

When your hosts says “traditional”

I was in Japan a number of years ago to deliver a series of ½ day training sessions to our company’s Japanese sales reps in 5 different cities in a 1 week time frame. The northern territory decided to meet in resort outside of the city of Sendai on the last day of this trip.

I had been told that in Sendai, we were going to a very traditional Japanese resort. However, I had been so focused on our meeting content, my own jet lag, simply getting to a new city each day, learning to work with a translator, and of course, trying to be sensitive to a new and totally different culture that I never invested the effort to find out exactly what was meant by the term “traditional”.

My first clue came mid-afternoon of that last day when the group wanted to cut the meeting short so they could take their baths. I was totally lost for a few minutes and quite frustrated (why do these guys need to take a bath?) until my host explained to me that one of the features of this resort was the natural hot springs that fed the traditional Japanese baths. And of course, the reason the team wanted to come here was to partake in the baths prior to our group meal that evening.



So, as we wrapped up the meeting and one of the locals who had coordinated all of the logistics with the hotel began to distribute room assignments and keys. That was when it dawned on me, there were 6 of us to a room!!!! As I quickly learned, traditional meant 6 of us to a room, our beds were thick futons on the mat floor with thick down comforters and the bathroom was traditional Japanese (i.e. **not** a western style sit-down toilet).



After wonderful evening with a traditional Japanese dinner, quite a few jokes at my expense (all given and received in the spirit of good friends and fellowship), an embarrassing turn at karaoke in the bar later, and a somewhat less than full night’s sleep (I can still remember who snores and who talks in their sleep) I began to get a much deeper appreciation for a culture that places the group over the interests of the individual.