

CUL286 FLPA Tokyo: TOKYO BOUND

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Ping!

I am awoken by a text. I reach for my phone and, eyes squinting, make out the time – 6:12 am. One of my students has let the class know on WhatsApp that he's arrived a little early at Pearson for our flight to Tokyo, which leaves at 12:55 pm. He is more than six hours early. If this is any indication, I think to myself, my FLPA students are an excited bunch.

As I brush my teeth, I feel both butterflies in my stomach and a spring in my step. I'm excited to – of all things – once again walk into a Tokyo subway station during rush hour and get sardined in the subway car. (This is a thrilling experience for a foreigner like me.) At the same time, I'm nervous because my colleague Maxine and I will be shepherding eighteen students from my CUL286 (Cross-Cultural Communications) course for two whole weeks. That's every day for fourteen days. 336 hours. That's a lot of head counting, problem-solving and stress.

Three hours later, I am leading a throng of students to the security screening line at Pearson. I look behind me and I hear bursts of laughter here and there and the hum of accelerated chatting. I steal a smile knowing that we got the only real hurdle out of the way – all eighteen students and two faculty leads checking in three hours before departure without any issues.

As I wait for my bins of carry-on items to arrive through the X-ray scanner, a security officer with furrowed eyebrows motions to me to come to her.

Uh-oh.

"You cannot bring honey onto the airplane," she said, increasingly raising her voice with each word that came out of her mouth. What the hell is she talking about? There's no ... My face suddenly feels hot and red. I forgot to put the three jars of Seneca honey (gifts to our hosts and guest speakers in Japan) in my checked baggage. I had brought them with me in the carry-on, buried beneath the mound of Seneca pens, screen cleaners and USB drives. And buried deep in my brain when I was packing my luggage, apparently. (I am so sorry, Ina!)

Once inside the terminal, I head straight to the duty-free shop and buy a couple of boxes of maple syrup-infused milk chocolate. This will be honey's replacement. I am still at a loss for words, though. How could I forget the honey? I go back and forth in my mind. I then let out a long breath. Let the adventure begin.

By Glen Choi