

I SHOULD KNOW BETTER

WHEN YOU HAVE BRIGHT BLONDE HAIR, SHINY BLUE EYES AND DON'T LIKE THE LITTLE BO PEEP LOOK, WALKING AROUND HARAJUKU STREET IN THE HEART OF TOKYO CAN ULTIMATELY MAKE YOU STICK OUT LIKE A . . . WELL, *GAIJIN*.

To those not familiar with the terminology *Gaijin* is the not-so-affectionate name given to all travellers who enter the inviting shores of Japan.

Name calling can prove to be hurtful when you're in your teens but when it comes to travelling, most travellers can put up with most things in Asia, whether it's consuming raw fish or simply trying to blend in with the locals while shopping in downtown Tokyo. Although I have mastered the art of slurping noodles and making as much noise as possible, there was one taboo that wasn't listed in the guidebooks—never drink, eat or consume anything on the streets whilst in Japan.

The Japanese are very polite, so much so that even the most rebellious teens and mafia-looking youths don't jay-walk. The country's politeness centres on being respectful to their elders as well as being tastefully ladylike when shopping with friends or sightseeing at a famous shrine or temple.

On a recent trip to Japan, hunger struck after consuming a not-so-satisfying breakfast of fermented soybeans and pickles in a luxurious five-star resort. Feeling slightly dizzy from the lack of fat in my diet, I opted to stop at a local bakery for some gorgeous pastries. The combination of butter and sugar permeated the bag and beckoned me to take a bite. As I wandered up and down the halls of the department store, people stared at the *Gaijin* who was committing such a taboo.

Convinced it was the powdered sugar on my face or perhaps my blonde hair that captured their attention, I continued to munch away on my delicious sweet bun. After mentioning this to my born-and-raised Japanese friend, she mentioned rather politely there were “resting” spots to consume beverages, food and even candy. She pointed out that it was not a common taboo but more of an error in my upbringing.

I now fully understand why Japanese are so slim—they don't snack! ■



top: In Japan, women are expected to conduct themselves in a ladylike manner at all times.

above: There are designated “resting” spots for the consumption of beverages and food.

Tokyo Metropolitan Government