

Yes, rural Japan is the only place I would ever live as an adult relocating there. But Yamanashi Pref. is Hokkaido Island, the home of Sapporo, the Ainu and six months of snow. So having a viable hot springs is a necessity, in my opinion.

I know more than a handful of foreigners (gaijin) who have chosen to live their lives in Japan, whether they grew up there as children/teens as I did, or whether they stayed after coming on student visas or teaching there. Japanese culture, especially where it is not overwhelmed by the image of Tokyo's Ginza and the vast urban apartment (apato) cities is very seductive. Even just a passing residential experience can be life changing.

As Markle describes it, some of the customs will remind many of the sociocultural aspects of Medieval Europe, but mostly it is just village life. Foreigners who choose to live outside the cities are still a novelty, and Markle would be welcomed, especially given his marriage and three sons. I am certain that if he and I were to meet anywhere in Japan we would both instinctively bow in greeting, though I would not as a foreign woman bow lower to him. I'm also his elder.

I have an article indicating that 80% of Japanese brides are pregnant at the wedding. Remind you of the Puritans making sure a marriage was going to be reproductive? More on that below, but it's most interesting to me that Markle is a fulltime farmer, albeit a subsidized one. Here's a clue why:

Yamagata farmer ships winter cherries worth Y1,000 apiece @ <http://www.japantoday.com/e/?content=news&id=244741>
Saturday, January 4, 2003 at 20:00 JST

YAMAGATA - A farmer in a snow-covered Yamagata Prefecture city on Saturday made this year's first shipment of his greenhouse-grown cherries which last year went for nearly 1,000 yen apiece, or some 30,000 yen for a 300-gram pack.

The farmer, 58-year-old Kiyokuni Saito of Tendo city, said his cherries did not grow initially this season due to bad weather in the blooming period but have eventually gained the color and taste similar to last year's harvest.

The farmer said he expects his cherries, the popular Sato Nishiki variety, to fetch tens of thousands of yen a pack this year in auctions. They are in strong demand for gifts or for cuisine at high-end restaurants. (Kyodo News)

Today's exchange rate for the Yen is 118.75. Yamagata Prefecture is Northern Honshu. If you go to www.outdoorjapan.com or www.japan.adventures.com you can get a look at why many travel there and note that many gaijin seem to be travel writers! Both of these sites have photo galleries or a virtual tour. The second one's virtual tour includes photos of old fashioned houses, one apparently abandoned, such as Markle refers to in his story.

As he notes, many of us are guilty of romanticizing Japan. I doubt that I could ever live in Tokyo or maybe even my cherished Kobe because things have

changed so much - even before the earthquake in 1995. I will keep images of tiny neighborhood temples and gardens tucked away in my memory along with hot food on a frigid night or unbearable humidity in summer, scented fans and incense, the clip clap of sandals on the street, obasans carrying their small grandchildren on their backs, bowing to a young stranger in greeting...there I go again.

Adding to the socioeconomic/demographics problems, as I understand it, more Japanese women are leaving the country for better career futures. Like many immigrants, some don't return after studying overseas for a better education than most would get as women in Japan. And that's the fork in the road Japan is facing: her history and culture are so strong but her economic and social structures are threatened so that many women consider it too confining a life. As in China, maybe Japanese women will have more socioeconomic, if not cultural power now. Thanks for sharing this post and asking. It was a nice trip down memory lane.

Karen Here's an interesting article that Brad or other FWers might like to consider. Any comments, Karen?

[About the writer of this article: David Markle is a long-term (17 year)resident of Japan. He first came to Japan as a student and has resided there pretty much ever since. He resides in rural Yamanashi Pref. Along with his wife, Yuko, and their three boys (12, 10, and 3). He is presently engaged in full-time agricultural activities. He welcomes reader feedback, questions, or comments. Please email him at <>]

DOWN ON THE FARM -- HOMSESTEADING IN JAPAN by David Markle

Archived on returntojapan.com, the blog about living in Japan.