

Japanese Hospitality of Meals

Last summer, I visited Torrance City, which is a sister city of Kashiwa, as a student delegate. It was an invaluable experience for me, and I met vegetarians and vegans for the first time in my life. Today I'd like to tell you about them.

As you might know, vegetarians are people who don't eat meat or fish, but do you know about vegans? They aren't very well known to Japanese people, but vegans have stricter dietary restrictions than vegetarians have. They do not consume any animal food or products. Some of them might want to maintain a healthy lifestyle, but others have fears of animals, so they don't consume animal food or products.

Among the Torrance delegates, there were one vegetarian and one vegan. The vegan girl wasn't on the restricted diet during her stay in Japan, but the vegetarian girl was. Actually she was a Jain and she followed the teachings of the religious dietary restriction, so she didn't eat any meat or fish. She said she had thought there are lots of delicious meals for vegetarians in Japan. However, when she went to a restaurant, she could not eat any meals except for salad.

America is a multi-ethnic nation, so because of religions or diversity, the country needs to prepare products for those who are on dietary restrictions. So, how about in the restaurant? Of course, in the US, there are hundreds of restaurants which have menus for vegetarians or vegans. However, Japanese restaurants do not. I believe this is a big problem.

There is a word "Itadakimasu" in Japanese. It means "I'm going to take this food," it's a way to appreciate lives I eat and the chef or the people who cooked, and to appreciate I'm alive now, so I can eat food. Most of Japanese people think that we can live because we killed and cooked animals for our food, so it's hard to understand the way of thinking of vegetarians and vegans.

What I mean is that Japanese people should have better understandings for people who follow food regulations for various reasons. Today, many foreigners enjoy Japanese food. According to a research by Hot Pepper, one of the biggest websites researching restaurants in Japan, almost 80% of foreigners want to visit Japan to enjoy Japanese food. As this number shows, more people than we think are interested in Japanese food.

In 2020, the Olympic Games will be held in Tokyo. Millions of foreigners will come to Japan, which will bring Japan huge economic benefits. However, if the

visitors are vegans or vegetarians, they cannot enjoy the meals in Japan. How will they come to feel? I think they will think "I don't want to visit Japan again."

Hospitality doesn't mean we have to pander to all of the cultures, I think it means to have understands of the good points of the country. But, don't you think Japan must consider the hospitality of meals more seriously? Japan puts efforts into sightseeing, so we need a change now. I hope as many visitors as possible will enjoy their stay in Japan through Japanese hospitality of meals.