



2026 JET Program

SURVIVAL GUIDE



2026 JET PROGRAM SURVIVAL GUIDE

JET PROGRAM OFFICE, EMBASSY OF JAPAN

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1. INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on your selection for the **2026 JET Program!** Before beginning this guide, there are a few items we would like for you to keep in mind as you read through:

1. This guide is intended to be a mostly-comprehensive resource for you as you prepare for departure and a supplement to the [General Information Handbook \(GIH\)](#). It contains a large amount of information, so we suggest that you skim through this guide on your first read-through, and then refer back to the necessary sections as you prepare for departure. With that said, **please bear in mind that presentations at the summer Q&A session and pre-departure orientation will be prepared with the understanding that you are familiar with the contents of this guide.**
2. The information provided here has been collected and edited by JET Program staff and alumni; some information is also referenced from the [2026 General Information Handbook \(GIH\)](#). The information from staff and alumni is based on their experiences in Japan and on the JET Program, but has not been certified by medical or legal professionals. When completing medical, legal, or tax documents, please be sure to carefully follow all relevant guidelines and instructions from the appropriate government agency or official organization.
3. Your predecessor may reach out to you before your departure. Predecessors have generally been one of the best sources for specific information for departure preparations and what your school or office will be like. They usually tell you what to bring and what not to bring, and what to expect when you arrive at your placement. However, there may be cases that your predecessor does not contact you (e.g., your predecessor broke contract and left early, your placement is new and did not have a predecessor, etc.). In the case that you do not have a predecessor, you should be able to find the same information talking with your supervisor or contacting someone in the same placement town/area, or someone from your prefecture's [Association of JETs \(AJET\)](#).

Once again, congratulations!

We look forward to working with you as you prepare to depart for Japan on the JET Program!

DC JET Program Coordinators

2. PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

Legal/financial obligations:

- Grant power of attorney to a responsible individual (at your discretion)
- Make arrangements for payment of any ongoing bills while overseas (student loans, credit cards, etc.)
- Inform banks/credit card companies that you will living abroad for the next 1+ years
- Collect W-2 forms and any other forms necessary for completing U.S. taxes while abroad
- Create a will and/or living will
- Arrange supplemental medical insurance, if appropriate
- Set up a Google Voice account in order to have free international VoIP calling in Japan (Optional, but very useful)

Important documents:

- Passport (for August departees, to be collected by the JET Program Office and returned at Pre-Departure Orientation)
- Two photocopies of your passport (one to keep with you, one to leave with family back home)
- Valid driver's license
- [International Driver's Permit \(IDP\)](#), if you have one (highly recommended)
- Japan address, contact information, and contract (if received) from contracting organization
- General Information Handbook (digital version found [here](#))
- Driving record (from your state's DMV) or other documents proving residency in your home country for at least 3 months if you intend to get a driver's license after your IDP expires or if you are able to convert your current license to a Japanese license due to state reciprocity. See [driving](#).

Money:

- JETs should plan to have \$2,000-\$3,000 on hand for the first month's living expenses (which may include your first month's rent) as the first paycheck may not come until late in the month you arrive.
- ATMs can be found at post offices and most convenience stores; most businesses accept major credit cards, but bear in mind that smaller stores and restaurants may not accept credit cards. Also, keep in mind that not all ATMs can accept international cards.
- Safest to bring funds in a variety of sources in case one version is unusable and/or rejected (i.e., cash, debit card, credit card, etc.)

Self-introduction materials:

- Items introducing your town (pictures of the town, famous landmarks, specialties & products, souvenirs, post cards, maps)

Life After the B.O.E.

by David Namisato



Dear New JETs,
Don't be 'that' guy, okay?

And have a wonderful time in Japan.

Note

JETs who are placed in major cities such as Tokyo or Osaka should plan to bring extra funds, as living expenses there tend to be higher than those in rural areas.

Life After the B.O.E.

BY DAVID NAMISATO (AOMORI-KEN CIR. 2002-04)



Note

Ask your predecessor what the most important things to pack are.

- Items introducing you and family (especially pictures of you, family members, hobbies, cultural heritage or traditions)
- Prizes for in-class games or activities: stickers, stamps, pencils, postcards, etc. are all big hits

PACKING

Clothing (GIH, 1.4.6, EN p.12; JP p.10-11)

➤ Climate

- **Summer:** Most of Japan is hot and humid during the summer. Schools and offices may use fans or air conditioning, but as an energy-saving measure these will not be turned on except for the hottest days of the year. The teachers' room at school may be air-conditioned through the day. Except for the northernmost parts of Japan (i.e., Hokkaido and the Tohoku area), Japan's summer is relatively long. Warm weather may persist as late as the end of October, and sometimes until the beginning of November.
- **Winter:** Winters are cold, and many buildings will rely on gas or electric room heaters. Most buildings generally do not have central heating or insulation. Many JETs choose to ship winter clothes to their address in Japan before departing.

- **Rainy season:** The rainy season takes place in June/July. You may need to use a rain jacket, pants, or boots in addition to an umbrella.

➤ Work

- **Formal wear:** A suit is required for formal occasions. These include JET conferences and school functions such as graduation and entrance ceremonies. You should bring at least one black suit jacket and one pair of black dress pants or a dress skirt.
- **Office attire:** Appropriate attire will vary by school or office. As a general rule, many JETs choose to wear formal attire for the first few days or weeks, then dress down if appropriate. Business casual is appropriate for most situations. You should avoid exposed shoulders and skirts/shorts far above the knee. During warmer seasons, "cool biz" attire may be allowed in the workplace. Professional short sleeve dress shirts and clothing with thinner material is usually appropriate during this season.
- **Elementary school/kindergarten visits:** JETs visiting elementary schools or kindergarten may wish to bring a track suit or other non-formal clothes suitable for physical activity.
- **School shoes:** Most schools have separate shoes for use inside the school building. JETs who travel among multiple schools may choose to bring a pair of indoor-only shoes with them. It is recommended that indoor shoes be easy to slip on/take off.

Examples:



Students will usually have an additional pair of shoes for use in the school's gym (3 pairs total), but it may be acceptable to simply wear your regular indoor shoes depending on the school.

- Start by evaluating which of your clothes you'll take with you, and which you can purchase in Japan. While you've likely heard a lot about how Japan doesn't accommodate regular Western sizes, let alone plus sizes, this is slowly changing. If not readily available at stores, there is a good chance you can still get them through [Amazon in Japan](#).
- If you are going shopping before departure: pay attention to material. Cotton and linen are breathable materials which will make the summer heat much more bearable than materials such as silk or polyester.
- **Please be aware:** Big-name Western brands will likely have stores in the larger cities. Aside from smaller sizes overall, clothing may be shorter in length or narrower in cut (shoulders, bust, hips etc.) Moreover, waist and length tend to scale linearly in Japanese stores, so for example it may be difficult to find pants that are larger in the waist but shorter in length.
 - Notice: Japanese bras are different sizes, and possibly a different shape than you are used to.
- **Footwear:** Women's shoes in Japan tend to run up to 24.5cm (US size 8), and men's up to 28cm (US size 10.5). You will find yourself taking off/putting on your shoes far more than in the United States (for example at restaurants), for this reason, we recommend generally bringing shoes that do not have an excessive amount of straps and buckles.
 - **Socks:** If they have holes, don't bother packing them. Socks are cheap and widely available in almost all sizes. Additionally, wearing socks with holes in a society where people take off their shoes regularly will reflect poorly on your personal appearance.
- **Swimsuits:** Some ALTs, especially those in ES, may be invited to join swimming lessons with the students. If that is something you would like to join, please remember that your swimsuit must be quite conservative and stay in place even if children tug on it.

SUGGESTED PACKING LIST FOR CLOTHING

Tokyo Orientation (Your Carry-On Bag)	
	2-3 days' worth of smart business attire (suits)
	Casual clothes (2-3 days' worth)
	Pens and paper
	Toiletries
	Pajamas
	Important documents

Shoes	
	Sneakers
	Sandals
	Indoor shoes
	Winter boots (consider shipping)

Underwear	
	Bras
	Tights/stockings/hose
	Underwear
	Undershirts
	Socks (without holes)

Sportswear	
	Undershirts
	Underwear
	Gym clothes
	Indoor gym shoes
	Swimsuit

Winter Clothes (consider shipping to Japan separately)	
	Sweaters
	Thermals
	Thick tights
	Winter coat
	Winter/snow boots
	Hat, scarf, and gloves
	Warm pajamas

Surfing
If you have a board and are placed in a location near a coast, bring it or ship it. There is good surfing all along the Pacific coast, and you can find the Japanese surfers all year round. Wet suits are available for purchase (larger sizes are rarer). Surf boards can sometimes be found at second hand shops near the coast.

Skiing & Snowboarding
You may want to bring/ship your own gear if you already own it. Second hand shops generally carry ski/snowboard gear at very reasonable prices.

Packing Limits and Shipping to your Contracting Organization

JETs are only permitted to bring two large pieces of luggage and one carry-on with them to the hotel.

Therefore, you cannot have more than the allotted amount, even if you are willing to pay for extra luggage.

Consider shipping luggage from America to your contracting organization ahead of time if you want to bring more luggage than allowed. There will be an opportunity for you to send your luggage from the hotel to your contracting organization during Tokyo Orientation. You will be responsible for any fees associated with shipping your luggage (usually 2,000-5,000 yen/bag). More information will be provided for you at Tokyo Orientation.

For those JETs who will be placed further away from Tokyo (particularly off the main island of Honshu) bear in mind that you may be travelling from Tokyo Orientation to your placement by air or by shinkansen. As such, the luggage you keep with you through Tokyo Orientation may be subject to a **lower weight limit** in order to comply with domestic airline baggage restrictions. When using the Tokaido/Sanyo/Kyushu Shinkansen (super express), the total dimensions of a single piece of luggage must not exceed 160cm.

Toiletries & Cosmetics

Most toiletries can be purchased in Japan. International brands are becoming more prevalent in large cities, but depending on your placement those products may not be readily available. In general, if there is a particular brand you prefer, you may wish to bring a small supply of it with you. Many JETs find [iHerb](#) to be a helpful site for ordering products from home.

Things to consider bringing from the USA:

- **Deodorant:** Japanese deodorants may not be as strong as their American counterparts; some products will be either a deodorant or antiperspirant, but not both.
- **Toothpaste:** Japanese toothpaste does not contain the same levels of fluoride as those sold in many foreign countries.
- **Contraceptives** (GIH **1.4.8** EN p.13, JP p.12; **6.1.2**, EN p.79, JP p.72): Condoms and birth control are both available, but brands will differ. For obtaining the pill in Japan, please bear in mind that it will be necessary to undergo a check with a gynecologist to receive a prescription.

Cosmetics are widely available in Japan, and Japanese skin-care products are respected for their quality and efficacy. However, foundations, concealers, and powders are formulated to suit Japanese skin tones, so you may want to bring your own.

Medications (GIH, **1.4.5** EN p.10-12, JP p.9-10, **6.1.1** EN p. 77, JP p.71)

Check the GIH for regulations for importing medication. Some medicines may not be readily available in all of Japan, and may have different dosages compared to products at home. Bring a copy of your prescription with you, and a list of what not to take with your current medication. Medications can be shipped separately provided that they are in quantities low enough to avoid requiring the *Yunyu Kakunin-sho* (described below).

Things to consider bringing:

- **Painkillers:** Japanese painkillers may not be as strong a dosage.
- **Tylenol/other cold remedies**
Please note: **Pseudoephedrine** (found in many American cough syrups such as Nyquil) **is prohibited to bring to Japan.**
- **Vitamins** if you use them on a regular basis.

Yunyu Kakunin-sho (GIH, **1.4.5 EN** p.11-12 **JP** p.9)

If you intend to bring medication over the allowable limit to Japan (GIH, **1.4.5** p.11 or p.9), you will need to obtain a certificate called a *Yunyu Kakunin-sho*. Refer to our more in-depth guide [here](#) and/or the GIH for exact details. Please bear in mind that it will be necessary to submit the required paperwork to the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare in Japan approximately one month before departure.

OMIYAGE

Omiyage is defined as a “gift of respect.” The tradition of presenting an important acquaintance with a small souvenir from one’s travels is firmly entrenched in Japanese culture. As a foreigner, you will not be expected to give *omiyage*, but the gesture will be appreciated. It is a culturally appropriate way to make a good first impression on your new coworkers, and you may find that it goes a long way toward building relationships.

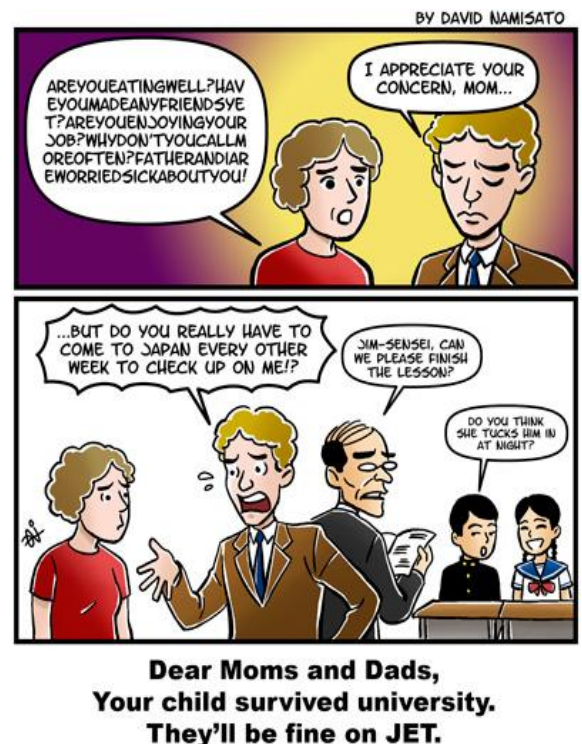
Unlike American souvenirs, which typically take the form of magnets, t-shirts, or other memorabilia, *Omiyage* in Japan are usually individually-wrapped sweets or savory snacks (such as cookies, biscuits, etc.). Something that can be shared among a group of people, such as a box of candies, is also acceptable. *Omiyage* are commonly presented in large quantities, so it is not necessary to purchase expensive items. **The point is not to impress, but to make a gesture of goodwill and express your willingness to share yourself and your experiences.**

If you choose to bring *omiyage*, keep in mind the hot summer conditions and rough treatment your checked bags may endure in transit. Try not to bring anything that is perishable, crushable, or otherwise will not survive the flight. For any *omiyage* you bring from America, hometown and region-specific items will be the most cherished; something unique to your area and hard to find elsewhere makes for interesting *omiyage*.

Some ways to acquire low-cost *omiyage* items:

- Contact your senator or representative, or also the Chamber of Commerce to request free items
- Stock up on freebies given out on holidays and events
- Visit dollar stores for stamps, stickers, etc.

What you give, and to whom, is up to you. Smaller gifts can be given to new friends and colleagues. Nicer individual gifts should be given to those to whom you are most indebted (your supervisor, close neighbors, English teachers) and to individuals whose rank deems it appropriate (principals, vice principals, mayor). These should be brought with you to Japan, so that they can be given at the time of introduction. You should ask your supervisor when the best time to distribute *omiyage* will be. If most of the teachers are not in school for an extended period of time, it may be better to wait until the entire staff has returned before handing out any



perishables. Presentation is important for these; do your best to not present wrinkled, smashed, or otherwise banged-up *omiyage*, as this may be seen as a lack of care.

Main individuals to give <i>omiyage</i> to: ➤ Supervisor(s) ➤ Contracting organization (head & staff) ➤ Principal & vice principal ➤ Fellow English teachers	Other individuals to consider giving <i>omiyage</i> to: ➤ School faculty & staff ➤ Your mayor ➤ Friends ➤ Neighbors ➤ Students (as prizes for activities/games)
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Do not worry too much about finding the perfect *omiyage*. You should give something if you can, but the nature of the gift itself is less important than the intention.

STUDYING JAPANESE

Setting Goals

Setting goals is the core of a good self-study regimen. An effective goal focuses primarily on results rather than activity; it defines where you want to be and helps you determine where you are. Goals should be defined in terms that make it easy to measure your progress and know when you have succeeded. To that end, strong goals are usually defined quantitatively.

Example timeline of attainable, concrete goals with a timeline designed for JETs:

- I will study for 1 hour every day using the CLAIR Japanese Course and JLPT preparation materials.
- I will study 2 hours every weekend in a study group with other JETs.
- I will learn at least 10 kanji every week.
- My first year of JET, I will take the JLPT N4 in December. If I do not pass, I will retake it in July. If I do pass, I will begin preparing to pass the JLPT N3 in my second year.

Goals using Japanese can also include accomplishing tasks such as:

- Hold a telephone conversation
- Order at a restaurant
- Schedule a doctor's appointment

General Study Tips

- Cover all your bases
 - Reading (books, materials at work)
 - Listening/speaking (interacting with people)
 - Writing (kanji & sentences) – keep a journal, write letters, text messages
 - Also practice *keigo* (formal speech), casual speech, regional dialects
- Immerse yourself in Japanese
 - Change settings on your devices to Japanese
 - TV: Watch the news, variety shows, quiz shows, cooking shows, dramas, movies; even if you cannot understand most of what's being said, it is helpful for listening practice
 - Books: Manga will often write the furigana next to kanji, so this can be a good place to start for beginners; work your way up to short novels
 - Find a language exchange partner (you practice Japanese with them, they practice English with you)
 - Do not worry about making mistakes and stepping outside your comfort zone! People around you will understand that you are not a native speaker. They recognize and appreciate your effort.

Resources

- [CLAIR courses](#):
 - Beginner, intermediate, & advanced Japanese online courses
 - Translation class (limited space)
- Online:
 - [Jisho](#): Japanese-English dictionary
 - [Handwritten Kanji Search](#): Manually-drawn kanji reference
 - [Tae Kim's Guide to Learning Japanese](#): Full, free online textbook ranging from learning hiragana to advanced grammatical expressions
 - [Weblio](#): Japanese-English dictionary (in Japanese). Popular for Japanese users.
 - [NHK Web Easy](#): News articles written in simple Japanese (and including furigana).
- Apps:
 - **Google Translate**: Translations, can translate pictures using your smartphone's camera
 - **Midori**: Dictionary, translation, flash cards, JLPT kanji lists
 - **Imiwa?**: Dictionary, kanji reference, build your own lists
 - **Memrise** (also has desktop site): Digital courses and drills
 - **Anki**: Flashcard builder
 - **Duolingo**: Language-learning app
 - **Todai**: Easy Japanese – Daily news articles in Japanese
 - **WaniKani**: Kanji-learning platform
- Textbooks:
 - **General purpose**:
 - Genki I & II (beginner & intermediate respectively)
 - An Integrated Approach to Japanese
 - Tobira Gateway to Advanced Japanese
 - Try! JLPT series
 - **Specific purpose** (kanji, grammar, etc.)
 - A Dictionary of Intermediate/Advanced Japanese Grammar (separate books)
 - Kanji in Context
 - Shin Kanzen Master (JLPT prep book series - separate volumes for listening, reading, kanji, etc.)
 - 敬語のお辞典 (*keigo* dictionary)

Useful Phrases

<i>Yoroshiku onegai shimasu</i> (よろしくおねがいします) (よろしくお願ひします)	"Thank you in advance for doing this." Also used after introducing yourself to say "nice meeting you"
<i>Osaki ni shitsurei shimasu</i> (おさきにしつれいします) (お先に失礼します)	"Excuse me for leaving early." Used when one is leaving work (regardless of how early/late one actually leaves).
<i>Otsukare sama deshita</i> (おつかれさまでした) (お疲れさまでした)	"Thank you for your hard work." Used when a coworker is leaving work.
<i>Oisogashii tokoro sumimasen</i> (おいそがしいところすみません) (お忙しいところすみません)	"Sorry for bothering you while you are busy." Used to initiate conversation with a teacher or coworker (such as when going over to their desk).

<i>...wa arimasu ka?</i> (～はありますか?)	“Do you have...?”
<i>Betsu bestu de onegai shimasu</i> (べつべつでおねがいします) (べつべつでお願いします)	“Separate bills, please.”

THE FIRST MONTH

The first month will be a busy time as you settle in to your new town, including registering with the government, setting up new accounts, and making important purchases. Your supervisors at your contracting organization should assist you with most of these processes.

Residence Card (GIH, **1.3** EN p.6, JP p.7; **2.5.2** EN p.27, JP p.25; **4.8** EN p.64, JP p. 58)

You should receive a Residence Card (*zairyū kādo*) when you arrive at Narita. If it is not issued at that time, you will receive a stamp in your passport showing that it will be issued later. Please be sure to keep your residency card with you at all times. If you do not receive the residency card when you arrive, keep your passport on you in the interim.

Bear in mind that as long as you have a valid passport and Residence Card, you will not need to apply for a re-entry permit as long as you are re-entering Japan before your period of stay expires.

Moving-In Notification and Residence Record (GIH, **2.5.1** EN p.26-28, JP p.24)

It will be necessary to complete a “Moving-In Notification” (*tennyū-todoke*) at your municipal office. You will need to show your residency card. For some JETs, your contracting organization may complete the “Moving-In Notification” prior to your arrival. If you didn’t receive your residency card at the airport, your municipal office will send your address to the local immigration bureau, and your card should be sent within a few weeks.

The “Residence Record” (*jūmin-hyo*) will also need to be obtained from your municipal office. This certificate is used for setting up some accounts and making certain major purchases. You can choose whether it will include your *My Number* (see below.) One copy typically costs about 300 yen. Your supervisor may assist you in obtaining it.

In addition, starting in June 2026, you may apply for a **Specified Residence Card** that combines the functions of your Residence Card, Individual Number (*My Number*) Card, and Proof of Insurance into one single card. (GIH, **2.5.3** EN p.27-28)

Individual Number (My Number) ID System (GIH, **2.5.3** EN p.27-28, JP p. 25)

After submitting your Moving-In Notification, you will be mailed an Individual Number Notice with your *My Number* (within 2-4 weeks). There will be further instructions on that notification of how to make a *My Number Card*. The *My Number System* is very important for taxes, Social Security, etc. Even if you don’t plan on living in Japan for life, you will be automatically enrolled in this system and assigned a number.

[My Number Portal](#): My Number services are now accessible through an online portal.

Housing (GIH, 4.3 EN p.57-59, JP p.51-52)

In most cases, your contracting organization will arrange for your housing before you arrive. Often, incoming JETs will move into their predecessors' apartment or house. This arrangement minimizes start-up costs and removes the hassle of looking for and contracting for a new apartment.

Certain placements, such as Tokyo proper, may require JETs to search for their own housing with the help of a real estate agent shortly after arrival. It is suggested that JETs placed in this area bring additional savings with them, if possible, as it may be necessary for them to pay a deposit upfront.

Rent will depend on your placement; in some cases, it may be subsidized by your employer. Paying for utilities is usually the responsibility of the JET.

Name Stamp (Hanko/Inkan) (GIH, 4.6 EN p.61 JP p.54)

A name stamp (*hanko/inkan*) is usually created with your name in katakana. *Hanko* are used frequently in places where you might be accustomed to using a signature. You may be required to use your *hanko* to stamp in every morning at the office; to sign for deliveries and important documents; to make payments at the bank; or for large purchases such as a car.

Your contracting organization may have already ordered a *hanko* for you, in which case you may have to reimburse them (usually around 1000-2000 yen.) If not, they should help you obtain and register your *hanko*. This may take a few days, which will delay your ability to do other essential tasks. We strongly recommend that you coordinate with your supervisor to have one in production before you depart for Japan. We also recommend making and using only ONE hanko during your time in Japan to avoid any confusion.

Bank Account

To open an account, you will fill in an application and show your residency card. (If you did not receive your residency card upon arrival, you may be able to open your account using only your passport and the document stating that your residency card has been applied for.)

The largest bank in Japan is actually the post office. As post office bank accounts are accessible all around Japan, it may be useful to have an account with a post office bank instead of or in addition to your regular bank account. Otherwise, see if you have the option to sign up for a national bank versus a regional or prefectural bank account so you can access your account when travelling within Japan. Talk to your predecessor to find out about their banking situation.

When you open an account, you will be given an ATM card and a bank book. The bank book takes the place of monthly account statements. Open the book to a page with blank entries; then, insert it into an ATM and it will record all of your account activity. Your ATM card is solely used for withdrawing cash – unlike American debit cards, it cannot be used for online transactions. Please take this into consideration when deciding whether to bring or get a debit or credit card. Some banks also offer apps that allow you to check your balance/transactions and perform simple banking functions on your phone.

Cell Phones

There are several prominent cell-phone service providers in Japan; check with your predecessor to see which company has the best reception in your area. Many JETs choose to purchase smartphones during their time in Japan, but it is still fairly common to use flip phones.

The major phone and internet companies (AU, Docomo, Softbank) have a 2-year commitment and heavy fees if you cancel before the set ending date. If you bring/purchase an unlocked (or sim free) smartphone, MVNOs (Mobile Virtual Network Operators) such as Sakura Mobile, Bic Camera SIM, and Mobal, offer commitment-

free plans and some offer English language support. You should choose a plan that allows for calls to your contracting organization and emergency services. VoIP apps alone (Line, Zoom, etc.) are not sufficient for this. If you are bringing a phone from home check to make sure it will work in Japan at [Will My Phone Work](#).

Recommendation: Set up Google Voice **before you leave the States**. This will allow you to have free calling back home.

Bill Payments

Your supervisor should help you with setting up accounts with the gas, water, electric, and phone bills and to be certain that they are in your name. You can either have these automatically drafted from your bank account or receive the bills by mail. Paper bills can be paid for at convenience stores. Certain bills may need to be paid directly to your landlord.

Internet (GIH, 4.4 EN p.59, JP p.53)

Speak with other JETs to see what is available and ask your supervisor to help you set up internet. Because internet service is area-specific, it is best to find out more from your supervisor or other JETs in your area.

BANKING AND MONEY

ATMs

Besides the bank, ATMs can be found at the post office, convenience stores, and in shopping centers. Not all ATMs will have menus in English; check the GIH for a guide to ATM functions in English. Be aware that many ATMs close in the evening around 7:00-9:00pm.

Convenience Stores

As previously mentioned, convenience stores serve a number of functions: All but the smallest will have ATMs and can accept bill payments if you receive paper bills. Convenience stores can also be used to pay for certain transactions (like online purchases, travel, or event reservations).

Remitting Money (GIH, 4.5.2 EN p.60, JP p.54)

Via SBI Remit (Shinsei Bank)

- Shinsei Bank offers an international remittance service with 200+ participating countries. You can easily create an account online (though it's recommended to have relevant documents on hand, like your Residence Card and bank information for the accounts sending and receiving money.)
- Remittance fees start at 880 yen for remittances under 30,000 yen, while a fee of 2000 yen applies for remittances above 250,000 yen.
- SBI Remit is partnered with MoneyGram, which means you can choose to receive your remittance into a bank account or as cash.

Via Wise (formerly known as Transferwise)

- Unlike SBI Remit, Wise charges a percentage and keeps up with the live exchange rate, not the one posted by banks. Thus, it may be a more cost-effective option if you regularly transfer less money.
- Wise will guide you through the set-up process online (you will need your My Number card, address, and Japanese bank information before you begin). They may send a confirmation letter via snail mail to ensure that you live at the address you listed. Once you enter the code from the confirmation letter, your account is live and ready to go.

Via the Japan Post Office Bank:

- Go in person during Japan Post Bank hours (usually 9:00am-4:00pm) to the International Money Transfer desk (国際送金, *kokusai soukin*). No prior registration is necessary, just fill out a form available in the office and bring the amount in cash that you wish to transfer. Note that small branches may not have this counter, check ahead on the [Japan Post website](#) to be sure.
- **Cash to wire transfer** (口座あて送金, *kouza ate soukin*): You must have your bank name, address, routing number, and account number, as well as your passport and Residence Card. There is a 2,000 yen fee per remittance; your U.S. bank may also charge a fee for accepting the transfer. Transactions take about 4 business days.
- **Cash to standard remittance checks** (通常為替, *tsūjo kawase*): The post office bank changes cash into remittance checks. The checks can then be mailed to another person or signed by yourself and sent directly to your bank via registered mail. There is a 2,000 fee per remittance.

Sample Monthly Budget

Item	Expense (¥)	Balance (¥)	Comment
Salary		JPY 335,000	Salary (by month)
Taxes/Insurance	JPY 20,000	JPY 315,000	Deducted from paycheck
Rent, Utilities			
Rent	JPY 50,000	JPY 265,000	Varies depending on location.
Gas	JPY 7,000	JPY 258,000	Used for hot water and cooking.
Electricity	JPY 12,000	JPY 246,000	Used for heating/ cooling and electronics.
Internet	JPY 6,000	JPY 240,000	
Cell Phone	JPY 8,000	JPY 232,000	
Regular Monthly Expenses			
Groceries	JPY 20,000	JPY 212,000	Based on \$50 per week.
Weekly Allowance	JPY 20,000	JPY 192,000	Includes lunches and transportation.
Weekend Allowance	JPY 60,000	JPY 132,000	Weekends can be pricey: eating out, trains, etc.
Other Possible Expenses			
Student Loan	JPY 30,000	JPY 102,000	
Savings	JPY 20,000	JPY 82,000	
Remaining Balance		JPY 82,000	Vacation fund or unexpected expenses

NOTES FROM A SUBURBAN JET

The first thing I do on payday is head to the post office and send a money order home. I find that if I do not do this, I end up spending what I should be saving. I usually send a lot of money home at the beginning of the month, so by the end of the month, I do not have much left, but it is not a problem. I can do without many things here because my priority is getting my money back home. I find that I can get by on very little if I need to – a skill developed in my university days!

I also save any “bonus” money I receive – so if I get a refund for school lunch, travel expenses, etc. I use this money to fund things like vacations. It makes a big difference. I also find that if I keep track of how much each bill was each month, it makes me more conscious of ways I can cut corners. So if the phone bill was a little higher than it should be, I try to be a little bit more conservative with phone and online time.

I have been able to travel, despite my savings priority. On the months I do travel, I do not send as much money home. I have traveled a lot in a year and a half. I went back to Canada twice (and will go back home this summer, too), and I went to the Philippines and Thailand. I bought a car recently (160,000 yen), too.

So, depending on your lifestyle, in combination with where you live, it is possible for some to save a lot and still have fun too. I recommend that if you are really serious about saving, start sending money home after your first paycheck and then do it every month on payday. Make it a habit. Once you are used to your 'budget diet', living within what you have left over becomes very easy. Conversely, if you get used to spending all that money, it will be hard to live without it. I know people in similar situations to mine (as far as bills and rent are concerned) who have not saved a dime. It really does depend on your priorities and your life style choices, but developing responsible saving and financial habits will pay off in the end.

CARS AND DRIVING (GIH, 4.7 EN p.61-64, JP p.55-57)

International Driving Permit

American JETs will need to obtain an International Driving Permit (IDP) in order to drive in Japan. When carried **together with** your valid U.S. license, the IDP allows you to drive in Japan for 1 year after the date of issue. The IDP is non-renewable unless you return to the U.S. for a period of 3 months or longer. As such, you will need to obtain a Japanese driver's license before your IDP expires.

It is strongly recommended that all JETs obtain an IDP unless they have been specifically told by their contracting organization that they will not be driving in their placement. JETs may not know if they will need to drive before arriving at their placement, but since it is extremely difficult to obtain an IDP from overseas, this step is highly encouraged. Obtaining an IDP while in the U.S. is very easy and quick.

Note

As of March 2026, JETs with Hawaii, Maryland, Ohio, Virginia, Washington (state), Oregon, and Colorado state driver's licenses are exempt from both the written and practical exam. More information on this may be found in the link about IDPs

The IDP must be purchased from an American Automobile Association (AAA) office in-person or online. You will need to fill out an application form and present two passport-sized photos. When applying for an IDP, make sure to select the correct type of permit; for most JETs, it will be "Passenger Car" type.

Bear in mind that it is best to obtain your IDP closer to the departure date as opposed to earlier. This will allow you more time with a valid IDP in Japan and thus give you more leeway to prepare for the Japanese driver's license. More information on the IDP can be found [here](#).

Japanese Driver's License

Obtaining a Japanese driver's license can be a time-consuming process. Accordingly, many JETs choose to begin the process as early as the April or May after arriving. Senior JETs in your area will have more information about the procedures specific to your prefecture, but in general, the process looks like this:



1. Translate your U.S. driver's license. The official translation must be done at a Japan Automobile Federation (JAF) office. No unofficial translations or translations from other organizations are valid for getting a Japanese driver's license. As of March 2026, the translation costs 4,000 yen.
2. Visit the driver's licensing center (*unten menkyo sentā*) to begin your application for the license. It may be necessary to have a coworker, teacher, or friend to accompany you. Also, you must show proof that you were in possession of a valid driver's license in your home country for at least three months prior to arriving in Japan. This serves as both proof of your driving history and also of your residency in your home country. If you recently had your license renewed, it is best to also bring that with you as further proof. The degree of required documentation will vary by location; some centers may only need to see your passport, while others may require more extensive documentation. Bringing along a driver's record is the safest option, but you may also bring items like pay stubs, receipts for rent payment, or official college transcripts.
3. Take the written and practical examinations. Be aware that it might not be possible to do both of these on the same day. In some cases, it is customary to take driving practice lessons on the course used for the practical exam. Additionally, very few JETs pass the practical exam on the first try, so you may have to do additional practice sessions and retake the test multiple times.

Like the DMV in the U.S., each step may involve a significant amount of waiting. Depending on your placement, the driving center and other locations may also require some travel to reach. Beyond that, it is possible that your local center may only be open during weekday business hours. Be prepared to take leave from work on multiple occasions to complete the process (although in some cases your contracting organization may permit you to go without using up leave).

Obtaining a Car (GIH, 4.7.3 EN p.62-64, JP p.56-57)

JETs usually obtain a car either by purchasing one on their own or leasing one from a dealership. Purchasing a car will involve more upkeep on the JET's part, as you will be responsible for annual automobile taxes, a car inspection (*shaken*) every two years, and maintenance. If leasing a car, the dealership should take care of those requirements (built into the monthly cost of the lease), but generally speaking it is cheaper to own a car if you intend to stay in Japan for longer than a few years.

Your predecessor will be able to tell you about the necessity of owning a car, and they may be willing to sell you their vehicle if they own one.

Many things go into the price of a car, but in particular, always ask about the car's *shaken* (車検) or the motor vehicle inspection certification. Shaken must be renewed every 2 years, and you are not legally permitted to drive a vehicle that does not have an up-to-date Shaken. Cars that need to go through Shaken inspections very soon usually run cheaper than cars of the same caliber that just had their inspections completed. Inspection locations will vary based on your placement, but your local AJET group will be a good resource to use when asking about vehicle maintenance, purchasing, registration, and selling.

Traffic Situation & Rules

Japanese traffic operates on the opposite side of the road compared to the U.S. (i.e., driving on the left side of the road). Accordingly, steering wheels in Japanese cars are on the right side of the vehicle, and the turn indicator and windshield wiper are switched. Narrow roads are fairly common in Japan, particularly in suburban or rural areas. Drivers can expect to see lower speed limits overall relative to the U.S.

In regards to drinking and driving (GIH, **4.1 EN** p.56 or *JP* p. 50): Japanese law has a zero-tolerance policy for driving under this influence. This means it is illegal to operate any vehicle (including bicycles) if you have imbibed **any amount** of alcohol. Violators are subject to revocation of their license, fines, and even prison time; JET participants' contracts will be terminated if found guilty.

Fortunately, many occasions where alcohol may be served (such as at work parties or dinners) are often held at venues near public transportation, and even in rural areas it is usually possible to order a taxi if need be. Your organization may also charter a bus to and from the venue for larger gatherings. In addition to regular taxis, a more expensive service called *daiko* can be called where a taxi will pick up passengers, and a second driver will take the keys to the car the customer drove in and drive it to the destination.

FILING U.S. TAXES IN JAPAN

All American JETs are responsible for filing taxes with the U.S. government, regardless of whether they are liable for paying taxes on their income or not. Even if you know that you won't owe anything, you must still file the appropriate forms. Failure to do so could result in being audited or charged fees and back taxes. If you meet the foreign [Physical Presence Test](#) of 330 days out of the United States and if you have earned less than \$132,900 (as of 2026), **you do not need to pay taxes on your foreign-earned income to the U.S.** You still have to pay Japanese taxes.

JETs in their second year and beyond will be able to pass the Physical Presence Test. However, first-year JETs will have to request a filing extension to pass the 330 days abroad requirement.

You will still be required to pay any taxes that are due to the IRS based upon US-earned income by the deadline (Oct 2026 with the extension) for any American-based income you earned in the tax year 2026.

Note

CLAIR, program coordinators, prefectural advisors, JET alumni, and your fellow JETs are not tax professionals and may not be aware of tax laws within the U.S. or the most recent updates. The information provided here is listed as a courtesy to help you and should not be taken as the final word in tax law, nor will referencing this guide protect you from legal or financial repercussions if the IRS determines there was a mistake with your filing. Look up proper directions for each form and read through the IRS Publication 54 carefully to find the most accurate and up-to-date information about filing taxes abroad.

IMPORTANT TAX DOCUMENTS

First Year JETs		
Form	Purpose	File-By Date
8822 – Change of Address	Record change of address with the IRS. US taxpayers residing overseas have an automatic 2-month extension.	Soon after arrival in Japan

Form 4868 – Application for Extension	Allows you to extend the deadline of your filing to October 15 th . If you need even more time to qualify for the Physical Presence Test, see Publication 54.	April 15 th , 2027
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Second to Fifth Year JETs		
Form	Purpose	File-By Date
2555 – Foreign-Earned Income Exclusion	Include with 1040 (not 1040 EZ) to record exclusion from paying taxes on foreign-earned income below \$107,600. Must be able to prove Physical Presence Test (see notes for extension form). See also Instructions for 2555 .	File with Form 1040
源泉徴収票(gensen choushuu hyou) – Foreign Earned Income Statement (this is like a W-2)	Statement from your employer indicating earned income for the tax year. Include with form 1040, as well as a translation and exchange rate (see “Federal Reserve Foreign Exchange Rates” in Additional Resources below).	File with Form 1040
1040 – U.S. Individual Income Tax Return	The basic tax paperwork that all taxpayers must submit.	April 15 th 2026 (or October 15 th 2026 with extension)
W-2 – Statement of Earned Income (Received from employer)	If you worked and earned income in 2026 in the US, you’ll still need to report those earnings and potentially pay taxes on that earned income.	No submission necessary; keep for records

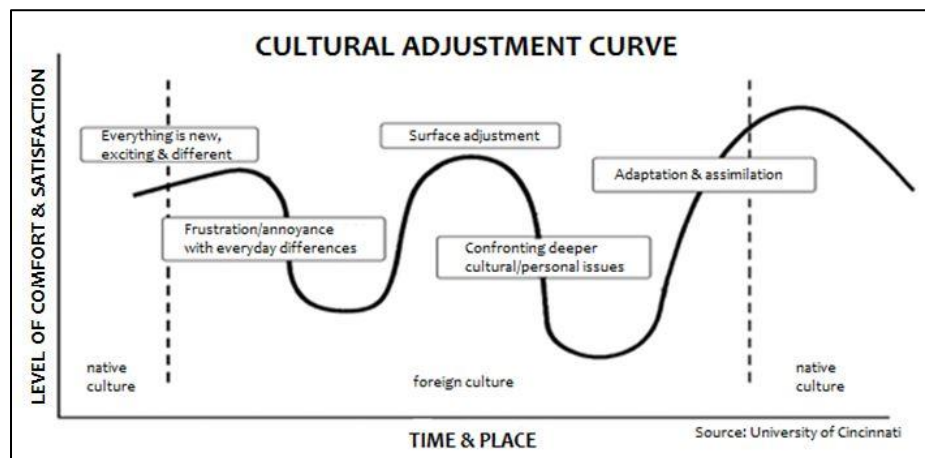
Additional Resources	
IRS Pub. 54 “Tax Guide for U.S. Citizens and Residents Abroad”	CLAIR JET Programme Current JETs, Taxes
The US Embassy in Japan's Tax Page	Federal Reserve Foreign Exchange Rates
Kumamoto JET Tax Guide	Akita JET Wiki
Contact the IRS	

CULTURE SHOCK (GIH, 6.2 EN p.81, JP p. 74)

“Culture shock” refers to the emotional difficulties one encounters after moving to a new and unfamiliar environment. It develops over time in response to changing levels of uncertainty and stress. Be kind to yourself as you go through each stage, and keep in mind that full adjustment may take a year or more.

STAGES

1. **Honeymoon:** During this period, the differences between the old and new culture are seen in a romantic light, wonderful and new. An individual might love the new foods, the pace of life, the people's habits, the buildings and so on.
2. **Initial culture shock:** Within a few weeks to a couple months after arrival, minor issues become major annoyances. Cultural differences become irritating, and you can find innumerable reasons to criticize the new culture. You may feel helpless or confused, like you are being treated like a child, or like you are not able to fit in. You may also feel a distance growing between yourself and your social circle back home, which can contribute to feelings of loneliness, homesickness, or depression.
 - a. Keep in mind that this stage usually begins during the winter; the cold, dark weather and holidays back home may intensify your feelings.
3. **Adjustment and gradual recovery:** A cyclical phase of adjusting and reorienting one's self to accept the new culture with a positive attitude. You begin to realize that often problems are due to the inability to understand, accept, and adapt to the new culture. Also, the challenge of trying to understand and overcome new cultural challenges that arise can be fun.
4. **Adaption and acculturation:** "Acculturation" is defined as "cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture; also: a merging of cultures as a result of prolonged contact." This phase usually causes substantial personal change by the creation of a bicultural identity in where you integrate new cultural aspects into your previous sense of self.



The first three stages can occur sequentially but may also occur cyclically (e.g., reverting back to stage 2 after experiencing stage 3). Also, different stages of culture shock may endure for different amounts of time for different people.

Recognize that culture shock may be the cause of a broad variety of changes in physical or mental well-being. Being aware that culture shock could be the cause for any persistent changes in physical health or personal well-being is an important step to addressing it. Most of all, be kind and patient with yourself as you adjust to your new environment. Make sure that you stay active, eat well, and maintain social ties with your friends both in Japan and your home country.

Preparing for Departure

- Make sure you give yourself enough time to prepare for your new life as much as possible
- Take pictures of everyday things at home and bring a couple of items with personal value

- Make a checklist of things to do before leaving (like sights, events, food, personal goals)
- Establish a presence on social media and build up a network of friends and family to be able to share and communicate with them regularly while in Japan
- Research as much as you can about your new town, region, and prefecture
- Make three lists:
 1. “Who am I?” List the first 20 aspects of your identity that come to mind.
 2. “What do I expect?” List 12 expectations you have; in addition to writing about Japan, include expectations for how you will behave and for when you leave Japan.
 3. “What are my goals?” This list may be the most challenging, but it will help ground you the most strongly.
- Study up on Japanese language and culture as much as possible:
 - Learn hiragana and katakana
 - Familiarize yourself with numbers 1-10,000
 - Learn basic greetings
 - Study the basics of modern Japanese culture & etiquette



While in Japan

- Develop a routine that works for you
- Get involved in your community through volunteering, sports, or another hobby
 - Some cities have foreign citizen centers that can offer assistance with daily life and connecting with the community
- Take care of your physical health; be sure to eat well, exercise, and get enough sleep
- Plan trips within Japan and go experience firsthand the things that made you excited to come
- Get involved with other JETs around you
 - Socialize with other people who are going through/have gone through the same process
 - Organize get-togethers with JETs nearest to you
 - Go to AJET events and parties
 - Join your prefectural AJET as an officer
 - Travel around Japan with other JETs or go visit JETs in other places
- Stay in touch with home:
 - Video and voice call with friends and family
 - Keep a blog, journal, or even a YouTube channel to share
 - Keep up with American news

Resources

- **Prefectural advisors (PAs):** Current JET participants appointed to act as liaisons between JET and CLAIR.
- **[AJET Peer Support Group](#):** Anonymous support hotline run by JET volunteers; available 7 days a week, 8pm-1am JST. Call 050-5534-5566 or connect on Microsoft Teams at ajetpsg@gmail.com.
- **[Tokyo English Lifeline \(TELL\)](#):** Anonymous phone counseling; available 7 days a week, 9am-11pm. Call 03-5774-0992 or visit their website at telljp.com.

TRAVELING IN JAPAN

Japan is full of fantastic festivals, astounding natural beauty, and remarkable architecture. JETs should make the most of their time to travel both in and outside of Japan, but they should request time off prior to finalizing

travel plans, as Contracting Organizations have the right to refuse time off requests. To avoid conflicts, JETs should try to plan vacations to correspond with school holidays or request time off several weeks in advance.

Planning

- **For checking train schedules**
 - [HyperDia](#)
 - [Jorudan—Japan Transit Planner](#)
 - Google Maps
- **National travel websites:**
 - [Japan National Tourism Organization \(JNTO\)](#)

Lodging

- [International Tourism Center of Japan](#) has a database of affordable *ryokan* (Japanese style inn) and hotels throughout Japan. They can also make the reservations for you, which is great if you do not speak much Japanese.
- [Tatami Timeshare](#) is a database of JETs across Japan that are willing to host traveling JETs. You can search by geography, gender, number of people the JET can host, smoking preferences, etc.
- **Hostels** in Japan are a low-cost alternative to hotels. Generally, they are clean, safe, and can offer tourism advice for the local area. Popular sites such as [hostelworld.com](#) allow you to check reviews for an institution before booking your stay.
- **Booking.com** and **AirBnb** are also flexible and affordable ways to find lodging in Japan.

Transportation

There are a number of ways to travel around Japan, including bullet train, train, bus, plane, and ferry/ship.

- The [Japan Rail Pass](#) is available to tourists, but it cannot be used by JETs on a working visa (although visiting friends and family members may want to take advantage of it). However, there are a number of rail discounts that may be available. [Seishun Juhachi Kippu](#) (“Youth 18 ticket”) is a seasonal ticket for five days of unlimited travel on local and rapid trains run by JR. It can also be used on the JR ferry to Miyajima and some JR buses. Despite its name, this ticket is available to passengers of any age. It can be purchased for spring, summer, or winter seasons.
- Private trains that operate regionally may have other discounted ticket options.
- **Japan National Tourism Organization** has [an online Travel Planner with info on getting around Japan](#)

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS (GIH, *ENGLISH VERSION*, 5.2 P.68-70, 6.4 P.83; *JAPANESE VERSION* 5.2 P.62-64, 6.4 P.76)

Japan is a world leader in emergency preparedness, and is home to some of the most advanced architectural engineering and early-detection technologies known to man. However, every JET should take the risk of natural disaster seriously and recognize their responsibility to be prepared. Consider the following questions: How will you know if an evacuation order has been issued for your town? Where is the nearest shelter? How will you contact your parents in the event of a blackout? We will answer these and other questions in this section.

Weather

The weather maps you will see on TV will largely resemble ones you are used to seeing in the U.S.

Japan uses Celsius instead of Fahrenheit. As a quick conversion to Fahrenheit, take the Celsius temperature, double it, then add thirty. For example, 10° C is approximately 50° F = (10 x 2) + 30=50.

The Japan Meteorological Agency has an [English webpage](#) where you can keep track of weather patterns, tsunami warnings, earthquakes, and typhoons.

Earthquakes

Earthquakes are very common in Japan, and it is very likely that JET Program participants will experience them. Most are small and short, and they pose minimal interruption to everyday life. However, larger earthquakes do occur, and JETs should familiarize themselves with earthquake best practices.

Prepare an earthquake kit soon after arrival. This should include a supply of water for both drinking and washing (refresh every 6 months), a flashlight and batteries, a radio, first aid kit, and dried or non-perishable foods; ask your supervisor for a map of the emergency meeting locations and shelters in your town. Common evacuation locations include schools and city halls.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government has made [an exhaustive English-language manual](#) for earthquake preparedness. Most of the info in the manual is applicable for any location in Japan, not only Tokyo. Some important tips include securing items like bookshelves and wardrobes to the walls and not placing anything heavy high off the ground without securing it. During an earthquake, avoid stairs, glass, and heavy pieces of furniture. Once an earthquake has subsided, immediately turn off your gas valve.

Japan's method of rating earthquakes is called *shindo* 震度 and it is based upon how the earthquake feels and the level of damage. The levels range from 0-7 with upper and lower levels for 5 and 6 (so there is a total of 10 levels). Look at what is shaking around you to determine the level. Avoid beaches (including riversides) and watch for landslides.

- **Nankai Trough Megaquake (AKA “The Big One”):** JETs should be aware that an impending Nankai Trough megaquake has received significant news coverage in the past year. This earthquake is projected to have a magnitude of 9 (*shindo* 7) and would likely be accompanied by a tsunami. It is likely that this quake will occur within the next 30 years, but it is impossible to predict exactly when. The Government of Japan has released an [English-language guide](#) to preparing.
- **NERV** is a disaster prevention app that uses data from the Japan Meteorological Agency to provide live updates to users, including early warnings before earthquakes arrive.

Tsunamis

Not all earthquakes produce tsunamis, and not all tsunamis are necessarily large or destructive. Nonetheless, as soon as an earthquake occurs, listen on the TV or radio (or ask a coworker or supervisor) to see if there is a tsunami warning. As Japan is an island nation, it can be hit by tsunamis even when earthquakes occur far away. Most coastal towns have walls and breakers to impede tsunamis, but seaside areas should still be avoided during and after earthquakes.

Very often tsunamis are preceded by drawback, where the water on the shore very suddenly pulls back. This is a sign that a tsunami is imminent and the area should be vacated immediately. As drawbacks do not always occur with tsunamis, though, JETs should pay careful attention to announcements and sirens.

Tsunamis are most commonly created by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, but occasionally landslides and underwater explosions can cause them as well. Those caused by earthquakes can reach shore from anywhere within minutes to hours of the earthquake's occurrence. In the 2011 Great East Japan Tsunami, the highest waves crashed through the third floor of buildings, and the wave itself traveled 6 miles inland.

Typhoons

Nearly 30 typhoons develop in the Pacific every year. Of these, several may hit the southern islands and a few will spread across the entirety of Japan. Typhoons develop between May and December and typically strike Japan between June and October. In Japan, typhoons are known by number rather than by a specific name.

The Japan Meteorological Agency has a scale of 4 levels in categorizing severe storms:

- Tropical depression (speed of <61 km/hr, 33kt)
- Tropical storm (88 km/hr, 35-48kt)
- Severe tropical storm (89-117 km/hr, 48-62kt)
- Typhoon (>118 km/hr, >64kt)

Volcanoes

10% of the world's active volcanoes are in Japan, but this does not mean eruptions are regular or imminent. Most can be scaled without fear of danger. Ask your supervisor if there is any risk.

Other Hazards

- Landslides: Generally the result of heavy rains and/or an earthquake, landslides are common in mountainous and coastal regions. Care should be taken when walking and driving in these areas.
- Tornadoes: Japan rarely has tornadoes and damage is usually slight.
- Blizzards: Snowfall can occur in mountainous areas regardless of latitude, but severe blizzards are most typical in the northern areas. Avoid driving and walking in white-out conditions if possible. As many northern areas do not fully clear ice and snow in the winter, JETs should ask for advice in adapting to such snowy conditions.

Safety Notes

For the most part, it is unlikely that JETs will be in any dangerous situations during their time in Japan, although they should expect to face earthquakes, typhoons, and heavy snowfall (depending upon their location). These are all common in Japan, and are typically not catastrophic. Nonetheless, JETs should all be prepared in case of emergency. Find out where your emergency meeting place is and assemble an emergency kit no later than your first month of arrival.

It is recommended that all JETs take the following steps:

- [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#): American JETs should register with STEP before or soon after departing for Japan. This serves two purposes:
 - It notifies your government where you are staying in case they need to evacuate you, and
 - It provides the Department of State with an email address to send safety and security announcements.
- **Locate your closest [U.S. Embassy or Consulate](#)**
- **Travel**: Make sure you leave a detailed itinerary with your Contracting Organization before you travel anywhere, including contact information.

- **Contacts:** Provide your family with your supervisor's name and contact information. If they are worried and can't reach you, they will want to know who they can call or email. Provide your supervisor with the same information, in case something happens to you and they need to contact your family.
- **Medical details:** Have a list of medications you are on and any pertinent information relevant to your medical history (allergies, blood type, conditions, etc...) on your person in case of an accident.

JAPANESE LAW (GIH, *ENGLISH VERSION*, **4.1** P.56-57, **5.1.3** P.68 ; *JAPANESE VERSION* **4.1** P.50-51, **5.1.3** P.62)

Japan's rights and rules may resemble those you may be used to in the U.S., but there are a few major differences to note. As a general rule, police powers in Japan are far greater than in the West. You still have rights, but they are comparatively diminished due to the burden of proof being on you. It is strongly recommended that you familiarize yourself with the information below to ensure you are complying with the most accurate and most recent laws.

Basics of Law and Law Enforcement

Japan uses civil, rather than common law. That means that the accused are tried according to the letter of the written law rather than using statutes or precedents from previous cases. There is no trial by jury; cases are decided by 1-3 judges dependent on the nature of the case. Judges are men in most cases, but there are female judges in Japan. This system is changing, with a 4th layperson judge being used like a hybrid juror/judge on an experimental basis to make the system more transparent.

Police in Japan have fewer checks on them than in the West with regards to due process and warrant requirements. They have almost unlimited search and stop powers. In many cases, law enforcement can conduct a full search of your vehicle, workplace or house without a warrant. Personal searches are limited to frisks without a warrant. However, if requested, judges rarely deny warrants.

Presenting Identification

You must have your residence card or passport on you **at all times** according to the law. If you cannot produce it when detained, penalties can range from a reprimand (which is most probable) to a maximum of 6 months in jail under charges of obstruction of justice, followed by deportation at your own expense for violating Japanese law (which is extreme and very unlikely).

The only people that you are legally obliged to cooperate with on this are police officers and officials designated by the Ministry of Justice, such as immigration/customs officials at ports of entry. Individuals such as hotel clerks, shopkeepers, librarians, stadium personnel, etc. do not fall into this category. Furthermore, they cannot refuse you service for non-compliance unless company policy is shown to dictate all customers (including Japanese) must show ID.

If a hotel's policy states that everyone, including Japanese nationals, must show identification, it falls under the "management reserves the right to refuse service" rule and you will have to show your residence card. Accommodations law in Japan states a hotel can only refuse a customer service if they are seen to be carrying an infectious disease, are drunk and disorderly, all rooms are full, or pose a risk to the public at large.

If a police officer/designated official asks you for passport/registration card, they are legally bound to show their identification first if asked. Note that this is not applicable in an arrest situation. However, if a policeman stops you in the street and asks you for your identification without providing you with theirs upon request,

you have no obligation to cooperate. By asking for their name and number you make them aware that their actions will be reported if necessary. Police are not legally obliged to present you with ID if they are in their place of work, as this is taken as proof enough. This is why police officers may sometimes ask you to accompany them back to the *kōban* (police box). Just show your ID and be polite, and you'll find everything will be just fine.

Filing Complaints

If you have complaints, they can be made in writing to the public relations section of prefectural police headquarters, and they will then be submitted to the Ministry of Justice.

The rights of the accused are practically non-existent. Simply put, the "burden of proof" always falls on the suspect, not the prosecution. In other words, suspects are guilty until proven innocent. (Even in the press, if someone is accused of a crime the honorific "-san" is dropped and they are thereafter referred to as "*yogisha*" or "suspect" until cleared.)

According to law, the police have the ability to:

- Hold you for a maximum of 3 days without charge for investigative purposes, which can be extended by a judge by 10 days up to 2 times (for a total of 23 days).
- Deny you access to legal counsel during interrogation (to avoid "possibility of collusion"). You are entitled to limited representation and a translator, but they may or may not be competent or interested in your case.
- Deny you phone calls and communication (see above)
- Interrogate you for 3 sessions a day (morning, afternoon, evening); session times are defined at maximum 4 hours, but that does not mean they can't try other non-interrogative tactics in the interim.
- Use confessions as evidence (regardless of whether they were obtained under duress or deception)
- Use any evidence as admissible in a court of law, regardless of the search legality. "Inadmissible" doesn't exist. For example in Japanese law, what is important is that "we found drugs in your house," not that "we broke into your house without warrant while you were incarcerated."
- You have the right to remain silent, but judges may hold your silence against you. They assume that, logically, an innocent person would cooperate with authorities.

Confessions

A confession is key for Japanese law enforcement. Ministry of Justice statistics indicate 90% of *indictments* are made with a confession, showing police rarely proceed without one. Police may interrogate suspects for long periods of time with threats, abuse, or offers of plea bargains ("tell us you're sorry/you had no initial intent/who's really behind it and we'll go easy on you"). There have been cases of foreign suspects who have signed documents they couldn't read they thought were release forms that turned out to be "confessions."

Cooperating with Law Enforcement

As a general rule, cooperating with the authorities is strongly recommended. However, it is in your best interest for you to know the law about your obligations and theirs. A facet of all criminal law is "*ignorantia juris non excusat*," Latin for "Ignorance does not excuse you judgment." This applies in Japan too. Nobody can possibly know every law, but knowing the ones pertaining to cycling, driving, working and residency are very important in your daily life and useful for backing up a dispute. Ask a supervisor or your PA for clarification about specifics.

In the unlikely event that you are involved in a criminal justice situation, be aware that the police are not bound by many restrictions, but one of them is professional conduct. You have the right to expect the same

treatment a Japanese person would. It is worth remembering that there are frequently cases where the police stop Japanese people in the same way. If you think the situation requires it, make sure you get the officer's name at the beginning when the situation is still relatively calm. If the police brush you off, look around. What is their car number/ license plate? What time is it? Are they on foot, on a bike? How many officers are they with? What do they look like? All of this information will be useful if you need to hold the officer accountable for their actions via a complaint with the Ministry of Justice.

Often, starting in English then changing to Japanese of any level, excellent or broken, will not make them go that much easier on you, but it may help to de-escalate the situation. If the situation is minor, then go with it and take the inevitable reprimand like an adult. If not minor, you may want to stick to a neutral "sorry, I don't understand" unless you are 100% sure what is being said. However, trying to resolve things before it gets there is in everyone's best interests. If you are only 90% sure of what is being said, wait for a translator.

If it is serious, it is highly advisable to say nothing except "I will not make any statements until I am given a professional translator and legal counsel," or something simple along those lines. This may be a difficult decision to make since cooperation is usually the safest strategy. Ask yourself what the situation is: "Am I in the wrong? Is he being heavy handed?" Be clear about this. If you were caught red-handed and you have no defense, making a stand will get you nothing, regardless of your Japanese skills. Remember to use your common sense and you will be just fine.

Bicycle Laws

Bicycles are considered 'light vehicles' under Japanese traffic law, and are held to the same drunk driving standards and penalties as cars. You can face a maximum of 3 years imprisonment and/or a 500,000 yen fine if caught biking under the influence. However, the instant you get off your bicycle and start pushing it, none of these laws apply as you go from being a light vehicle to a pedestrian.

Some other rules to be aware of (fines may vary):

- Not using your bike light after dusk - Maximum 50,000 yen fine.
- Not riding on the left-hand side of the road - Maximum 20,000 yen fine.
- Disobeying traffic signs or lights (including stop/give way signs) - Maximum 3 month imprisonment and/or a 50,000 yen fine.
- Riding while using a mobile device: Maximum 3-month imprisonment and /or a 50,000 yen fine.

ON BEING A RURAL JET

Christina Brady – Nagasaki

I first arrived to my island paradise by ferry, a long, swaying three-hour ride from the closest port on the "mainland." When I arrived, and for a time afterwards, I felt like I was the island among a sea of bamboo, rice fields and curious eyes. Two years later, after two weeks of "good-bye dinners" with a different friend, a different family every night, a crowd of teachers, students and friends gathered at 7:00 am to bid me farewell. I boarded the same ferry with tears in my eyes, and left a community that I had built around myself.

There are many challenges that are unique to living in a rural area, and there are some that aren't. In my experience, most of challenges specific to rural areas are not necessarily unique to Japan. It is helpful to keep

this in mind when you are frustrated, lonely, bored, or feel that your personal life has been broadcast on the local TV station. Shopping may be difficult. It may seem like there is nothing to do. People will be very curious about you, but at the same time, they may be quite shy. Everyone will know you and know where you live. However, for all of the challenges, living in a rural area can be an amazing experience.

First, I am going to suggest balance. I recommend finding a balance between your life in your town, among the Japanese community, and life among the JET community. I made a conscious decision to try to become involved in the community in which I lived. The result is that I have wonderful Japanese friends, one of whom came to visit the U.S. with me. Another Japanese friend invited me to participate in a “speed dating” dinner party with her. In short, I felt like part of the community when I left. Unfortunately, this meant that I was less involved with the JET community, and consequently probably more prone to loneliness and frustration at times. If you choose to apply your energy to making friends within your local community, be patient and pro-active. However, try to develop friendships within the JET community as well. If you start to feel “cabin fever,” leave! Know the bus, train or ferry routes and times out of your small town. You may want to consider buying a car so that you can get around more easily. On the contrary, if you feel that it is more productive, more comfortable or suits you better to put more energy into the JET community, don’t completely neglect your local community. There are more interesting people and interesting things in small towns than you may think.

What is there to do? How do you meet people? I gave adult English classes one evening a week. This worked well in two ways. The obvious advantage is that I became friends with students in my class. The second is that people who were interested in befriending me joined the class in order to meet me (and stopped coming once we started spending time together outside of class). I know of other English teachers who have also become very close friends with some of their adult students. There are classes that you can join as well, both private and at the community center. Your JTEs may not know about them because they may not be from the community. However, they do exist. Go to the community center (if you speak Japanese), or ask your JTE to call the community center for you to find out what classes are offered (if you don’t speak Japanese). Events and classes will also be advertised in the local newspaper. Finally, make your interests widely known. Rural towns are very small communities, word will travel quickly, and an opportunity may be presented to you. I became friends with the person who came to check for gas leaks in my house because we both play the guitar. When he saw my guitar, he started a conversation about music.

There are advantages of living in a small community; there are also disadvantages. My guitar-playing partner would park his car a couple of blocks away from my house in order to avoid curious eyes and gossiping mouths. People will talk about you. They will talk about what you eat, how often you frequent the snack bar or karaoke box. People will talk about who you are going to marry (if they see you with someone of the opposite sex), etc. I was seen on a walk with a foreign man, and I invited him to my house for dinner. The next day, my elementary school students were talking about “my boyfriend.” It is relieving to know, though, that the people in the community talk about the Japanese teachers as well (especially the ones who come from a different town). The differences are (1) you stand out more, and (2) the Japanese teachers are more skilled at being discreet. I worked with a JTE who kept her marriage a secret for the entire 4 years that she lived on the island. As in any culture, people knowing your business and the resulting social pressure are two of the many factors that keep Japan Japanese. With that in mind, decide how much of your life you want to be public knowledge and be very discreet about the rest. However, be flexible. It is impossible to live in rural Japan with the same amount of privacy that most of us are accustomed to. In the end, trying to keep your personal life completely private will be frustrating

and emotionally destructive. On the other hand, being open and flamboyant is not necessarily the best way to be accepted or keep people's respect. Hence, I recommend finding a balance here also between being yourself and adapting to the culture around you.

Another disadvantage of living in a small town is that people might be reluctant to "go out." This may apply more to women. However, I found that people were more inclined to come to my house for a dinner party than to go out to dinner. (See the previous paragraph about town gossip.) Some advantages of living in a small town are the people and nature. The people around you are very kind, warm-hearted, generous, appreciative people. A couple, whose shop I frequented, brought me a souvenir from Italy. When my parents visited, the parents of the friend who came to the U.S. with me invited us all to their house for a sushi dinner. My tea ceremony instructor had me to her house for a full, traditional Japanese meal and tea ceremony. Students will probably be shy, but very sweet. Some of my students gave me small gifts as well. Lastly, Japan's nature is gorgeous. Buy a bike to ride around the town, go fishing, run, jog, or go for walks outside.

Rural placements are challenging for their disadvantages but also have the potential to be immensely fulfilling. I hope that you enjoy and learn from your experience as much as I did.

4. CULTURAL ETIQUETTE

COMMUNICATION STYLES

American Communication

- Smile big
- Make direct eye contact; avoiding eye contact can be disrespectful
- Frequent use of body language and facial expressions; use hand gestures while talking
- Proud of individual achievements
- Choose words to communicate in a direct and specific manner

Japanese Communication

- Smile moderately
- Make moderate eye contact; too much is considered aggressive
- Subtle or little body language/facial expressions; no hand gestures
- Downplay personal accomplishments in favor of thanking those who made the accomplishment possible
- Fewer words used/more left unsaid, context of words matters

DO'S AND DON'TS

At a Japanese Home:

- Remove your shoes before entering a house or tatami mat dining area of a restaurant.
- Don't step on the ground of an entryway after removing your shoes; step directly into the house/building.
- Don't wear your shoes or slippers on the tatami mat.
- Wear bathroom slippers in the bathroom (restaurants also sometimes have these), but don't forget to change back to regular slippers when exiting the bathroom.

Gift-giving:

- Bring a small gift (food & drinks are customary) when visiting someone's home. Wrap it for more formal situations.
- Bring small gifts (*omiyage*) back to the office after going on vacation.
- Don't open a gift immediately upon receiving it unless urged so by giver first.

Using Chopsticks

- Don't stick your chopsticks so they stand up in your food, especially your rice
- Don't pass food chopstick to chopstick. Always pass food onto another plate
- Don't use your chopsticks to push or pull dishes near you
- Don't point at others with your chopsticks
- Don't hover your chopsticks indecisively over food when sharing with a group
- Don't lick or suck on your chopsticks
- Don't pick up food by skewering it
- Don't get annoyed if people praise your chopstick skills excessively. Praising someone is a common conversation starter

Life After the B.O.E.

BY DAVID NAMISATO (AOMORI-KEN, CIR, 2002-04)



Eating, Dining Out, or At an *Enkai* (dinner party with colleagues):

- Say *itadakimasu* before eating and *gochisou sama deshita* after eating.
- Pick up the dish when eating soup or rice.
- Finish all the food on your plate. Don't take more food than you can eat; wasting food is regarded as impolite in Japan.
- Pour your companion's drink and let them pour yours.
- Don't help yourself. Do wait until the host/hostess offers.
- At restaurants, it is customary to be given an *oshibori*, a small, moist, rolled up towel (cold in summer/hot in winter) to wipe your hands with. Don't wipe your face and neck with the towel.
- Don't feel obligated to drink alcohol if you are unwilling or unable. Other teachers, especially those who drove to the event, may choose not to either (usually tea or juice is offered instead).

Hot Springs (*Onsen*) and Baths (*Ofuro*):

- Don't wear a bathing suit.
- Bring your own towels if not provided at the venue (a large one for drying off and a small face towel for washing beforehand).
- Wash yourself thoroughly before entering a communal pool/bath.
- Rinse off if you switch between different types of baths or pools.

In The Workplace:

- Be punctual at all times; as one saying goes, "If you aren't early, you're late". 5-10 minutes early is a good rule of thumb; showing up *too* early may be interpreted as disrespectful of others' time.
- Greet everyone with energy and enthusiasm. Give a big *ohayou gozaimasu* ("good morning") when you first arrive at work in the morning.
- Don't leave work without saying something (such as *osaki ni shitsurei shimasu*, "please excuse me first").
- When making a speech, bow before and after speaking.

- Accept someone's business card with both hands when possible. Study the card for a moment before placing it in a pocket or leaving it on the table in front of you. Do not put it in your back pocket and sit on it in front of the person who gave it to you.
- Don't be late for work, appointments, or meetings with friends.
- Don't chew gum when at work or in other formal situations.
- Hierarchies are important, so be sure to use proper channels when you need to get time off or have some sort of request or grievance.
- When making some request, explicitly acknowledge the other's feelings or position; this will go far in smoothing relations (and getting what you want).
- Refer to your Japanese colleagues by their last name and "–sensei" (for teachers). Try to avoid referring to them by their first names unless directed otherwise.
- Don't sit on desks or use your feet to move things (including desk drawers).
- Don't eat snacks in front of students.

On The Train:

- Give up your seat for the elderly, injured or disabled people, and pregnant women or those with infants. Some train cars may have specially designated accessible seats (優先席, *yuusenseki*.) It is good manners to leave these seats open for those who need them, especially when the train is crowded.
- As much as possible, avoid talking on your cell phone inside the train.
- Avoid eating and drinking if possible. (Water and other bottled beverages are okay.)

Always:

- Watch others around you and model your behavior after theirs.
- Wait for a "green light" from your hosts (e.g. waiting to be seated, offered a drink, etc.).
- Don't blow your nose in public if you can help it. Use tissues, not a handkerchief (as handkerchiefs are primarily used for drying hands and wiping sweat).

BE A GOOD EXAMPLE!

Nick Harling – Mie

Being both an ambassador for America and a Japanese government employee are heavy responsibilities. Never forget that your job as a JET doesn't end when you leave the office or the classroom. Always be aware of the image you project, and be prepared to have less privacy than perhaps you are used to. This is especially true if you are placed in a small village or town. For example, neighbors may "gossip" when you have visitors of the opposite sex at your apartment. Also, it's not uncommon for children or nosey grandmothers to ask you pointed questions or invade your personal space by examining the contents of your grocery basket. Small intrusions into your privacy can't be helped. However, try to project a positive image of the US, and resist the urge to be defensive. Usually, such interactions are borne out of curiosity about you and your culture. Try to turn them into opportunities for positive cross-cultural interaction.

It's also a good practice to go out of your way to say hello to your neighbors and strangers (even if they ignore you). It may take a little persistence to break the ice with some people. However, you never know when you

might need a neighbor to lend you a hand in a tough spot. Show your friends and townspeople that not all Americans are loud, rude and self-centered. Be friendly, and you will make friends! Finally, it goes without saying, but don't break the law and please respect dress codes. Remember, dress in Japan is generally more conservative than in the United States.

5. YOUR JOB AS AN ALT

ALTs AND TEAM-TEACHING (GIH, 3.2.1 EN p.39-42, JP p. 35-38; 3.5.4 EN p.50, JP p.45)

School Arrangements

Teaching situations at each school will vary based on a number of factors, including the size of the school, the number of students and class sections, and the number of English teachers. Accordingly, you may see some teachers and students frequently and others infrequently.

Types of arrangements:

- **Base school:** ALTs with a base school will work primarily at one school (their “base school”) but may also occasionally visit other schools on a regular basis. This arrangement is more common for high school ALTs.
- **Rotation:** Some ALTs may visit multiple schools once or twice a week on a rotating schedule, but do not have a main or base school. School visits may be planned out in advance for the academic term or entire school year.
- **One-shot schools:** An ALT may be assigned to visit a school very infrequently. Sometimes you will only see each student once each term or school year. This can occur if a school is very small or if the ALT is assigned to several schools.

Team-Teaching

In most cases, a single ALT is assigned to individual schools and works with all of the Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) at each school. The ALT will work with each JTE to develop lesson plans, create activities, and carry out lessons. Different teachers will have different teaching styles, and the requests they make of you will vary as well. For some classes, you may be just in the classroom to work on pronunciation or read passages aloud, while in others you may be given the responsibility of being the lead teacher.

Teaching Resources

- AJET publications (starred items have free online versions):
 - [Planet Eigo](#)* (lessons and games for all levels)
 - Akita AJET's [Eikaiwa Guide](#) (adult conversation groups)
 - Akita AJET's [Teaching Resources](#) (all levels)
- Online resources:
 - [Tofugu](#)* (resources for JET ALTs)
 - [ALTopedia](#) (once known as Englipedia)
 - [Eigo Ganbare](#)*
 - [Three Wise Monkeys](#)
 - [Dave's ESL Café](#)
 - [Genki English](#) (paid)
 - [The Booklet of Selected Cases of Initiatives by the JET Programme's Assistant Language Teachers](#) – Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (may serve as inspiration)

- Everyday websites:
 - Google image search for making handouts or worksheets
 - YouTube for lesson ideas & activities
 - [Irasutoya](#) for cute, free, and varied images for making teaching materials

BASICS OF JAPANESE SCHOOLS

Students and Academics

Japanese schools are divided into the following levels:

- Elementary: 1st-6th grade
- Junior high: 7th-9th grade
- High school (often referred to as “senior high”): 10th-12th grade

Students are referred to by their level within the school at which they currently study. For example, an 8th grader would be referred to as a junior high second-year (*chūgakkou ni nensei*). Students generally stay in their classroom all day except for gym, music, art, and other special subjects. Regular academic subject teachers move from room to room to teach the students.

In elementary and junior high school, students within the same year are divided into class sections randomly, not by ability. In these cases, lessons may need to be planned to accommodate a wide range of ability. High school classes may sometimes be organized by academic ability or may offer elective courses, so individual classes may have students with similar ability levels.

Daily Life at School

Example of a Typical Daily Schedule	
Time	Class/Activity
8:00 – 8:10	Teachers’ morning meeting
8:10 – 8:30	Homeroom morning meetings
8:40 – 9:30	1 st period class
9:40 – 10:30	2 nd period class
10:40 – 11:30	3 rd period class
11:40 – 12:30	4 th period class
12:30 – 1:05	Lunch
1:10 – 1:30	Recess
1:30 – 2:20	5 th period class
2:25 – 2:40	Cleaning
2:40 – 3:00	Homeroom end-of-day meetings
3:00 -	Club activities

At most elementary and junior high schools, lunch is eaten in the classroom rather than in a cafeteria. A group of students from each classroom will bring in plates, utensils, and food from the school kitchen and serve it out among the class. Some ALTs will be placed in a classroom to each lunch with the students, cycling through different classes on different days. High school students, on the other hand, tend to bring their own lunch or buy food at the school if there is a cafeteria.

Homeroom is an important part of Japanese school culture. Homeroom teachers provide support for students outside of classes, and they can be almost like an extra parent for the students. (To illustrate this point further, if a student is detained by the police, in many cases they will first call the student’s homeroom teacher rather than their family.)

Almost all junior high and high school students participate in club activities (*bukatsu*) after school. This includes sports, band, and cultural clubs. Practice usually lasts for several hours after school every day during the week and for a few hours on the weekends. Many clubs also require members to come to the school for practice during breaks and vacations.

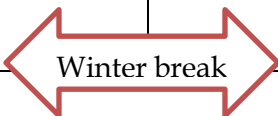
Teachers

All teachers' desks are located in the teachers office. The teachers office is usually an open-plan office with many desks placed close together (with little personal space). Some schools (particularly high schools) will have separate offices for each department, for example the English, Math, Science departments. Classrooms will have a podium or desk for the teacher's use, but teachers bring lesson materials to and from the classroom with them as periods change or as they return to the teachers' office.

As employees of the prefecture, teachers are rotated to a different school every few years. This rotation takes place at the end of the school year in late March. The number of teachers who change over in each school will vary by year. Information about who will transfer and where they will go is not shared widely with students and other staff until the very end of the year.

School Year & Events

The Japanese school year is divided into three academic terms. A chart of a typical school year including a few of the most prominent events may be found below:

April	May	June	July	August	September
School year begins Entrance ceremony			End of 1 st term		Beginning of 2 nd term
					
October	November	December	January	February	March
Sports day	Culture fair & chorus concert (<i>bunkasai</i>)	End of 2 nd term	Beginning of 3 rd term		Graduation & end of school year
					

Formal ceremonies:

- **Opening ceremony** (*shigyou shiki*) and **closing ceremony** (*shugyou shiki*): Ceremonies marking the beginning and end, respectively, of each academic term. Speakers may include the principal, vice principal, and student government members.
- **Entrance ceremony** (*nyugaku shiki*): Ceremony for new first-year students at the school.
- **Graduation ceremony** (*sotsugyou shiki*): Ceremony for graduating students. The graduating class may perform one or two songs as a chorus. Graduation is sometimes a few weeks before the end of the academic year, in which case only the underclassmen will have class through the remainder of the year.
- **End-of-year ceremony** (*shuryou shiki*): Ceremony for remaining (i.e., non-graduated) students at the close of the year.

Festivals:

- **Sports festival** (*undōkai/taiikusai*): A field day-type event. Depending on the size of the school, students will be divided up into a couple or several different teams, with each team being comprised of students from all grades. In some cases, the last one or two periods of school each day will be devoted to practice a week or two before the festival.

- **Culture festival** (*bunkasai*) and **chorus concert** (*gasshosai*): These events may occur separately or on the same day. Both events are open for parents to attend. For the chorus concert, usually each grade will perform one song, then each individual class performs an additional song. There may also be performances from the brass band or orchestra. Arts and culture clubs will have their works on display in classrooms. High schools may also have additional events like student band performances.

Enkai

Enkai are banquets or dinner parties with work colleagues. They are not school events in the same sense as the items above, but they will be organized by your schools and involve their staff and faculty.

Enkai can be hosted by your school, board of education, or other organizations you belong to (for example, if you volunteer with your town's international association). They are generally held at a restaurant or banquet hall, featuring a set menu and all-you-can-drink beverages. The price per event may vary based on the venue and occasion; to give a general idea, 3,000 yen might be a cheaper *enkai*, while a more expensive one could be anywhere between 7,000 yen and 10,000 yen.

Large *enkai* are held near the end of the calendar year called *bounenkai* (which roughly translates to "a party to forget the troubles of the year"). For these and other large-scale events, your school or office may elect to spend a night at an inn or hotel. Besides the banquet itself, there may also be a visit to the venue's *onsen* and karaoke if it is available. Other types of *enkai* include welcome and farewell parties for colleagues (*kangeikai* and *sōbetsukai* respectively) and parties involving a school's parents and PTA members (*konshinkai*).

Enkai occupy an important place in Japanese work culture, and as a JET they will be important opportunities for you to improve your relationship with your colleagues. Because you may have several schools and because attending *enkai* frequently can be expensive, you will not be expected to attend every one. With that said, it is encouraged to attend as frequently as you are able, especially when you first arrive. *Enkai* are an important chance to get to know your coworkers better, particularly those with whom you do not work with on a daily basis.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ALTs

Unlike junior high and high school, elementary school teachers are usually generalists rather than specialists. Depending on the size and nature of the school, there may be a specific instructor for subjects like physical education, music, science, etc., but the homeroom teacher will be responsible for most academic subjects, including English. As a result, elementary school teachers will generally have a lower level of English training. They may also cede more of the responsibility of executing the lesson to you.

Try to get lots of rest before you teach elementary school. Elementary school classes, particularly with younger students, require a large amount of attention and energy. It is helpful to always have on hand items like a ball, a stopwatch, and lots of stickers in case you need to implement a quick activity.

Younger students love interactive lessons. Some teaching styles that will help keep the students engaged are playing games, singing songs, playing music, and of course, giving out prizes. Remember to have fun and use your experiences to make each class better than the last.

Life After the B.O.E.

BY DAVID NAMISATO (AOMORI-KEN, CIR. 2002-04)



Often, it's what we do outside of class that makes a difference.

Older students will rely on a textbook, and accordingly there should be activities based on each lesson or unit. However, depending on your teacher's style and how quickly the class progresses through the book, it may be necessary to prepare supplemental or original activities.

Tips for Team-Teaching in Elementary School

- Pick a theme (colors, animals, sports, fruit, other foods, shapes, etc.) and plan activities or games that help you teach the theme.
- Use lots of games. Games from your childhood work. You can also look for games online.
- Songs are also good. Some schools may already have CDs with songbooks, or you can also teach your own.
- Your main job is to have fun and make English a fun thing to learn for the students.

JUNIOR HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL ALTs

Duties

- To assist the Japanese Teacher of English (JTE). Different teachers will have different expectations and classroom needs.
- To teach about your country and culture.
- To work with the JTE outside of class to plan classroom lessons.

The Self-Introduction Lesson

Many ALTs are asked on their first lesson with a class to give a full lesson (45-50 minutes) introducing themselves. If you visit schools on a one-shot or rotating basis, be prepared to give your self-introduction lesson several weeks or even months after arriving as you encounter new classes for the first time.

Self-introductions lessons are done in many different fashions, but it is common to incorporate games or activities that are appropriate to the level you are teaching (such as bingo, a quiz game, etc.) and a verbal presentation using items or pictures to use as teaching aids. Finally, be sure to leave a time at the end of the lesson for students to ask you questions about yourself.

Ideas/items for your self-introduction lesson can include:

- Pictures of your home, family, town, or those related to your hobbies and interests—pictures that are blown-up and laminated to show the entire class are best
- A map showing where your hometown is and/or other places important to you
- Children's books and magazines
- Video of American TV (shows, commercials, news, weather, sports, etc.) or of your life
- American money, stamps, tickets, coupons, fliers, maps, coins, etc.

Getting Involved Outside of Class

Building a good rapport with students outside of formal classroom instruction will ease your job inside the classroom. The more familiar students become with you through different types of interaction, the more likely they are to respect and listen to you. Taking part in these activities is also a great way to develop relationships with non-JTEs at your school.

A few ways to be involved outside of the classroom:

- Eat lunch with your students if possible.
- Join sports and other club activities after school (if the teacher in charge permits).
- Help out or supervise with school cleaning time.
- Create an English bulletin board and update it every few weeks/month.
- Make an English newsletter or newspaper.

- Start an after-school English club.
- Sit in on other classes (if other teachers permit).
- Make up creative ways to get students to use English outside of class.
- Volunteer to join or help chaperone field trips.
- Help prepare students for regional, prefectural and/or national speech & recitation contests (mostly for high school ALTs).
- Help out with preparations and cleanup for school events.

THE SELF INTRODUCTION

Danielle Freeman - Shimane

You will be expected to do several self-introductions. One will be in front of the entire school, while the other ones will be in front of the classes you teach. The presentation in front of the school will be more formal than those in class. Usually, it will not be more than 5 minutes. A brief description about yourself in English will suffice, but if you can include some Japanese, they will be impressed and pleased with your effort.

The self-introduction in front of your classes, however, is longer, interactive, and much more personal. It will often take up the entire class, so be prepared to teach for about 45-50 minutes. Since you do not know the English proficiency level of the audience to whom you are presenting yourself, it's best to keep your introduction simple.

It's also important to note that many schools do not have AV equipment on par with what you'd expect in the US. You should prep a low-tech version before investing a lot of time in anything more advanced.

If the lesson is too difficult, students will not understand it and it will take away your primary purpose: to have students to learn about you.

If you're teaching to ES, JHS, or low-level SHS students, you should keep things extremely fun and simple. Avoid talking for more than 5-10 minutes at a time, as you will lose the student's attention and their motivation will evaporate.

Make sure you plan ahead. Incorporate pictures of your family, your hometown, money, post cards, music, and food. Bringing a map can help the students get a better idea of where you are from in relation to where they live. To ensure that the students understood your presentation, you can incorporate a simple quiz game. Some prizes that you can provide are mementos and items unique to your hometown. Be aware, however, some schools expect that if you give a prize to one student, then you must give one to all students. If you have a class of 100 students, come prepared!

In addition, remember to leave ample time for the students to ask you a variety of questions about yourself. Most importantly, when you are giving your introduction, remember to speak slowly, use simple English, and smile. Good luck!

6. YOUR JOB AS A CIR

JAPANESE OFFICE LIFE (GIH, 3.2.2 EN p.42-44, JP p.38-40; 3.5.5 EN p.51, JP p.46; 3.6 EN p.52, JP p.47)

The Typical Day

While there is no single typical day for all CIRs, there are some general truths. First, you will almost certainly be translating and interpreting at your office or in the community. Most CIRs are also expected to teach some

English—either at local schools, in the community, or to workplace colleagues. International events are on the menu, too, and as a CIR you will likely have the opportunity to help organize an event or even plan one yourself. In sum, most CIRs will find themselves wearing a variety of hats while on the program. The key is to be flexible and ready to take opportunities as they come.

Getting By at the Office

Adapting to a new environment is a two-step process. First, you have to notice and develop an understanding of your surroundings. Then, you must take personal responsibility for making appropriate changes to your behavior. Each office (and coworker) will have a distinct character that you will have to adapt to.

A few universally applicable tips:

- Give a big “*ohayou gozaimasu*” in the morning and an “*osaki ni shitsurei shimasu*” before you leave.
- Respect the schedule. JET contracts are for 35 hours per week – it is ok to work a bit more sometimes to show you’re a team player, but don’t work less. Always be five minutes early to everything.
- Respect the hierarchy. Use at least *desu/-masu* with everyone. CIRs do not fit neatly into the hierarchy, but insofar as you are a part of it, you are at the bottom.
- Respect the community. Not only are eyes going to be on you because you are foreign, but your actions will be scrutinized because you are a public servant.
- Model your behavior/dress/speech off of someone in your office who is the same age and gender. It is not fool-proof, but it is a good rule of thumb.
- Respect continuity. Usually your job will have been established by those who came before you. You might have to wait a year (or two) to carve out a space for your own ideas.

A Note on Feedback

Feedback is rare in the Japanese office. For most Japanese managers, praise is usually not expressed verbally. Instead, they will slowly begin to trust you with more responsibility, include you in meetings and communications where they think you’d be most useful, and invite you to ‘extracurricular’ events such as *enkai* or private parties. On the flip side, if your performance is subpar, they will avoid the ‘confrontation’ of directly telling you that you need to improve. Instead, they may become more micro-managing, and not offer the opportunities they otherwise would.

All of this is not to say that CIRs are without recourse when it comes to receiving feedback. We recommend having a one-on-one with your direct supervisor early in your tenure to discuss expectations. Keep in mind that just like the US, there are good managers and bad managers in Japan. Some will take you up on this and speak freely of what they need from you, some won’t, and others will say that they will and then proceed not to. Regardless, try to take notice of what you are doing and how it affects the team. Pay attention to what is going on around you and let this be an honest opportunity to be self-reflective about your work.

TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION

Translation

CIRs have been known to translate everything from movie scripts to sister-city correspondences to housing contracts. You may also be asked to check the translations of non-native speakers; the colloquial term for this is “native check.” Both are skills, and like any other skills you will develop them with practice.

Some general things to keep in mind:

- There’s no need to translate everything 100% literally. Except in technical or legal texts, tone and message are more important than semantic fidelity.
- Maintain the tone of the original. Shed your voice and adopt the author’s.

- Research on the field of the text you are translating. Learn the lingo and sound like an expert.
- Digesting a variety of well-written materials in both English and Japanese will help the most.
- Listen to criticism. You might not like hearing critiques by non-native speakers, but even the most misguided critique can lead you to better writing if you are receptive.
- Learn written forms of address (“The Most Excellent,” “The Honorable,” etc.) when writing to sister cities and public figures. Google has many excellent resources.
- Be careful of proper nouns. Often, an organization may have already chosen an English name for a program, location, building, or business. You should use their choice, even if it seems odd.

Interpretation

Interpretation is the act of verbally representing another’s voice in a different language. Most people assume that because you speak both English and Japanese you will be able to interpret with ease. Do not worry if you struggle – even professionals struggle with interpretation, and it is only a rare CIR who is able to interpret with ease right away.

Some pointers:

- Avoid getting hung up on individual words. Instead, concentrate on conveying the core message.
- Take notes to remember what was said, not which words were used.
- If interpreting a speech, try to get a copy of the prepared text. If a PowerPoint presentation will be used, try to get the slides ahead of time.
- Do not be afraid to ask clarifying questions. If you cannot hear the speaker, ask him or her to speak up.
- CLAIR offers a translation/interpretation course. The multi-day seminar at the end is fantastic.
- Practice at home by “shadowing” while watching TV: continuously repeat what was said immediately after the actor says it.

DON’T FORGET THE “E”

Ian Shantz - Kyoto

You will meet many in Japan and the United States who forget that the “E” in “JET” stands for “exchange,” not “English.” As a JET, grassroots exchange is your job, and as a CIR it will become your specialty. CIRs have been around as long as the JET Program (35 participated in the program’s inaugural year), but the roles and duties of the CIR have always been more nebulous than those of the ALT. An assistant language teacher assists in the teaching of language, but what exactly does a ‘coordinator for international relations’ coordinate? And what does “international relations” actually mean in your daily life? One of your challenges – and one of your adventures – is to figure these questions out for yourself.

7. ASSOCIATION OF JETs (AJET)

WHAT IS AJET? (GIH, 4.9, EN P.65 JP P.59)

The Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET) is a volunteer organization of JET Program participants. AJET serves the JET community by building support networks, organizing useful information, and offering resources to enhance the lives of the Program participants in Japan and abroad. It maintains a [peer support group](#) and an [online magazine](#), and voices the opinions and concerns of JETs to CLAIR and the Japanese government ministries that manage the JET Program. AJET has existed since the inception of the JET Program; at the national level, it is headed by the AJET National Council, a body of twenty elected and appointed current JETs from across Japan.

PREFECTURAL CHAPTERS OF AJET

AJET operates on a local level through their 47 prefectural chapters, which can be found [here](#). Your prefecture's chapter will organize a variety of events that all JETs are welcome to join, and it's a great way to meet other people in your prefecture. Your prefecture will also be part of a larger 'block' of prefectures, and prefectures within the same block will often try to organize block-wide events. Your block will also have a representative who liaises with National AJET on behalf of the constituent prefectures.

AJET RESOURCES

AJET organizes a variety of resources for JETs to make use of. Please refer to the links below:

- [JET Special Interest Groups](#)
- [Educational Resources for ALTs](#)
- [AJET Peer Support Group](#)
- [Advice for Incoming JETs](#)

8. LIFE AFTER JET

ABOUT THE JET ALUMNI ASSOCIATION (JETAA)

After you finish your tenure on the JET Program, you may find yourself at a loss for how to maintain the connections you built with Japan and JETs from around the world. That's where the JET Alumni Association comes in! With chapters in 17 countries around the world, JETAA is well-positioned to help you acclimate to life after JET. Additionally, many of these 17 nations have regional sub-chapters to help make it easier for returning JETs to connect. Whether it be through social events, professional development workshops, or networking opportunities, connecting with your local JETAA chapter is a great way to hit the ground running as you continue your career. For links to all JETAA chapters, see [here](#) and [here](#).

WASHINGTON, D.C. JETAA (JETAADC)

The Washington, D.C. chapter of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program Alumni Association (JETAADC) is one of 19 chapters in the United States that represents and promotes the interests of former JET participants.

JETAADC was founded in 1990. It currently operates under the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR). Having a network of people with shared abroad experiences can be not only comforting while you make your transition back to the US, but also beneficial as the association can present you with numerous career and volunteer opportunities.

Objectives

- To provide a forum for JET alumni in the Washington, DC area through regular meetings, social events, community outreach projects, and email updates
- To assist JETAA members who move to the DC area
- To support career development of local JET alumni
- To support the Embassy of Japan in promoting the JET Program; recruiting and preparing new JET participants
- To foster interaction among JET alumni and Washington's Japanese community and organizations
- To engage with other Japan-related organizations working to promote greater understanding of Japan in the Washington, DC area and of Washington, DC in Japan

Activities

- Networking events partnering with other Japan-related organizations
- Career development workshops, mentorship programs, and other professional development activities
- Social activities including *bōnenkai*, trivia nights, book club, baseball games, “*Nihongo Dake*” dinners, and more
- “JET Talks,” a speaker series modeled after TED Talks featuring dynamic and interesting individuals with unique expertise on Japanese culture and Japan-U.S. relations
- Outreach/volunteer activities
- Cross-cultural activities such as participation in Sakura Matsuri
- Provision of JETAA and Japan-related information via newsletter, website, and email list

JETAA Website and mailing lists

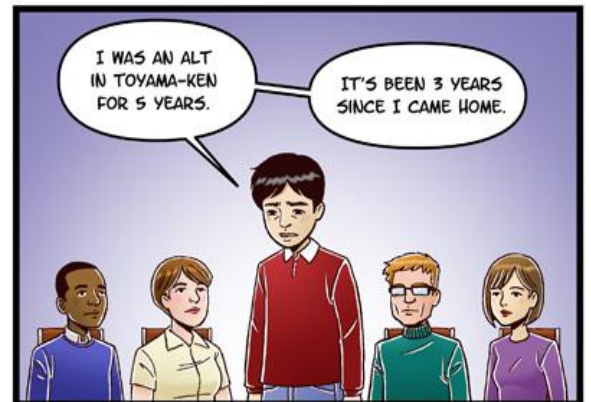
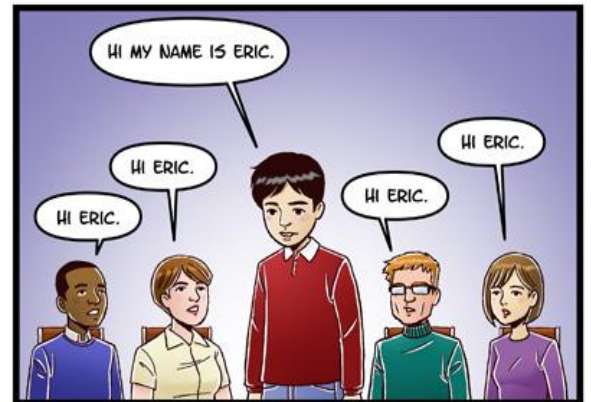
- [USJETAA](#) website
- [JETAADC](#) website
- [JETAADC Google Group](#): Request to join JETAADC, then sign-up for the Google Group
- [JETAADC Facebook Page](#)
- [JETAADC Instagram](#)
- [JETWit](#) website
- [JETAA International](#) website

JET Program USA

- JET Program USA [website](#)
- JET Program USA on [Facebook](#)
- JET Program USA on [Instagram](#)
- JET Program USA on [X](#)

Life After the B.O.E.

BY DAVID NAMISATO (AOMORI-KEN, CIR, 2002-04)



JETAA
We're here for you.