

Sarah in a New Country

Dear Mum and Dad,

I hope you are both doing well, I miss you already! I am enjoying the start of my new life in Kyoto, although it has its challenges. The weather has been really hot, but I am doing my best to stay cool. It is so different from the weather back home! But I am learning to adapt to it.

It has been 5 days since I arrived, and I have just got my internet connection. I'm also just starting to get settled into my new life here. I arrived just in time for the *Gion Matsuri*, which is a traditional festival. It was a lot of fun – I didn't really understand it, but there was a lot of interesting food at the *yatai* stalls. I wish we had festivals like this back home. Actually, I have been able to go out and see many interesting things. The other day, I visited a Shinto shrine on a mountain, and it was just breathtaking. The shrine is dedicated to the god of agriculture and prosperity, and it is surrounded by thousands of bright red *torii* gates. And, the view from the top of the mountain was just stunning.

I have been exploring the city and finding my way around, and I have to say that the public transport system is fantastic. The trains and buses run like clockwork, and they are so convenient and affordable. Japan is a really easy place to live! The postal system is also really good. The other day, I ordered a couple of English books on Amazon, and they left a note because I wasn't home, and redelivered my books the same evening!

Unfortunately, I haven't been sleeping well, because it is summer here now, and it is still very hot at night. Thankfully, they have convenience stores called *conbini*, which are open 24 hours, so I can go and buy some snacks or drinks any time I want. There is something I don't like about the *conbini*, though. They always give me a plastic bag, even when I don't need one, and I don't know yet how to say I don't want one. Actually, I think that Japan uses too much plastic in general. I bought a box of cookies the other day, and each cookie was individually wrapped. That can't be good for the environment!

That reminds me of another thing I don't like – a lot of the restaurants here still allow smoking. I usually don't mind that of course, as have a few myself from time to time, but they often get a bit too smoky, so it's hard to breathe! I wish people could just smoke outside.

So, I guess Japan isn't perfect. I have a lot of good things though, and I think there are more positives than negatives, so I am happy to be here. Hopefully I will get better at Japanese by the time you come to visit at the end of the year, so I can show you around easier. Don't worry – I'll make sure to find plenty of non-smoking restaurants that we can enjoy together!

Love,
Sarah

Questions, Answers and Hints:

1. What month is it now (when she is writing the letter)?

Answer: July.

Hints/Clues: Aside from being summer, the *Gion Matsuri* is happening.

2. Does Sarah speak Japanese fluently?

Answer: No.

Hints/Clues: She says she cannot refuse a plastic bag at the *conbini*. Also, she says at the end that she hopes her Japanese will get better.

3. Was this letter written before or after 2020?

Answer: Before.

Hints/Clues: She mentions not being able to refuse a plastic bag – *conbinis* began to charge for plastic bags after the law came into effect on July 1, 2020, and thus afterward they no longer supply plastic bags without asking. (Restrictions on entering the country during the pandemic might also be a hint). Also, rules around smoking in restaurants have changed considerably since 2020.

4. What Shinto shrine did Sarah mention visiting?

Answer: Fushimi Inari Taisha.

Hints/Clues: The shrine is dedicated to the god of agriculture and prosperity, and it is surrounded by thousands of bright red *torii* gates.

5. Does Sarah smoke?

Answer: Yes, but not often.

Hints/Clues: She says, “I have a few myself,” which means a few cigarettes.

6. What does Sarah do?

Answer: Probably a student.

Hints/Clues: She is ‘settling into a new life,’ so she is here at least relatively long-term. However, she doesn’t have good Japanese, so it would be difficult to find work. Also, she has time to visit the Gion Festival, so perhaps classes haven’t begun for her yet – she has likely arrived early for the fall/winter semester.