

We interviewed a Japanese-American who runs Nagomi Visit, a nonprofit organization based in Tokyo. People all across the globe from around 60 countries use the program to visit local homes all across Japan.

These “home visits” allow a traveler to visit a local home for two to three hours and experience the everyday life of locals in Japan by engaging with them over a meal. In comparison to a homestay where you stay overnight, there is less pressure on both sides. It allows for more people of different backgrounds to come together and share.

Over 3,000 people from around 60 countries have used the program since the organization got its start in September 2011. The number of hosts has reached over 600 nationwide, with Nagomi Visit also becoming a true window to the world for many local Japanese wanting to genuinely expand their horizons.

Nagomi Visit simply made sense

I am a second generation Japanese-American born in the state of Virginia in the United States. My parents first came to the East Coast separately during the 1970s. Japan was becoming a prosperous

Chief Operating Officer of Nagomi Visit Alisa Sanada



Nagomi Visit

Nagomi Visit operates a program of "Home Visit" in the NPO based in Tokyo. People all across the globe from close to 60 countries have used "Nagomi Visit" program.

Nagomi Visit Web <http://nagomivisit.com/>

Wanting the world to experience the “Real Japan”

country so there was also always the option of being able to go back home. This made Japan a very important part of my parent’s identities so they insisted that I study Japanese and go to supplementary Japanese school.

I was completely disinterested in Japan at that time, but gradually I went from having a strong aversion to everything Japanese to wanting to know about my roots. Also there was always a part of me who felt the need to learn more about the world before I turned 30 so I decided to travel around the world.

I first found out about the idea behind Nagomi Visit from a former colleague of mine who is the current founder of the organization during my world trip. She used to sit near me while we worked every day at the same office but just like me, she eventually went onto other things like going to Denmark. Visiting a friend’s house and sharing a meal with a Danish family became the source of inspiration for Nagomi Visit.

The only plans I had after coming back from my round-the-world trip was to do freelance work. Meanwhile during September 2011 while I was still traveling, my colleague was matching the first four guests and

hosts which would end up being our first Nagomi Visits. It was then I was asked to help out with translating the host profiles.

From the start I was already fascinated with what she was trying to accomplish. It did not take me long to let her know that I really wanted to help in any way I could. Being former colleagues we knew we complimented each other’s strengths. There were already also numerous personal experiences we each could draw inspiration and knowledge from including our travels, studying and living abroad, being hosts among many other things. Teaming up simply made sense.



I officially joined Nagomi Visit once I came back from my trip in January 2012.

Experiences beyond sushi and tempura

As of now, Nagomi Visit guests have come from approximately 60 different countries. Many from the US, Australia, and Singapore. While a large number who go on Nagomi Visits are tourists, we also have participants who are expats or study abroad students living in Japan who utilize Nagomi Visit as an introduction to local life since they haven't had a chance to immerse themselves in their newly adopted home.

One of many discoveries you may encounter as a guest is that despite the impression you may have from eating at Japanese restaurants, you actually won't find sushi or tempura too often at a typical Japanese dinner table. Even if sushi does come up in the menu, it will most likely be scattered chirashi-zushi (ちらし寿司) or hand-rolled temaki-zushi (手巻き寿司) which are typical dishes locals associate as being a part of a good old-fashioned home cooked Japanese meal. On the other hand, you as a guest may be quite versed in your knowledge of Japanese food which will be a delightful surprise for the host as it will be an opportunity for them to dig deeper into their repertoire and share from their rich family or regional cuisine.



Beyond discovering new foods, what I hope to provide through Nagomi Visit is an opportunity for as many people to connect with others regardless of their background. We see the visit itself as the beginning of a hopefully long friendship. That is why we do our best to encourage all those who participate in our program to come prepared to share and really engage.

Nagomi Visit is nonprofit for a reason

It was crucial for us to run Nagomi Visit as a nonprofit organization. We were very sure of not wanting to make our program into an online marketplace because our ultimate goal is to keep hospitality genuine and to see our hosts and guests become like family after their Nagomi Visit.

Our choice of keeping the pricing fixed was intentional instead of allowing the hosts to set their own prices since we know the host and guest dynamic changes to a commercial one once the focus becomes wanting to make a profit. If monetary gain becomes the sole purpose of the host's motive to welcome visitors into their own home, there is no way friendships would flourish. Since our

goal is to be a sustainable organization that promotes cultural understanding and competence this would go against our mission statement. Thankfully, because we have clearly stated this on our website, our participants have organically come together with this mindset in place.

While Nagomi Visit for sure is our way of creating an opportunity for people from all around the world to learn about the real Japan, at the same time if it were not for our hosts, we would not exist as a program. So another aspect that is important to us is that hosts find Nagomi Visit appealing and easy to use. With the Tokyo Olympics approaching many locals are wanting to brush up on their language skills and to become more culturally competent. This is very important to us as an organization that promotes cultural understanding on both sides.

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Meet local foodies and families during your trip in Japan

Looking for a non-touristy thing to do in Japan? Signing up for a Nagomi Visit is a great way to experience the real Japan. Learn about Japanese food and culture by visiting homes from Hokkaido to Okinawa.

Send your request now and receive a list of potential hosts in 3 days

[Send your request here »](#)

What happens on a Nagomi Visit?

Meet your host
Either at 12pm for lunch or 6pm for dinner at a designated station near your host

Walk home
Your host will guide you to their home from the station

Enjoy!
Chat and eat at your host's home for about 2 hours

Importance in seeking and sharing the Real

Looking back at my life so far, everything all boils down to trying to seek and put a spotlight on the "real" in everything.

The website I created when I was 15 in 1996, although I must admit it wasn't perfect, just like the name of the website it was my first attempt to explore the "Real Japan." But despite my efforts, it really wasn't until I lived in Japan starting with studying abroad in Tokyo that I truly began to see the real Japan. Then fast forward to now after living more than 10 years in Japan, my goal is for as many people as possible to experience the real Japan by essentially going directly to the source, which is meeting the locals themselves through Nagomi Visit. It was a natural step forward from what I was trying to accomplish with my website.

This is the same for the Nagomi Visit hosts who are welcoming

wonderful people from all across the globe. I hope Nagomi Visit is an opportunity for everyone to see the “real” in every country and each and every individual. In essence, I want everyone to feel



the same human connection I felt when I met people from around the world during my year-long trip. It did not matter what country they were from.

We all worry about the same things and we find joy in the same places. I realized we were all human.

Creating a culture of recognition and respect

All this said my intention is to not completely dismiss the fact that there are differences. But that also does not stop me from believing that people can come together with awareness. I just hope that Nagomi Visit can play a part in this change.

I also can't stress enough that when we say we want everyone to be a part of the Nagomi Visit experience, we mean everyone. From the seasoned traveler and confident linguists to those who just need a little bit of support to find the courage to see what fun is in store that comes from opening your home to the world or visiting that home in Japan.

One of the many memorable stories was when I spoke to a host family whose grandmother was not exactly adamant about overseas travelers coming to her own home for a Nagomi Visit. But the surprising fact was that despite language barriers, it didn't take long for her to feel a human connection that she eventually found herself enjoying beers with them. Her story among many others have been a glimmer of hope that shows people can change. This is exactly the change we want to bring about one Nagomi Visit at a time.



What is Japan to you?

I truly believe Japan is more diverse than you may expect at first glance.

So to me, life in Japan is still always full of surprises where many interesting encounters await.

Before I came to Japan my impression of the country was a mixed bag. I had strong images of a very homogenous society. Everyone being more comfortable thinking the same way, no one really expressing their opinion, and that people just lived their lives just like everyone else. Looking back, my initial image of how it would be like to live in Japan was perhaps negative because most of those images were formed by what I heard from Japanese people who left the country for whatever reason.

But once I moved to Japan and saw for myself what it was like to live here, I have since then met the most interesting individuals. Each have their own aspirations and are living their lives to the fullest trying to reach whatever unique goals they may be. After you start meeting individuals that inspire you so much, it's hard not to lament whenever the whole country's population is lumped together and too often described as a society where “a nail that sticks out will be hammered.” This oversimplification simply does not paint the full picture.

However, it doesn't take much to see past these sorts of stereotypes. There are so many things you learn by coming together even for a quick chat. I just hope that Nagomi Visit will be able to help foster this positive culture of understanding and eventually peace.

Alisa's links

Nagomi Visit

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