**Please tell us your most significant international experience to date**

**The word limit is 300, please help shorten the essay.**

It is probably not surprising to many that one can learn a thing or two from the culture-rich city of Kyoto. I, on the other hand, was a minority who thought a swirling, touristy picture at Fushimi Inari could simply stamp my visit. Observing the swarm of visitors and locals-alike made me think I was not wrong, yet an aspect more profound struck me.

As an independent traveler who can’t speak nor read the local language, it happened to be a constant challenge to position hidden gems oblivious to many – particularly this one restaurant in a chilly night as my stomach started calling for kaiseki. Fortunately, my taxi driver took the initiative to call the eatery for the exact location and made sure we reached the right place, a service I do not expect less of in the Land of the Rising Sun. I was passing by this semi-deserted lane to the sushi bar when my ears caught a high-pitched sound.

“Oh, just because the cashier gave out the wrong change?” I promptly responded to my local friend who had translated the scenario for me.

While Japanese people were known to be polite, customers apparently need not reciprocate. In my country, we have a saying that ‘customer is king.’ In Japan, they clearly took it to a whole new level. The crash course my friend initiated explained how this culture is one of the causes for high depression and suicide rate within the Japanese society. Even in some major corporations, managers and subordinates would have the same dynamics as a customer-and-staff relationship.

My jaunt to Kyoto was deeply-rooted into the local culture yet also something I can connect to globally. Pondering on the event as I strolled along the vermilion-colored shrine icon? Not so touristy after all.