
2010-11 Postcards

Postcards from Abroad

10-31-2010

I Want to Ride My Bicycle . . .

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Recommended Citation

Sedy, Leah, "I Want to Ride My Bicycle . . ." (2010). *2010-11 Postcards*. Article. Submission 6.
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Journals from Doshisha University, Japan

2010-10-31 I Want to Ride My Bicycle...

One of the first things I did upon arriving in Kyoto was buying a bicycle. Mine cost 6000 yen or about \$70, expensive for a used bike, I thought, but the subway fare to and from Doshisha is 500 yen a day, so I figured the bike would pay for itself quickly and save me a lot of money in the long run. And Kyoto is flat and on the whole very conducive to bicycle riding, and there are lots of interesting places to visit even in the small range I have of about a 40-minute ride. I use my bicycle so often--I went for a walk today and it felt very strange to go a long distance on my own two feet! That is not to say riding a bicycle here is easy or stress-free. In fact, it is fraught with danger at every turn, just like a 90s computer game. I've compiled a list of obstacles to look out for:

1. The salaryman late for work: generally, he rides on the road to better whiz to the office, but when he does decide to barrel like a buffalo down the sidewalk, do your best to get out of the way—he will simply go in a straight line.

2. Old ladies, children, and dogs: don't let their cuteness deceive you, they are very dangerous because you never know just where on the sidewalk they will decide to wander next. You also lose the most points if you hit one of these three.

3. Adolescents: boys tend to wander back and forth when chatting with more of their kind. To get by you have to whiz through on the right-hand side when they leave an opening for approximately 3.6 seconds. Girls like to travel three abreast and take up the whole sidewalk. There is nothing you can do about this obstacle except hope your bike-bell works.

4. People parking their bicycles on the side of the sidewalk: these pedestrians may seem harmlessly engaged in locking up their bikes, but they have a nasty habit of suddenly dashing across the sidewalk into Lawson's when you least expect it.

5. Crosswalks: even if it's a tiny crosswalk and Salaryman or Adolescents ignore the signal and go straight through on a red light, don't. If you're lucky, *omawari-san* (policeman) will happen by and nod approvingly at you for waiting: +100 bonus points and an extra life! *Yatta!*

6. Subway station exits: you can easily recognize these by the blue triangle logo and ugly public-restroom-style beige tiling. The Japanese use these portals to travel quickly across town, so naturally they are still a bit discombobulated by the space/time-compression process when they pop out. Give them a wide berth.

7. Construction: it is the hobby of a group of men in matching blue jumpsuits to dig up a different part of the sidewalk every day. They will make a short maze for you to pass through;

just follow the arrows, stay on the green mats, and avoid hitting the cones. +10 points for navigating these successfully.

8. Rain: this makes every obstacle 2x bigger since they will all be using umbrellas. If you haven't yet unlocked the level that allows you to ride a bike and hold an umbrella at the same time, don't worry, you will get soaked either way because rain in Kyoto means business.

9. Motorcycle Masa (dude) and Miko (chick): this smokin' hot, leather-clad duo rides double and roars out of little side-streets Bonnie and Clyde-style. They've got some rumpus to start down in Shijo, you see. If you manage to see them in time and swerve out of the way, you won't lose a life under their smokin' hot tires.

10. Bugs: these tiny (and not so tiny) obstacles are particularly dangerous because they are invisible except at very close range. Best to always ride with your mouth closed.

Congratulations, you have successfully arrived at Doshisha for a day of classes! Next level: Bicycle Parking Area of Doom! Enter more tokens to continue play...

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