Tunisia?

Answer: Arabic, French and English (recently).

Hints/Clues: As above, the narrator mentions « Even though our native language in Tunisia is Arabic, we use a lot of French. » She also mentions « Otherwise, we use the Tunisian dialect in our daily life. Each Arab country has its own dialect, » and « Although young people have started using English more than French in their daily lives. »

3. Why is French such a major language in Tunisia, an Arab country?

Answer: Due to its history of French colonization/administration.

Hints/Clues: There are no direct clues in the text itself, but a general knowledge of European colonization should allow students to guess the answer. Otherwise, a search on Wikipedia etc. should quickly turn up that Tunisia was under French rule from 1881 to 1956.

4. Did the narrator cook for herself when she lived in Tunisia?

Answer: Probably not.

Hints/Clues: The narrator mentions that when she should have made *tajin* in Tunisia, one of her favorite foods, that « It was actually the first time I had ever made *tajin*, » suggesting that she probably didn't cook much in Tunisia. Also, she mentions that when back in Tunisia for this trip, « My mom [...] cooked my favorite foods, » so her mom likely also cooked for her when she lived there.

5. Was the narrator interested in Japan before she moved here?

Answer: She probably was.

Hints/Clues: Although the narrator doesn't discuss learning the Japanese language, she makes reference to her hobby of cosplay: « I used to cosplay characters from my favorite games and movies, like *Mononoke Hime*, Luffy and Nami from *One Piece*, and also Samus Aran from *Metroid*, » which are all Japanese characters, suggesting that she had an interest in Japanese media, at least.

6. Does the narrator's family live in Sidi Bou Said?

Answer: No.

Hints/Clues: The narrator mentions « One thing I was very excited to do was to *visit* my favorite place, Sidi Bou Said, a famous white and blue city on the ocean ».