

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, September 2024

—Voices of the WGO? Staff and Members of the Volunteer Guide Seminar—

September in the City

The real pleasure of traveling is to experience something very different from day-to-day life in your home country. Even if your destination receives negative comments on social media or elsewhere, don't get so nervous that you miss out on a good trip. People's impressions of different places vary. They also tend to be exaggerated to attract attention.

Last September, I traveled to San Francisco for 2 weeks. It is a city blessed with a pleasant climate, and beautiful scenery, as well as an interesting history and culture. I wish I could have stayed longer.

One year after that trip, I realized something important.

Travel sometimes involves trouble. I lost my wallet during the trip. (I had a spare credit card and cash. The insurance company covered everything later, so there was no problem.) It might have fallen out of my bag. Or I might have been the target of a pickpocket. I was careful while carrying my bag, so it's hard for me to judge exactly what happened. It's still a mystery.

It might have been stolen. It might have fallen out of my knapsack.

Still, I need to be responsible for what I say about this incident.

If you conclude that the wallet was stolen, what kind of image do you have of the city in which the crime occurred? Hasty judgements based on one unpleasant event can be a source of misunderstanding, and others might have a bad impression that the city is dangerous based on one recollected incident. That is what I learned later.

The next morning, in order to report the incident, I went to the police department in the Tenderloin District, a notoriously seedy area of the city.

On the way, even though I encountered some things I had never seen before, the homeless and people I suspected were drug dealers didn't bother me at all.

A poorly dressed woman staggering, probably high on Fentanyl, leaned forward and almost hit the ground.

Homeless people were asking pedestrians for money. Others were lying on the sidewalks. The area was messy and smelly, though it was a few blocks away from high-end boutiques. Witnessing this, I learned of the disparity between the rich and the poor.

Back in Japan, I told my family and friends about the downtown, including this area and all about my good and bad impressions of the city.

But while I also talked about my tour to famous wineries in Napa and Yosemite National Park, it was hard to get across the whole situation to them just by recalling my experiences.

In the end, however, they reacted, "After all, foreign countries are dangerous. Japan is safe and comfortable."

According to recent news, the SFPD has brought improvements to the Tenderloin District over the past year. The current number of homeless people is the lowest in ten years.

When planning a trip, check the latest information and update your awareness. Don't believe unfounded rumors and unproven stories.

Any trip abroad will definitely enrich your life and give you an opportunity to think about your

own country and its place in the world.

(Miwa N.)

"Would it be possible to register a legal seal today?", an American lady texted me a year ago. She needed a *jitsuin* and a certificate to set up a new business on one of Matsuyama's outlying islands.

As a MIC volunteer, I accompany international residents to city hall when necessary.

I'm afraid Japan is a society that relies on *hanko* stamps in situations where signing one's name would suffice in the West.

Can you believe that I put my name seal on the attendance sheet at work first thing in the morning?

My husband, who is a professor at a national public university, must also use a stamp to report his attendance to the school administration.

Officially, your signature means nothing here.

So, this American lady knew Japanese culture well and ordered a certified stamp for work and to open bank accounts.

You can make a *hanko* using your first name, family name, full name, or just initials, in alphabet, hiragana, katakana, or kanji characters. Usually, one seal is enough for your everyday life.

However, when applying for certain documents, you should prepare a legal seal backed with a certificate from the local government office where you are registered.

In my case, I use a registered seal for purchasing or scrapping a car, real estate registration, receiving insurance payouts and more.

With a young officer's assistance, I learned about appropriate stamps, especially for international residents.

For legal stamps, applicants have to use written letters or characters when filling out the Immigration Bureau's document.

Although she wanted to use her favorite two kanji characters on the *hanko*, these were not considered acceptable. Only alphabet and katakana letters are included on her residence card. She would have to change her name to include kanji and alphabet at the immigration office in order to make the seal she wanted.

So complicated! I still recall her mumbling with a deep sigh, "What a bummer!"

(Kay)