

Survival Guide for New JETs

Brought to you by the Chicago JET Alumni Association

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Bringing the Necessities	2
Your Luggage	2
The Japanese Tourist Bag	3
What to Bring	4
What Not to Bring	7
Omiyage	8
Japanese Language Learning	10
The Basics	10
Leveling Up: the JLPT and 「和会話」	12
Language Learning Resources	14
The Dreaded Dress Code	15
Men	15
Women	16
Shoes	18
Buying Clothes and Shoes in Japan	20
Women and Minorities on JET	22
Female on JET	23
People of Color on JET	26
LGBTQ+ on JET	27
Money Matters	29
Initial Costs	29
Cash in Japan	31
Hanko	31
Bank Accounts	32
ATMs	33
Budgeting	34
Paying Bills	35

Sending Money Overseas	35
Your Japanese House and You	38
The Construction of Your Japanese House	38
Cooling and Heating Your Japanese House	43
How to Use Your Japanese Toilet and Bath	50
Cleaning Your Japanese House	55
Furnishing or Inheriting Your Japanese House	61
House-Related Resources	62
Cellphones & Internet: How to Keep in Touch with the People Who Love You	64
Cellphones	64
Internet	64
Communicating Overseas	65
That Job Thing	67
A Brief Introduction to the Japanese School System	67
Japanese Schools are Different from American Schools	68
Navigating Your Schools or Offices	70
Free Time in the Office	71
Interacting With Students	71
Work Outside of Work	73
Alcohol and Drugs in Japan	73
Invasive Personal Questions	76
Emergency Situations in Japan	78
Resources for Emergencies	80
Your Japanese Doctor and You	81
Sick Days	82
Having a Cold in Japan	83
Visiting the Doctor	84
Dentistry	85
The Lady Doctor (OB/GYN)	86

Driving in Japan	88
Acquiring a Vehicle	89
All About Japanese Cars	90
Getting Your Japanese Driver's License	91
Driving Resources	96
Traveling in Japan	97
Appendix I: Acronyms	98
Appendix II: Collected Resources	99

Introduction

You're a JET! Congratulations! You're going to be living in Japan for a year or beyond—lucky you! Probably you already have questions, maybe a lot of questions. And that's okay. Many JETs have done what you're about to do, and we'd like to make it easier for you. This document is intended to help answer questions beyond the paperwork—stuff that your General Information Handbook (GIH) won't cover—like what are you supposed to do with all those buttons on your toilet? How do you heat your house in winter? How do you deal with invasive questions?

Don't worry, we've all been there. But first, some friendly advice:

- **READ THE INSTRUCTIONS.** There is a lot of paperwork associated with being a JET. Most of it is confusing, but the JET Program gives you all of these forms and instructions for a reason. Read everything carefully, and if you still have questions, then ask the folks at the Consulate. The Program has been running for nearly forty years; they do, in fact, know what they are doing, which means if you get a set of instructions telling you to do something, do it. For your reference, the GIH can be found online in English and Japanese at http://www.jetprogramme.org/documents/pubs/gih2014_e.pdf

- **EVERY SITUATION IS DIFFERENT.** If the JET Program had a motto, that would be it. ESID applies to nearly every aspect of JET life. Because JET participants are actually employed by different contracting organizations all over the country, it's difficult to definitively give one answer for every situation. It may be tiring to hear vague answers accompanied by a grin and an "Every situation is different," but there's no better way to describe the variety of life on JET.

- **Note:** This document contains Japanese text, in order to familiarize the reader with important hiragana, katakana, kanji words that are useful to know and/or recognize for living in Japan. To facilitate ease of use, all Japanese text has also been romanized, using the modified Hepburn system, and any kanji compounds have also been annotated with furigana. This document is intended to be a guide for life in Japan, not an introduction to Japanese language, so no effort is made to introduce Japanese phonetics or the writing system. Learning that is up to you.

Bringing the Necessities

To be fair, packing to move across the ocean to live in a foreign country for a year or more is pretty intimidating. There's a lot to think about, and JET provides some guidance, but what should you actually pack into those suitcases?

Your Luggage

The General Information Handbook is pretty specific on this—you generally get two suitcases (max 50lbs) as checked baggage and your carry-on luggage with you on your flight to Japan, and you may be charged for the second bag. If your bags are overweight, you will be charged. You are responsible for paying for those charges; have your dollars ready to go at the counter. Once you arrive at Narita, you will be asked to ship at least one of your checked bags to your contracting organization. This is because you will all be busing from Narita to Tokyo, and there is no room!

- **Note:** You are only allowed to bring one large bag and your carry-on to Tokyo Orientation. They are incredibly serious about this.

You are also asked to leave space in a bag to receive the metric ton of papers that you'll be getting at Tokyo Orientation. Expect to be carrying at least some of your carry-on luggage on your lap during the bus ride. Carry-on luggage is typically defined as one piece of small luggage and a "personal item", which may be a backpack or a purse.

So here's a suggestion: pack smarter. In your carry-on luggage—perhaps a backpack and a small duffel—pack your necessities: everything you need for Tokyo Orientation plus a week in your new home, toiletries, computer, etc.. Leave some space. In your two big bags, pack everything else, all that non-vital stuff that you're going to want eventually, but won't need for a week. Make sure you, yourself, can carry all your luggage a fair distance because you will have to do that at some point. Also, weigh your bags; if you don't have to get slammed with an overweight baggage charge, that's all for the best.

When you get to Tokyo, ship both your giant checked bags. At this point you will need your Japanese address. If you're clever, you will have memorized it or written it down somewhere convenient. Boom! All your heavy stuff is gone and you have everything you need for Tokyo Orientation, plus some spare if your bags get delayed. All in a neat little carry-on

duffel and a backpack. So easy! So light! Public transit or another flight to get to your posting will be a breeze! Stairs? No problem! No space for luggage on the shinkansen? Whatever, your bags fit overhead.

- **Note:** Do not be the guy repacking in the Narita parking lot.

Every year someone fails to read the GIH with the respect it deserves and packs all their necessities all over in their checked luggage. Then they have to unpack everything in the middle of the Narita Airport parking lot while everyone is jet-lagged and confused and trying to ship their luggage and get on the buses. It will be hot, possibly raining, probably 95% humidity, and your suitcase will never close again. You do not want to be that guy. Don't be that guy.

The Japanese Tourist Bag

Here's an important tip! You're going to be arriving in Japan, in the heat of summer, at the end of July. Some extremely useful things to have at hand or in your carry-on:

- **Sweat towel/hand towel:** a small towel comes in really handy for wiping off all that sweat (but you won't be sweating because you will have shipped all your luggage, right?).

Japanese public restrooms don't have paper towels, and often don't have hand dryers. Preserve your suit pants or skirt; bring a little towel.

- **Kleenex:** a small packet of tissues will not only keep your nose clean; lots of Japanese public restrooms don't have toilet paper! Regret nothing, carry kleenex.

• **Hand Sanitizer:** transpacific travel is a great way to get sick. Avoid the sniffles (although you have kleenex) and carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer. Also, good for restrooms without soap. Small bottles only, bigger bottles cause issues at Customs.

• **Painkillers:** Whether you like Advil, Tylenol, or Ibuprofen, it's wise to carry a small bottle with you, as Japanese painkillers are weaker than American ones, and traveling tends to be painful. (Not for you, though, you packed smart and are carrying your awesome Japanese Tourist Baggie. You are the Best JET.)

• **Fan:** Don't worry, this one you can pick up there, but Japan in the summer is hot, hot, hot, and air conditioning is questionable at best. Picking up a little hand fan is a great way to stay cool and acquire Japanese street cred.

What to Bring

Okay, you have your baggage, now what should you be putting in it? As stated previously, in your carry-on mini-duffel, you're going to want your suit, or whatever suit-like business attire you're going to be wearing at the Tokyo Orientation, and whatever else you need to survive for a week or so. Everything else can go into your big bags—remember that you're going to be arriving in late July and August, so it will be hot and humid for the first month. Depending on how much stuff you have, you may end up shipping some of it to your final destination.

Additionally, take some time to think about stuff that you really love having in America that might not exist in Japan, or that you might not be able to find in your size. Here's a handy list of some things that you probably want to purchase in the United States and bring with you:

- Toiletries (Primarily anything you might rub on your skin):
 - Lotions
 - Shampoos/Conditioners
 - Soap
 - Skin care products
 - Deodorant
 - Make-up (a lot of Japanese make-up has bleach in it—if you're not into that, you'd better learn how to read ingredient lists (and hope to find a color that looks good on you) or bring your own.)
 - Sunblock
 - Bugspray
 - Toothpaste: Japanese toothpaste does not contain the same amount of fluoride as American toothpaste. Likely the water won't have fluoride in it either.
 - Dental floss
 - Allergy medications (non-prescription)
 - Pain meds, e.g. Ibuprofen, Advil, Tylenol, etc. (non-prescription)
 - Tampons: Tampons are slowly becoming more and more popular in Japan, but it can still be hit or miss. (If you are a lady who uses the more substantial tampons available in America or don't like plastic applicators, bring your own.)

- Prescription meds: depending on if you fill out the Yakkan Shōmei (やっかんしょうめいしょ; 約款証明書);

yakkan shōmeisho, the forms to bring more than one month of prescription medication into Japan), you may be bringing several months of prescription medications with you in your luggage. If you don't want to fill out the Yakkan Shōmei, then you can only bring one month's worth of each prescription medication. You might also consider bringing a copy of each of your prescriptions, especially if you don't want to fill out a Yakkan Shōmei. A copy of your prescription can help a Japanese doctor prescribe you the same or a similar item.

- International Driver's License: available from AAA for about \$15. **Get one.**

Accompanied by a valid American driver's license, this will give you the option to drive in Japan for your first year. After that you will have to survive the dreaded Japanese Driving Test. It's a good idea to bring even if you don't plan on driving. More on driving in Japan later.

- Spare passport-sized photos: you're going to need a bunch of photos of yourself for various reasons when you first arrive, so bringing some spare is a good idea. You can get these at places like AAA or Walgreens.

- Clothing: if you wear anything larger than a small, maybe a medium in American sizes for women or men, it will probably be much harder for you to find clothes in Japan. While you can always order things online, shopping in stores will be pretty much out. Plan accordingly.

- Shoes: gentlemen, this one is particularly for you. If you have largish feet, Japanese shoes will never fit you, so plan on bringing or buying online.

- Winter clothing: depending on how much stuff you have, this will either fit into your bags or you'll have to ship it. But, guess what, Japan gets cold and you will want a warm coat. (Unless you live in Okinawa, then you have to worry about sunburn.)

- Long underwear: you are probably going to want a pair of these at some point. If you think Japanese sizes might not fit you (and you are larger than very petite), you might want to buy a pair early. If you don't believe that you'll need a pair, Uniqlo does offer sizes that fit many foreign folks, but if you have already have some, bring them.

- **Money:** ESID. There is a lot of conflicting advice about how much money you actually need to bring. The GIH proposes that you bring ¥250,000 with you to Japan. (Remember friends, read the instructions!) Now that sounds like a lot of money, and it is, but remember that you won't be getting a paycheck until mid-to-late August and you are moving a

new apartment in a foreign country. There are going to be a lot of start-up costs, and then you have to live sans paycheck for several weeks. Maybe you are that lucky JET who is inheriting a fully furnished house and all you have to do is buy some groceries. Don't count it, though. In the worst case scenarios, JETs have been able to borrow money from their supervisors or contracting organizations, but that's not exactly the image of suave sophistication that you want to be sending to your new bosses. Listen to the GIH. Change your dollars wherever you can find the best exchange rate, but do it before you get to Japan because there will not be time in Narita for exchanging money, and your CO may not be in a place that can handle American plastic.

- Bring some USD too! Having a hundred dollars in your pocket might come in mighty handy if you get smashed with some unexpected baggage charges or if you need some coffee to survive.

- **Tell your bank you are going abroad.** If you don't do this and you use your credit or debit card in Japan, your bank is probably going to lock down your account because they suspect fraud. Getting your account unlocked from abroad is a pain.

- Use your International Travel While Carrying Money Common Sense Powers! Don't carry your whole wad of survival cash in your wallet. Whether you divide it up in several places or carry a money belt, be aware that while Japan is a pretty safe country and people walk around with large amounts of cash on a regular basis, your money can and will walk off if you leave it unattended, or your bags could get lost in transit leaving you without bags or cash.

- An adapter plug or two for any electronics you might bring. As will be discussed later, Japanese outlets are essentially the same as American outlets, but they do not have a third hole for a ground or a polarized prong (where one of the prongs of a plug is slightly larger). Most American computer power cables are three prong, so taking a quick trip to Home Depot or Best Buy to pick up a "three-prong-to-two-prong adaptor" for your computer isn't a terrible idea. (Don't worry, the disappearance of the third prong will not affect the function of your device.)

What Not to Bring

Please don't bring household goods unless they are absolutely vital for your continued existence. Japan has great household goods, and you can purchase nearly everything that you need once you've moved. (And stuff you can't get in Japan, you may not be able to use in Japan.)

Use common sense here and don't bring anything illegal. If you can't bring it on an international flight, then probably you can't bring it into Japan. See the GIH for details about what you shouldn't bring.

- **Note: Japan has a zero tolerance policy for drugs. All drugs. Do not bring them. Do not use them. Not only will drug use get you fired, it will probably get you jailed and/or deported. This is *extremely* unpleasant. Do not do this.**

Drugs include marijuana in any amount. Seriously, it is absolutely not worth it to go to jail in a foreign country because you wanted a pot brownie.

Omiyage

^{みやげ}
(お土産 ; omiyage)

Possibly the most difficult part of packing to depart on JET. What is omiyage? Omiyage is classically translated as “souvenir,” but the actual meaning is closer to “gift.” Omiyage are small presents that the Japanese bring when they move to a new place to give to new coworkers and neighbors, or to bring back if they go on a trip. Giving and receiving omiyage is an important part of gift-giving in Japanese culture; it demonstrates that you were thinking of others while you were gone. Omiyage are local products, representative of the place where they were purchased—often foodstuffs—and run from very cheap to very expensive.

So, do you have to bring omiyage? Well, technically, no. No one can make you. Should you? Absolutely. You should plan on bringing something, even if it’s just something to show from your home. Bringing omiyage is a good way to show your future coworkers, neighbors, and friends that you took the time to do some research about Japan and its traditions, which is a pretty good thing to do if you’re going to be employed as an ambassador of your country. Also, bringing omiyage from your home is a good opener for your coworkers to ask questions about you and where you’re from. Bam! Internationalization go.

Okay, what are good things to bring? First rule, your omiyage should be representative of where you live or of the United States in general. Second rule, keep in mind that you’ll be traveling in Japan in August. It’s going to be hot, it’s going to be sticky, and if you bring something like chocolate, it’s going to melt and possibly leak all over your bag. Anything that melts is a terrible idea. Anything that will expire is also a terrible idea. If you bring a food, it should be individually wrapped (this rule is not absolutely set in stone, but individually wrapped things are definitely a higher grade of omiyage). Good foods: local, non-melty treats or snacks, Starbursts, suckers, etc. Bad foods: Tootsie rolls, saltwater candy (melting, guys, melting), anything really sweet (the Japanese are against a lot of American candies because they are “too sweet” for the Japanese palate. This is debatable, but don’t fight the Man too hard.), etc.

You can also skip foods entirely. Pennies, keychains, local shot glasses, pens, pencils, stickers, postcards, etc. make great omiyage, and you never need to worry about them melting.

Anything local or America-themed will be popular. NASA items are a hit as well. The downside to non-foods is that they can be heavy.

Wait, who gets omiyage? Basic rule of thumb: start with the important people and work down. It's probably best to bring a variety of items, so that the very important people get the very important items. School principals, the head of the Board of Education, perhaps the Mayor are the very important people. They are followed by vice-principals and the vice-head of the Board of Education, and then pretty much everyone else in the office. Communicating with your predecessor is important to figure out how many people for whom you might want to buy omiyage. In Japanese tradition, when you move to a new apartment or house, it is your responsibility to introduce yourself to your neighbors—omiyage are good here too.

Students, however, are on the absolute bottom of the omiyage list. You should not bring food of any kind for students—once again this rule is not actually set in stone forever, but consider the risk of deadly allergies and that the school may not want to feed the students anything they may perceive as “junk food.” Better safe than sorry. For students, stickers, pencils, and pennies are good rewards for good performance. Stickers are gold in elementary, junior high, and even high school, so don't hand them out willy-nilly when you could be using them as magical prizes for the best English Class Participants.

Japanese Language Learning

Regardless of your level: absolute beginner or Grand Kanji Master, you're going to be learning something about the Japanese language you didn't know before. Truthfully, you're an English teacher. You are being hired to teach English to Japanese students, but...most JET postings are in rural areas where it may be difficult to find fellow native speakers of English. Learning some Japanese will not only improve your relationship with your coworkers, it will absolutely improve your quality of life. If you do know some or a lot of Japanese, you probably already have some study tools in place, but if you only know Styx's "dōmo arigatō, Mr. Roboto," where does one even start?!

The Basics

If you don't know any Japanese at all, or only have a few phrases, please don't kill yourself pre-departure trying to learn how to conjugate adjectives, how to use keigo and kenjōgo (honorific and humble forms), all 2,136 jōyō kanji, and the causative-passive verb tense. It will only make you cry. Instead, pick up a beginner's level Japanese textbook—consider *GENKI* (The Japan Times, publisher), as it is a good introduction to basic Japanese—and apply yourself for some study time. *GENKI* is a good introductory textbook because it introduces the hiragana/katakana/kanji writing system early (the sooner you learn them, the better you'll be). *CLAIR* also provides Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced textbook-based courses (also a Translation and Interpretation course). Some people love it, some people don't—it's not necessarily a comprehensive learning experience. That said, there are a million theories on how to learn Japanese, and most of them disagree with one another; your mileage may vary.

But how are you supposed to learn three different styles of writing—one of which is really hard—a new vocabulary, a new grammar, and actually order stuff in restaurants?! you may cry. Unfortunately, there is no easy answer, and anyone who tells you that you can become fluent in Japanese in weeks to months is definitely lying to you. The US Foreign Service Institute classifies Japanese as a Category V language, requiring 2,200 hours of study to achieve general proficiency. There is a lot of brute force memorization and practice required. If you took a language during your educational experience, you probably remember this. It's a good way to empathize with your students.

If picking up a textbook sounds too difficult, you should probably do it anyway—your fellow teachers and your students will appreciate your hard work to learn their language. Disregarding how awesome at Japanese you want to become, picking up some quick and dirty phrases and learning the sounds before leaving is a good idea.

Here is a basic spread of things that you might want to memorize:

- Greetings and Basic Office Phrases:

English	Romaji	Japanese (kana only)
Good Morning	Ohayō gozaimasu	おはようございます
Hello / Good Afternoon	Konnichiwa	こんにちは
Good Evening	Konbanwa	こんばんは
Good Night	Oyasumi nasai	おやすみなさい
Thank you (very) much	(Dōmo) arigatōgozaimasu	(どうも)ありがとうございます
Pleased to meet you. (Used only the first time you meet someone.)	Hajimemashite	はじめまして
Lit: Please take care of me. (When asking someone to do something for you or when introduced to someone.)	Yoroshiku onegaishimasu	よろしくおねがいします
Lit: I receive this. (Said before eating. Req'd at school.)	Itadakimasu	いただきます
Thank you for this meal. (Said after a meal. Req'd at school.)	Gochisōsama deshita	ごちそうさまでした
Excuse me for leaving. (Said to the office at the end of the day.)	Osaki ni shitsureishimasu	おさきにしつれいします
Please excuse me. (Polite.)	Shitsureishimasu	しつれいします
Excuse me. / Sorry. / Pardon.	Sumimasen	すみません
I'm sorry.	Gomen nasai	ごめんなさい
I don't understand Japanese.	Nihongo o wakarimasen	にほんごをわかりません。

- Where is the Toilet?:

English	Romaji Pronunciation	Japanese (kana only)
Where is....?	...wa doko desu ka?	〇〇はどこですか。
Toilet	Toire	トイレ
Train Station	Eki	えき
The Board of Education	Kyōikuiinkai	きょういくいいんかい
Straight	Massugu	まっすぐ
Right	Migi	みぎ
Left	Hidari	ひだり

There are endless things to talk about, as the Japanese language is just as big and complicated as the English language, but this is not a language textbook. Buy one and make an effort. It will really help you.

You can also ask your BOE if someone in your area is willing to tutor you for free or a nominal fee. Nobody can teach Japanese like the Japanese can, and a good Japanese tutor can really give you an edge in language learning. It may also behoove you to learn how to write your name in katakana (characters for foreign words/names) before you go (word of advice: do not pick kanji (Chinese characters) for your name—name kanji is complicated, and you can get it really wrong really easily). If you already know how to write your name, that means you get to be the definitive voice in how it is pronounced, which may be important. Being able to write your address, once you know it, in either English or Japanese characters is also a good thing to practice because you are going to need to be able to know that right off the bat.

Leveling Up: the JLPT and 「和会話」

So you know some Japanese, maybe you know a lot of Japanese—maybe you're a CIR, and you should probably be doing something more useful with your time than read this section—in any event, you're about to move to Japan and whip out your phenomenal Japanese skills on the unsuspecting populace. But what if you could be even better?

As mentioned in the Basics section, CLAIR does provide a series of textbooks and a translation and interpretation course, which may be useful. The beginner's textbook series,

GENKI, which is published by The Japan Times, has a bigger, badder brother called *An Integrated Approach to Intermediate Japanese*. The Japan Times has a number of other publications aimed at advanced learners, and are a fairly reputable publishing company for learning Japanese.

If you are an intermediate to advanced student of Japanese, you might consider buying a *denshi jisho* (電子辞書; electronic dictionary), which can be used in class, and is excellent for leveling up your vocabulary game. Note that those bad boys are pretty pricy and require strong kana/kanji reading ability to use effectively. If you have a *denshi jisho* or you have a number of internet-based or paper *jisho* that you like, go to a bookstore and/or read the newspaper. Do it rigorously. Keep lists of new and exciting words, phrases, or grammatical bits that you learn. There are any of a number of study guides for amping up your skills.

You can also seek a tutor for structure learning or ^{わ かいわ}和会話 (*wakaiwa*; Japanese conversation class—pun on ^{えい かいわ}英会話; *eikaiwa*; English conversation class), which might be formal or informal. Going to bars or joining clubs at school or in the community is also a great way to improve your speaking. If you can find a patient friend, who is willing to correct you when you make mistakes, you can improve in leaps and bounds. If you run an *eikaiwa*, you might ask one of the participants if they would be willing to help you with Japanese.

The Holy Grail of Japanese Ability is the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT; ^{にほん ご のうりよくしけん}日本語能力試験; *nihongo nōryoku shiken*). If you already know about it or have passed any of the levels, go you. If you don't, the JLPT is the standard for Japanese proficiency. There are five levels, Five being the easiest and One being God Level. The test is held twice a year in July and December, and you must register and pay a fee. Log on to the JLPT website to find out how and where. There are endless study guides for the JLPT.

If the Kanji Force is strong within you, try the KanKen (The Japan Kanji Aptitude Test; ^{にほん かんじ のうりよくけんてい}日本漢字能力検定; *nihon kanji nōryoku kentei*), which is the Japanese standardized kanji test. There are twelve levels (ten levels and two pre-levels) with Level Ten being the easiest and Level One being Supreme God Level (more than 85% of native speakers fail it). The KanKen is only offered in Japanese, so you'll need to be able to read the instructions as well.

Language Learning Resources

- Basic Hiragana Chart: http://japanese-lesson.com/resources/pdf/hiragana_chart.pdf
- Hiragana Chart with Stroke Order: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/28/Table_hiragana.svg/768px-Table_hiragana.svg.png
- Basic Katakana Chart: http://japanese-lesson.com/resources/pdf/katakana_chart.pdf
- Katakana Chart with Stroke Order: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/0d/Table_katakana.svg/768px-Table_katakana.svg.png
- Jim Breen's WWWJDIC, The Online J-E, E-J Dictionary: <http://www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jwb/cgi-bin/wwwjdic.cgi?1C>
- Denshi Jisho, online J-E, E-J dictionary: <http://jisho.org>
- Tae Kim's Guide to Learning Japanese, good grammar reference: <http://www.guidetojapanese.org/learn/grammar>
- The Japanese Language Proficiency Test: <http://www.jlpt.jp/e/>
- KanKen (Japanese only): <http://www.kanken.or.jp>

The Dreaded Dress Code

You filled out your application, you survived the interview, you've been accepted to the JET Program, you're going to move to Japan to teach English for a year, now what on Earth do you wear?

Naturally, ESID. And then there are the tracksuits.

The best way to get a handle on your particular workplace's dress code is to stick with something formal business (whatever you wear to Tokyo Orientation) for the first few weeks so that you make a good impression on your coworkers and you can observe what they wear and make future sartorial choices based on your specific office.

- **Note:** Don't make any bold choices until you've seen someone in your office do it.
- **Note Two:** If you have a tattoo, you will cover it. Completely. Tattoos are not acceptable in a Japanese office as they have gang-related connotations. (The Japanese mafia, the yakuza, often have large tattoos.) Public baths also have rules about tattoos and may not allow you in if you have any large, visible tattoos.

Remember that CIRs and high school ALTs will probably have to stick to the formal end of the fashion spectrum and elementary and junior high school ALTs will get to wear more casual clothing. All bets are off when it comes to kindergarten and preschool.

Keep in mind that you are in Japan, representing the United States, so even in your off-work hours it is generally advisable to stick with fairly conservative fashion choices, as the people in your community will be watching you closely and your actions will direct their opinions on the U.S. as a whole.

That said, here are some general guidelines:

Men

Gentlemen, the code is generally somewhere between business and business casual—but think conservative. In the hot months (May 1st-October 31st), Japanese offices practice “Cool Biz.” This means that you can wear short sleeved shirts (button-up certainly, polo may or may not be acceptable—collars are key) with a lighter pair of slacks, chinos or nice khakis. No shorts or jeans. Ties and suit coats are not required during the Cool Biz months. As it will be quite hot, and your office probably will not have air conditioning, it is advisable to have some lightweight

pants and some undershirts to wear under your nicer shirts—because nobody wants to see sweat stains.

Cool Biz officially ends on October 31st, at which point your coworkers will generally start wearing long-sleeved button-up shirts, ties, and suit coats. As it may get quite cold where you are living, a few sets of heavier weight office clothes would not be amiss. Depending on where you live and how cold you feel, you may want a pair of long underwear to put under your clothing.

The Japanese also love tracksuits. Japanese tracksuits take all the aforementioned rules and trash them—except for the fact that they function like a uniform. They consist of a matching jacket and bottom, often in a lurid color with a slogan somewhere on them (never in velour). Underneath, male teachers often wear a loose athletic shirt or the same button-up they came to school in. Tracksuits are great for athletics, arts and crafts, and cooking classes, and some teachers teach all their classes in them. It can be a great way to protect and preserve your nice clothing from the everyday wear and tear of teaching. That said, there is a time and a place for tracksuits—Sports Day is good, graduation is bad. Use your best judgement and err on the side of caution.

You will also be expected to wear a black suit with a white shirt for formal occasions, such as graduation or commencement. The rest of the time, try to stick with neutral colors and mild patterns—men are not particularly flamboyant in the office. Shirts should be tucked in. Your shoulders, armpits, nipples, and underwear should never be visible. This also applies to your private life. Men do not wear any visible jewelry beyond a watch, or possibly a simple bracelet, visible piercings are generally not okay.

Women

Ladies, the dress code is much more complicated for you because you have so many more options and it's easier to get in trouble. Still, like the gentlemen, the dress code generally ranges from business to business casual. The keywords you should be focusing on are: modest and conservative. During “Cool Biz,” the dress code from May 1st to October 31st, you can wear lighter summer items. At the end of October, Cool Biz ends and everyone will transition to warmer clothing for winter.

Skirts should be no shorter than knee length. Your office may require you to wear pantyhose, so proceed with caution. During the colder months, you should wear tights with your skirt. Stick with black or other dark neutral colors for your tights. Avoid fun patterns; a simple pattern may be acceptable. As for pants, suit pants, slacks, chinos, and nice khakis are all good bets. Jeans are not allowed. Avoid low rise pants, and if your pants tend to slip, wear a belt.

Shirts are the most difficult. Unlike in the States, shoulders, armpits, breasts, and the lower back and belly are considered risqué. It is not ever appropriate for you to show off these assets, especially at school. Tank tops and blouses or shirts with cap sleeves are not appropriate for work and may not be appropriate for play. Blouses should not fall anywhere lower than three fingers below your collarbone. If you have particularly ample cleavage, you will want to have even more modest shirts. Check your wardrobe before you leave—you shouldn't be able to see any cleavage, even when bowing. Your shirt should be tucked in or you should be wearing a camisole. Camis are a great item to hide your bra (necessary) and to keep people from seeing your lower back when you bend over to bow. Permissible colors and patterns for shirts vary widely from school to school. Guess conservative and observe!

Depending on the situation, dresses may or may not be appropriate, accompanied by panty hose or tights. Avoid all tight, formfitting clothing. Utilize cardigans! A few simple cardigans can help you disguise the parts of your wardrobe that might not be up to Japanese standards. Scarves and pashminas can also help hide any unintended or unavoidable cleavage. You will be expected to wear a suit or a suit-like item for special ceremonies like graduation or commencement. Black is the best color for suits.

Accessories! We like them a lot in America, but caveat emptor, they are not necessarily appropriate for working in a Japanese office. Yet again, ESID, but you should plan on modest and conservative.

- Jewelry: stick with one piece at a time.
 - Earrings: one pair of discreet studs in your lobes—no other visible piercings.
 - Necklace: one small, simple pendant.
 - Rings: one at a time, stay simple. Wedding rings are fine.
 - Bracelets: one small and simple piece.
- Nail Polish: none. Err on the side of caution; your office may allow clear or neutral shades, but don't do it until you see someone else doing it.

- Perfume: none.
- Make-up: most Japanese women wear it. Stick with very neutral, nude shades—a matching face color is good. No bright eye colors and no heavy liner. Lipstick is normally okay on formal suit days, but nothing shocking. You can wear light gloss daily.
- Hair accessories: small and discreet. No headbands. Scrunchies are normally okay.

Now it sounds like all the fun stuff is off the table, and it kind of is. Your contracting organization is not hiring you to look cute and you are not a model, and, frankly, you don't want to be. Your students and coworkers are going to be watching everything you do. (Honestly, ladies, who wants to look super hot to junior high or high school boys and girls?) You are being hired to represent your country, and regardless of what you wear, you are going to get looks and comments about your body and your appearance. There are lots of ways to work within the system—cardigans are a great way to cover up questionable attire and look fantastic, so pack a wide variety of conservative and modest clothing, pay close attention to your coworkers, and you'll be fine.

Shoes

If you've been paying attention, you'll already be aware that the Japanese Shoe Game is intense. For those of you who have been navel gazing, there are two types of shoes in Japan: indoor and outdoor. The reason is that traditional Japanese houses have tatami in them, and you cannot wear shoes (any shoes with hard soles) on tatami without ruining it. Tatami is extremely expensive to replace and difficult to clean, so the Japanese kick their shoes off whenever they enter a house. This also keeps the house a lot cleaner, since you only track outside dirt into your genkan (玄関^{げんかん}, the entry way in a Japanese home, where people remove their shoes before stepping up into the actual house—generally a good place to store shoes, kerosene tanks, etc.). However, what this means for you is that you'll need double the amount of shoes, because you are not allowed to switch them. Since you'll be swapping shoes at least twice a day, shoes that are easy to slip on and off are the best.

Indoor shoes, which are worn in buildings (a number of government buildings and municipal offices use outside shoes, CIRs, remember, ESID), but never on tatami, can be *extremely* clean shoes you already own (wash them, maybe twice) or brand new. You will never

wear them outside. If you do, they become outdoor shoes. You'll be using these for most of your teaching day, and you'll likely be standing all day, so comfortable shoes are a must. Crocs, simple sneakers, flats, and low heels are good to wear at school.

- **Note:** It is not critical that your shoes match your outfit—often teachers have one or two pairs of indoor shoes that they keep at school, and at some point you'll see a teacher rocking a formal suit and lime green crocs.

Try to avoid high wedges or high high heels—they are a little too casual party to be acceptable in the workplace, and probably pretty uncomfortable to stand in while you teach a six class day (Japanese teachers do not sit to teach). If you fail to bring indoor shoes to school, then you will be given a pair of guest slippers, which are plastic, uncomfortable, and probably won't fit well.

Outdoor shoes are worn outside of buildings and into, but no farther than, the genkan. Again, shoes that are reasonably easy to slip off are recommended. You can use your American shoes for this. Do some research on where you're going—if you end up in Niigata-ken or Tottori-ken, you're going to be facing snowfall that can be up to 13 feet high. You're probably going to want to bring some snow boots.

There are a couple of other classes of Japanese shoes. In their private homes, on floors not made of tatami, the Japanese wear house slippers (スリッパ; surippa), which are available in many colors, shapes, and styles in shops. While there is no requirement that you must wear house slippers in your own house, they do keep one's feet toasty warm during cold winters. If you go into a friend's house, they will offer you a pair of slippers; use them. House slippers are a kind of indoor shoe and never go outside (or, technically, into the genkan; you should leave them on the genkan step and step into your outdoor shoes to answer the door).

Finally, there are toilet slippers (トイレスリッパ; toire surippa). Just as outdoor shoes belong outdoors, indoor shoes belong at work, and house slippers belong at home, toilet slippers belong to the toilet. The toilet, in this case, refers to the actual toilet, not the bathroom. Toilet slippers are generally made of plastic, and come in fewer styles and patterns than do house slippers. In a traditional Japanese home, these slippers will sit just inside the door of the toilet, and you will slip off your house slippers and slip on your toilet slippers when you enter. When you leave, you change slippers again, leaving the toilet slippers neatly pointing so that the next

person can step straight into them. Toilet slippers can also be found in a number of public buildings and offices. You must use them and always leave them neat.

- **Note:** Do not steal the toilet slippers. It happens to everyone, you go to the toilet, change your slippers, and then forget to switch back and flip flop your way back to the office wearing the plastic toilet slippers. Someone is going to laugh at you. Guaranteed. Do not steal the toilet slippers.

As you may be noticing, you're going to be changing shoes several times a day, and you're probably going to be confronted by having to wear slippers that do not belong to you. Because public footwear like guest slippers may see any of a number of different feet, it is polite, and, frankly, a good idea to always wear socks. If you go somewhere wearing your outdoor sandals, bringing a pair of socks along is recommended.

Buying Clothes and Shoes in Japan

Hah, good luck. Buying clothes in Japan can be challenging even for the petite. If you are not a small person, you are out of luck. Japanese clothes are available to those who fall into the “small” and sometimes “medium” size categories. For everyone else, bring it or order it online. Even for the petite folk, the proportions of Japanese clothes can be a little different, so try before you buy. Japanese clothing sizes are labeled S, M, and L—small, medium, and large respectively—but these sizes have no relation to American sizes and a woman who wears a size small in the States might wear an L in Japanese clothing.

Shoes are also difficult to buy. If you have large feet (anything past men's size 10 or women's size 8), you will be in trouble. The Japanese measure shoe size in centimeters, so the largest sizes usually available are 28cm for men and 25cm for women. Wide feet are also difficult to shop for. Occasionally one can find larger sizes in some shops, but house slippers and toilet slippers probably won't fit very well.

If you really, really want some traditional Japanese clothing, do not despair! While it is sometimes quite difficult to find kimono (着物; traditional Japanese robe tied with a belt) and yukata (浴衣; informal kimono worn in summer) in larger sizes for both men and women, it is not impossible. There is not a lot of variety, but it can be done! Finding tabi (足袋; split toe socks worn with traditional clothing) is pretty easy, as there are a number of shops that cater to

foreign folk in Japan and on the internet. Finding geta (下駄^{げた}; wooden sandals worn often worn with yukata in the summer) and zōri (草履^{ぞうり}; sandals traditionally made with straw, but now commonly made of plastic or brocade, worn with kimono) is a little more difficult, but also not impossible.

Women and Minorities on JET

Flippant title aside, JETs who are female, people of color, or LBGTQ+ are going to experience some things that other JETs might not (particularly male caucasian JETs), but everyone should read this section because knowledge is power.

As always, ESID.

First, before anyone gets angry because Japan is a first world country and everything is sparkles, roses, and ninja there, remember, the United States is a first world country too. Also, 95% of the time, your coworkers, your students, and your friends are not intending to make you uncomfortable—Japanese technology may be futuristic, but Japanese society is slow to change and the Japanese have a long history of social isolation from other cultures.

Second, while individualism is valued in the U.S., it is less so in Japan. Probably you have read about how Japan is a culture that is focused on the group, not the individual, and it's true. Japan has a saying that you should remember: 出る杭は打たれる; *deru kui wa utareru*; the nail that sticks out gets hammered in. The meaning is fairly self-evident, but if you stand out, you will face criticism. That does not mean that you should fold yourself up into a little ball to be the best Japanese person you can be. You're an ambassador of cultural exchange—you are participating in the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program, after all, and there's only so much you can change about yourself. But you should consider being somewhat politic about addressing your differences and the reactions to your differences that you will experience in Japan.

Also, keep in mind that Japanese society is changing. It may be slow and even seem thoroughly fossilized, but things are getting better, a lot better. Japan is becoming more internationalized, and the population of non-Japanese natives is increasing. With that increase there is a broadening awareness that social problems like those discussed below exist. That's where you come in. As a JET, you can use yourself as a teaching tool to educate your students and your coworkers about differences.

Female on JET

Ladies, this section is for you. Gents, there is some useful information here, and it probably won't hurt you to read it. Why is it necessary to have a section about being a lady in Japan? Isn't it 2014? How bad could it be?

Well, naturally, ESID, but here's the deal: for women's rights, Japan is socially a little behind the U.S.—think 1950s-style, Americana: women typically work in low status jobs, such as secretarial positions, get married, leave the workplace, and spend the rest of their lives as housewives catering to their husbands' every whim. Japan has a long tradition of OLs (オ－エ / ； office ladies) who serve a secretarial function, serving tea to guests and then leaving the office upon marriage. The OL career generally offers no chance for advancement, and is centered around menial office tasks. So, as a result, in the office, women are generally expected to serve tea to guests and clean up after others. You may not be asked to do this, as often you occupy the strange space between “foreign guest” and “female office worker,” but it could happen, and you will definitely see your female co-workers do this work very quietly. “Female office worker,” you will come to notice is often on a slightly lower tier than “male office worker.”

What do you do if someone asks you to prepare tea? Well, congratulations, you're one of the gang, but there's no simple answer. The wrong answer is probably to throw a fit about how you don't have to make tea for anyone especially for some visiting middle-aged dude. Even if it is infuriating, throwing a fit will not make you or your office look good. That is not to say that you should just keep your head down and automatically do whatever you're told. Probably the best answer is if you're asked to make tea and you actually know how to do it, do it, serve it, and then explain afterwards that you're uncomfortable with it.

Even if you're never asked to serve tea, it's quite likely that you will encounter something that will startle you because the reason is: “because you're a girl.” That something may be home maintenance (how do you know what the problem is?), volunteering to set up for events (how dare you lift a chair!), drinking (don't you like girly drinks?), etc. These kinds of micro-aggressions can really ruin your day, but take a deep breath and relax. Snapping at your coworkers or students is not going to solve the problem. Think of it as a really cool teaching opportunity; you make the change yourself.

If you have a “non-traditional” haircut or you like clothes that aren’t typically “feminine,” you may also face some censure. Pixie type haircuts are not particularly common for Japanese women. Mohawks and faux hawks are not appropriate for women or men. A shaved head on a woman will get some commentary, but is not a critical problem as Buddhist nuns often shave their heads. Women in Japan are supposed to like a certain set of things, and men are supposed to like a different set of things—for example, in a ¥100 shop, the lunch boxes intended for men are in black and blue with neutral patterns, the ones intended for women tend to be much more cutesy. Picking items intended for the “other gender” may incite some criticism (Silly foreign ALT, that lunch box is for boys.), so proceed gently, but firmly. Once again, consider it a teaching opportunity.

You’re also going to get asked about your marital and dating status. Endlessly. “Do you have a boyfriend?” is probably going to be the first or second question that your students will ask you. It’s probably the third or fourth question your coworkers will ask you. There are many ways to handle this question (see also, LGBTQ+ on JET). Don’t lie and invent some dude, because people will inevitably want all the details and “When is he going to visit?”, etc. If you aren’t comfortable discussing your relationships, turn it into a joke: “My boyfriend? Oh, yeah, I’ve got a great boyfriend—his name is Spiderman. He can shoot *webs*.” (“The Amazing Spiderman” came out in Japan in 2012, some Japanese pop culture knowledge will go a long way.) You can also tell everyone that “It’s a secret,” which might deter them or not. Either way, it’s up to you how you handle it, and you should think about it, because you are going to be asked. If you are a married JET, you may actually be asked fewer questions about your spouse because Japanese folks often work far from their homes and perhaps only go home to see their spouses on weekends.

Dating in Japan can be awesome. It can also be a complex morass of cultural misunderstandings. Be aware and tread carefully. As a rule of thumb, it is often harder for foreign women to get dates with Japanese folk than men, but, ESID. Keep in mind that most of your coworkers will keep their private life completely out of the workspace, and you might never know that they are dating or even getting married until they announce it. Additionally, “meeting the parents” is a pretty huge step in the Japanese dating world, especially when one party isn’t Japanese, so don’t expect it. For those interested in doing some outside reading, check out “My

Darling is a Foreigner” by Sayori Oguri (ダーリンは外国人 by 小栗左多里), which is a manga written by a Japanese woman who married a foreign man.

The other thing you should think about is sexual harassment, and how you might respond to it. Sexual harassment (セクハラ; sekuhara) is a serious problem in Japan. It ranges from fairly innocuous statements (“Do you like Japanese men?” “If we were the last men on Earth, who would you choose?” “You look like a doll, with your white face and pink cheeks.”) to extremely troubling (a supervisor pressuring a subordinate for sex). You will certainly experience more of the former than the latter. Sexual harassment is such a problem in Japanese society that all cameras, including in phones, are required to audibly click to alert people in the area that a photo is being taken. That’s pretty bad, but it doesn’t mean that you should never leave your house. Being a female JET means that you’ll need to have a tough skin to shrug off or laugh off vaguely sexualized comments—a great answer to “If we were the last men on Earth...” is “Oh, I wouldn’t need any men, I’d have the internet.”—and you shouldn’t be afraid to speak out if someone is giving you a hard time. If something truly terrible happens, start with your supervisor, and also talk to your Prefectural Advisors or contact CLAIR (the GIH has a lot more information on this).

Resources:

- Dating in Japan:
 - <http://zoomingjapan.com/life-in-japan/about-dating-in-japan/>
 - <http://zoomingjapan.com/life-in-japan/dating-japanese-men/>
 - From the Japanese perspective: <http://www.tofugu.com/2013/10/18/what-its-like-to-date-a-non-japanese-person-my-experience/>
- Sexual Harassment (Refer to the GIH for complete info):
 - CLAIR JET Line: 03-5213-1729 (Mon-Fri, 9:00am-5:45pm)
 - CLAIR JET Mail: jet@clair.or.jp
 - AJET Peer Support Group: 050-5534-5566 or Skype: AJETPSG (Sun-Sun, 8:00pm-7:00am)

People of Color on JET

So, you're going to Japan. Hooray! But maybe you're a little worried about caring for your natural hair. Or that people are going to point and stare. Or assume you're Japanese and just keep talking at you. These are all valid concerns. Japan is a pretty homogenous society, and so being different in any way can be tough sometimes. Hollywood has pretty thoroughly white-washed the way the average Japanese person sees "foreigners," so your experience will probably be different than a caucasian JET's. But, ESID. So, use it! Give lessons on yourself! Get your students interested in facets of American culture that are unique to you!

JETs of Asian descent—congratulations, you can blend. Nobody is going to point at you. People will probably ignore you on public transit and children won't yell "Foreigner!" at you in the streets. Bonus. Unfortunately, probably no one is going to buy you a round in the bar because you look like fun foreigners. Being Asian-American in Japan means that everyone will just assume that you're Japanese. That means that people will have a tendency to treat you like a Japanese adult; they will assume that you are fluent in Japanese. If you are actually fluent in Japanese, congratulations, you have won the lottery. If you aren't you need to learn how to say "I don't understand Japanese." (see: Japanese Language Learning: The Basics), but that probably will only slow people down a little. Your superiors and coworkers will likely also assume that because you look like you might be Japanese that all standards of Japanese behavior will apply to you, which they won't because you won't necessarily know that you're supposed to be behaving a certain way. Also be aware of political tensions in the region—it is possible to run into resentment towards Korea or China in certain areas of Japan.

As for everyone else, if you are not of Asian descent and you are not caucasian, someone, probably a student, is likely going to comment on your skin color at some point. Much like caucasian JETs, you are going to get stares and comments about your personal appearance that you may find uncomfortable. It will be difficult or impossible for you to blend in, so people are going to watch whatever you do with interest. There is a high chance that a small kid will yell "Foreigner!" or "Black person!" (if you are anything other than pasty white) at you regardless of your actual skin color or country of descent. Most Japanese people are familiar with people of color from TV, but many of them have never met any actual person of color. Try to remember that 95% of the time, people are not actively trying to be racist, mostly they are just really

curious and—especially your students—will not be the most tactful about expressing their curiosity.

If you are of African descent, it will be very difficult for you to find hair and skin care products in Japan, so best to bring your own. People are going to be very interested in your hair, especially if you have natural hair, and there is a very good chance that someone will touch it without your permission. For lady folk with darker complexions, bringing your own cosmetics and hose is vital.

Share whatever cultural heritage you feel closest to with your students. Talk about foods that your family loves, holidays your family celebrates, family traditions, music you like, the Civil Rights Movement, and famous athletes who share your awesome background. Talk about things that are important to you—even if they have nothing to do with your ethnic background. After all, you get to promote that Americans aren't just white, and that is really, really important.

LGBTQ+ on JET

As mentioned briefly in the Female on JET section, socially Japan is kind of like 1950s Americana, and also ESID. What does that mean for you? It means that Japan is still pretty socially conservative, but that does not mean that Japan is an unfriendly place to be a LGBTQ+ person. In fact, Japan is a relatively safe place to come out—although there are no legal stipulations to protect LGBTQ+ couples, it's absolutely not illegal, and most of the silence on the part of the Japanese about LGBTQ+ issues is lack of awareness of those issues. Historically, it was not something one could discuss or share, and was considered a bit of “hobby lifestyle,” but that is steadily changing (consider seeing the Tokyo Pride Parade).

Japan traditionally has a pretty strong gender binary. For the most part, women are supposed to like female things and men are supposed to like male things. Recently there have been a number of educational publications aimed at Japanese students to increase awareness and acceptance for gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals (and, eventually, we hope, everyone else). So while female students have to wear the female uniform and male students have to wear the male uniform, there are some exceptions and awareness and acceptance are increasing.

That being said, your coworkers and your students will assume that you are cisgender and heterosexual, and their questions will reflect that. How you want to handle their questions is up to you. Some JETs choose to come out to a number of trusted coworkers. Some only come out

to fellow JETs, but not at their office. Some choose not to come out at all. Proceed a little cautiously about coming out to students, perhaps come out to your coworkers first and gauge their reactions and ask a trusted coworker first—they have a better handle on the social situation than you do and can help you out. While providing a solid role model for kids who don't necessarily have access is a wonderful thing, your employers may not want you to come out to the kids for a variety of reasons (it may be considered not appropriate to share with the students).

Outside of your workplace, there are a number of opportunities for LGBTQ+ folk. Stonewall Japan is the biggest resource for all things rainbow in Japan and they have a lot of detailed information about being LGBTQ+ where ever you live. Naturally, bigger cities will have more opportunities, but that's true for just about everything. Also, when out and about, PDA is not appropriate for anyone, regardless of gender or sexuality, so you won't see very many people touching in public. However, it is fairly common for groups of people of the same gender to be out together, and you will not be questioned for being out with someone of the same gender.

Resources:

- Stonewall Japan: <http://stonewall.ajet.net>

Money Matters

Presuming you followed Rule Number One and read the instructions presented in the General Information Handbook, and listened to everything you were told in all the information you received pre-departure (it's a lot, but it's pretty much all important), you probably don't have any questions about bringing money to Japan. Even if you've only read the What to Bring section in this handy booklet, you should have some idea of how much money you should bring to Japan.

- **Note:** Please inform your American bank that you are going to be living abroad in Japan for a year. It's no fun for anyone if you try to use your American accounts and your bank suspects you of fraud and shuts down your access.

Keep your American bank account open! It's a good place to deposit all that money that you're making. Consider giving a trusted friend or family member access to your account in case of any issues. If you have outstanding debt, in the form of student loans or otherwise, make arrangements before you leave to keep your payments steady.

Initial Costs

Nonetheless, to reiterate: the GIH recommends that you should bring about ¥250,000, in hard, cold, cash to Japan. Bring it in yen—there's a strong chance you won't have the time or the mental bandwidth to change it in an airport (find a bank or a money exchange place near you—wherever the rates are decent). Now that seems like a lot of money, and it is; it comes out somewhere between \$2,000-\$3,000USD. Have past JETs brought less? Sure they have! Some JETs make it on \$500 worth of initial money. Some need \$4,000.

ESID.

But play it safe and assume that the writers of the GIH know what they're talking about—and they do—and plan on bringing the recommended amount. What are you going to do with all that money? Remember, you will not receive your first paycheck until late August (Japanese offices generally pay their employees on the 21st of the month), so you are faced with having to move across the ocean to a new country, possibly find a new apartment (you'll have help with this), pay to hook up utilities like power, gas, and internet, furnish your apartment, buy food, pay

for public transit, pay for delivery of large items, or pay for a car, and probably pay to set up a cellphone. Whew. That's a lot of things that require money!

Naturally, depending on your situation, you might not have to do one or more of these things. Assume you'll have to do all of them, then talk to your predecessor (if you have one, if you don't, plan to do everything listed above). Your predecessor will have a fairly good idea of what they had to do when they first arrived, and can give you specific information about what you will have to do. Often times your predecessor will be living where you will be living and will happily sell you the contents of the apartment (this is easier to do than trying to get furniture hauled away to the dump). 95% of the time, your predecessor is not trying to cheat you, but caveat emptor.

Occasionally you might not have a predecessor or you might have to move into a new apartment. Don't worry too much, your contracting organization is obligated to help you with this. However, Japanese apartments sometimes have unexpected costs associated with them, particularly shikikin and reikin. Shikikin (敷金) or hoshōkin (保証金) is similar to a security deposit that you pay upon moving in. It can be up to six months rent. If you treat your apartment well, you stand a chance of getting some of it back. The rest will go towards tatami replacement, lock changing, and etc. Reikin (礼金) is "key money" that you pay for rental rights. Reikin is nonrefundable and generally worth one to two months rent. Additionally, if you live in an urban area and need or want a car, you'll also likely be obligated to pay a fee for your parking space in addition to your rent. Your CO is probably not going to help get you a phenomenally expensive apartment, but be aware that these additional charges exist and that you will be expected to pay them.

In the worst case scenario: your shikikin and reikin are incredibly expensive, you have to buy all your furniture new, and it costs more money than you've ever seen in your life, much less had on hand; in these cases some CO or supervisors have been known to lend money to JETs in need. It's probably best not to count on it, though, so plan on bringing a substantial amount of money, already converted into yen so that you can assemble your new home and live comfortably for about a month until you receive your first paycheck.

Cash in Japan

Let's face it, Japan is a cash-based society. While credit cards are becoming increasingly more popular, as is paying with your smartphone, cash is still what keeps the Japanese economy running. In rural areas, many shops probably will not accept plastic. As such, it's not unusual for people to carry around several hundred dollars worth of yen in their wallets. It's even reasonably safe to do this.

Cash manners matter in Japan—it's not polite to simply shove money into a cashier's hand, instead, place the money on the designated tray. Keep your money looking nice, nobody likes wrinkled bills, and you'll notice that the bills you receive are nearly universally crisp and clean. Best advice: get a coin purse. You're going to be carrying a lot of coins at any given time, and having a separate small bag for them can be very useful

Hanko

^{はんこ}
(判子; hanko, or ^{いんかん}
印鑑; inkan; a personal seal)

In America we sign official documents with our signature, in Japan, they use hanko. Hanko, also called inkan, are stamps used in place of signatures—this can include everything from signing for postal deliveries, opening accounts, buying a car or a house, to signing into work every morning. Naturally there are several types of hanko, but as the different types and registration process are probably going to be meaningless to the average JET, we will mention they exist and move on.

In addition to your Resident Card, the hanko is one of the first things that you'll be getting in your first week, as you will need it to do everything else. Sometimes the CO will have your hanko prepared for your arrival, sometimes you will have to go with someone to get it. The hanko will usually have either your first name or your last name written out in katakana (the syllabary system used for foreign words). Once you get your hanko, you will need to purchase a case to carry it in. Hanko are usually stamped in red ink, and it's important to make a clear, crisp mark whenever you stamp.

As your hanko stands in place of your official signature, it is extremely important that you do not lose it. Keep your hanko case close at hand because you'll be using it a lot, and if you do happen to lose it, inform your supervisor as soon as possible.

Bank Accounts

Your first week at your Contracting Organization is going to be pretty busy. School will be out, but you will have to rush around setting up important things like your new bank account so that you can put away whatever remains of that money that you brought with you. As always, ESID—some JETs have a choice about which bank they open an account with, some don't. Generally, your CO will make the initial decision for you, as they usually have a relationship with one bank in particular. After the first paycheck, your paycheck will be deposited directly in your bank account. JPost Bank (ゆうちょ銀行; Yūcho Ginkō), run by the Japan Post Service, is one of the biggest players. It is one of the only two banks to have branches in every prefecture in Japan (the other is Mizuho Bank), and has a nationwide network of ATMs. Every other bank is a bit more local, which is to say, that if you leave your prefecture, you may find it difficult to withdraw money without incurring fees.

Your supervisor will likely accompany you to the bank to set up your new account, but you are responsible for bringing: your hanko, your Residence Card (在留カード; zairyū kādo), and any money you might want to deposit. It might not also hurt to have your passport on hand. The other thing that will help you is knowing how to write your birthdate the Japanese way—in most formal documentation, the Japanese don't use the Gregorian calendar. Instead they use a calendar based on each emperor's reign. Currently, we are living in the time of the Heisei Emperor (平成), and as 2014 is the 26th year of his rule, the current Japanese year (年号, nengō) is Heisei 26. (See Appendix II for a handy date calculator.) Once you've filled out all the paperwork and everyone has had trouble with your middle name, you get the goods: a cash card, a bank book, and a bank account to store your hard earned dough.

Your cash card (キャッシュカード; kyāshu kādo) is the key to your money. It is not, however, to be confused with a debit or credit card. Your cash card cannot be used anywhere outside of an ATM. Credit cards, on the other hand, are becoming more and more popular in Japan, but it may be difficult for you to get a credit card, as companies will see you as a temporary resident or a possible flight risk. There is plenty of information about applying for credit cards in Japan on the internet, so that information will not be included here.

Your bank book (通帳, tsūchō) is awesome. It combines the balancing powers of a checkbook with an auto-update function that makes keeping track of your money nearly painless. You will need your bank book to withdraw money from a teller's window inside the bank, and you can insert it into an ATM whereupon all transaction data will be printed on it. You will need it to make large transfers and when modifying your account—it's proof of account ownership! Don't lose it! When your bank book fills up, take it to your local branch, they will give you a new one and formally close your old one.

Your CO will probably set you up with a regular account (普通口座; futsū kōza), which functions much like a checking account in the States—you will not be earning interest, and you can set up automatic bill payment. Japan does have savings accounts and etc., but for the sake of brevity, we will be skipping them.

ATMs

ATMs in Japan are pretty great. They have a number of useful functions that will make your life so much easier. If you could only read them....

Japanese ATMs can be found at banks, post offices, train stations, shopping malls, and convenience stores (conbinis). You can use either your bank book or your cash card (or both) at ATMs that are owned by your bank.

- **Note:** Most Japanese ATMs do not accept foreign credit cards. JPost Bank and conbinis are the usual exceptions, but there is no guarantee that you'll be able to access your foreign account. Proceed carefully.

Most ATMs are touchscreen-operated and have a slot for your bank book and a slot for your cash card, plus slots to dispense cash and coins. The five basic functions that all Japanese ATMs perform are:

- Balance check: 残高照会; zandaka shōkai, prints you a little receipt with your balance.
- Update bank book (only at an ATM owned by your bank): 通帳記入; tsūchō kinyū,

this will update your bank book with any transactions or deposits that you might have made without it.

- Money transfer: お振込^{ふりこみ}; ofurikomi, a useful function that allows you to transfer money from your account to someone else's, usually for a small fee. If you wish to use the furikomi service to pay bills (it's really convenient), ask your supervisor or a Japanese literate friend to help translate for you, as it will require some comprehensive Japanese knowledge. Once you have set up the information, the ATM will print you a furikomi card for future use. Limited to ¥100,000.

- Withdrawal: お引き出し^{ひきだし}; ohikidashi, allows you to withdraw in increments as small as 1 yen.

- Deposit: お預入れ^{あずけい}; oazukeire, often you can deposit coins as well as bills.

Some ATMs even have an English language option! Although they tend to have limited functions. So make a card of the important kanji and carry it with you for awhile.

Well, that sounds awesome, I'm just going to memorize these kanji, and I'll never need to worry about human interaction ever again. What could the downsides be? It turns out there are several. The first are those pesky charges. Using ATMs outside of your bank or at a conbini will often incur a charge. Using ATMs on weekends or late in the day will incur fees. When you open an account, try to get a chart of the fee schedule or you pay end up paying several hundred yen in fees. Also, ATMs close.

- **Note:** ATMs close. They close in the evening (~5:30-7:00pm) and early on weekends (~12:30pm). ATMs close. Plan ahead!

Some conbini ATMs stay open late at night, but fees will be incurred and sometimes they will not allow withdrawals or deposits. You should be conscious about when ATMs open and close and make sure you have plenty of money to last you! Also most banks and ATMs shut down for the New Year's holiday, which runs from about January 1st to the 4th. This includes conbini ATMs, so prepare accordingly.

Budgeting

ESID. Even though you're living in an expensive country, you're also making a pretty decent paycheck. As a JET you'll have plenty of opportunities to travel and sightsee, but maybe you have student loans to pay or you want to save some money to go back to school, or buy a car, or a house. Budgeting is difficult, no matter the currency. Your JET salary is more than

enough for you to live on comfortably, so consider putting some of that away for later. To manage your money and your spending, you can use an online service like mint.com, or financial software like Quicken. If you're paper-oriented person, pick up a few housekeeping books (かけいぼ 家計簿, kakeibo) at your local ¥100 store. Try a couple of options to see what works for you. If you budget carefully, and stay in Japan for several years, you can very likely take several international vacations, completely eliminate your student loans, or even come home with \$10,000 in the bank!

Paying Bills

As the Japanese don't really use personal checks, how does one pay one's bills on a monthly basis? Mostly it depends on how your utility account is set up. Much like in the U.S., you can set up automatic bill payments that will be deducted from your account. Sometimes you may be paying at the ATM by furikomi, as described in the section above. You can also pay most bills at your local combini. You might also provide an envelope of cash to the correct individual (this option only occurs if your CO is obligated to arrange for one of your utilities, and one of your coworkers is your liaison to the company: ex. gas provided by LP Gas through the local JA (Japan Agricultural Cooperatives), you would pay the JA representative who works at your CO). How, where, and when you pay will be explained to you by your supervisor and/or your predecessor.

If you end up receiving paper bills, Japanese bills generally come in two parts: first, a notification of billing—usually a small piece of paper or a receipt delivered a week or so before a bill arrives letting you know the amount you are being billed (you can't pay it yet). Second, the bill itself, which shows up in an envelope and looks very official. Then you can go to your local combini and pay.

Sending Money Overseas

At some point you're probably going to want to send money home, either to pay student loans or otherwise. Naturally you're going to want to pay as little as possible to get your hard-earned cash home.

- **Note:** As international money laundering and fraud is a pretty big issue, plan on visiting the bank in person and bringing your ID and your hanko.

There are a couple of options:

First, the JPost Bank. Even if you don't have a Post Bank account, you can use their international remittance services, although check to ensure that your local branch can do international remittances. If your local post office can do international transfers, come armed with the money you want to send (if you don't have a JPost Bank account), money for the transfer fee, your Residence Card, and your game face. There are two ways to send money, either you are sending money to an account (口座^{こうざ}あて送金^{そうぎん}, kōza ate sōkin; an international wire—quick, secure, straight to your account, you will need an account and wire number, costs ¥2,500) or to an address (住所^{じゅうしょ}あて送金^{そうぎん}, jūsho ate sōkin; a paper money order—slow, not secure, requires a person on the other end to deposit it, costs ¥2,000). You will need to pick one, and then request a form called: 国際送金請求書兼告知書^{こくさいそうぎんせいぎゅうしょけんこくちしよ} (kokusai sōkin seikyūsho kenkokuchisho). Luckily, the instructions are in English. If you have a JPost Bank account, they can wire it directly, if not, hand them a giant wad of cash. JPost Bank takes only a few days, but be warned, you'll probably get hit with a second transfer fee on the American side (~\$10-\$20). They have a multi-lingual pamphlet with detailed instructions that can be obtained at most JPost Banks—their website is only in Japanese.

- <http://www.jp-bank.japanpost.jp/kojin/tukau/kaigai/sokin/kj tk kg sk index.html>

Second, Western Union. Only Family Mart conbinis and 7-11 ATMs can use Western Union to transfer money. You have to register in order to use the service and will receive a registration card (you must register separately to use Family Mart and 7-11). It costs between ¥900 and ¥3,000 to send money via Western Union. Like the JPost Bank, you have to send the money in person. Unfortunately, Western Union only sends money orders and you will need to have a trusted receiver on the other end of the transfer to pick up the money.

- <http://www.wu-moneytransfer.com/en/transfer/index.html>

Third, GoRemit. GoRemit (formerly GoLloyds) is a very popular service amongst expats for remitting money overseas. First, you'll need to apply online, print the application document, sign it, and mail it. Once you have received your welcome packet, you can go to a Japanese ATM and use the furikomi function (described in the ATM section, get some help setting it up or

follow the instructions on the GoRemit website) to transfer funds from your Japanese bank account to your GoRemit account (run by Shinsei Bank). GoRemit will then charge you ¥2,000 for the wiring fee and send your money off to America. GoRemit deposits directly into your American bank account. Naturally, your domestic bank will also slap you with a fee (~\$10-\$20).

- <https://www.goremit.jp/index/en>

JPost Bank and GoRemit are the most popular ways of moving money internationally, as Western Union requires at someone to pick up the money order. There are some domestic Japanese companies that provide international remittance, and your local bank may even be able to do it for you, although these tend to be a bit more expensive.

Finally, there are inevitably some rumors floating around that you can use PayPal to flout the system and send money overseas without incurring any charges. This is not correct. If you create a Japanese PayPal account (with your Japanese address and a different email address), you can link your bank account with your PayPal account, but you can only move funds from PayPal to your bank account, not the other way. Suck it up and prepare to pay transfer fees.

Your Japanese House and You

As you might have guessed, Japanese houses are a little bit different from the average American house, so the nitty gritty details of home ownership are a bit different as well. Most JETs live in apartment complexes, but some JETs out in the inaka (田舎^{いなか}; countryside) live in attached or detached houses. ESID, but here are some important things you need to know in order to get started enjoying your Japanese house (and to keep you from making some unpleasant discoveries when winter rolls around).

- **Note:** Your CO should provide housing for you, so you probably won't need to worry about actually looking for an apartment when you first arrive, just paying to furnish it. If you choose, for some reason, to move while you are in Japan, there are a number of excellent articles about the internet on how to find a Japanese apartment.

Handy hint: watch Studio Ghibli's *My Neighbor Totoro* (となりのトトロ) for an excellent view of an old-school style traditional Japanese house. (Probably you won't end up living in one exactly like that, but it could be similar—especially if you live deep in the inaka.)

The Construction of Your Japanese House

First of all, how will your new apartment differ from your American house? There are a number of significant differences between Japanese and American houses—from construction to appliances. An important thing to note: in the States, the stove/oven, refrigerator, dishwasher, built-in microwave, and light fixtures are often considered “built-in” or “part of the house.” People do not always take them when they move. In Japan, none of the above are considered to be part of the house or are built-in. As such, moving into a new apartment means that you may not find any of those things. (The light fixtures are a bit more flexible, but it is possible to walk into a new apartment and find no ceiling lights.) Let's talk about some things you will encounter in your new Japanese home.

Japan is a shoes off indoors society—as discussed in prior sections, you will be expected to remove your shoes whenever you enter other people's homes and when you enter schools. To preserve the longevity of your own Japanese living space, it is recommended that you do the same at home. Buy some house slippers. Shoes come off and live in the genkan (玄関^{げんかん}), the

entrance area found in all Japanese homes. Since the genkan is designed for outdoor shoes, it's generally a small tiled space on ground level straight through your front door. The genkan is also a great place to store things like kerosene. The rest of the house is on a higher level, in order to keep dirt out, so one steps out of one's shoes up into the the main floor of the house. (It is polite to keep one's shoes neat and to turn them around to face the door, so that you can quickly slip them on.) Try not to walk around the genkan in your socks—even when answering the door—as that will just track dirt and/or pests into your house.

Japanese houses are famous for tatami. Tatami (畳^{たたみ}) are woven straw mats that make up the floor of traditional Japanese rooms, and there is a fairly high chance that the place where you live will have tatami—especially if you live in a slightly older building. (Newer apartment buildings generally don't have tatami.) New tatami is a light green, while older tatami ages to a straw color. Shoes and slippers are never to be worn on tatami, as the soles will damage the mats, and tatami are extremely expensive to replace (between ¥10,000-20,000 per mat!). Tatami rooms are generally used for living and sleeping; cooking is not done on tatami. Tatami come in a few standard sizes, and Japanese apartments are often measured by the number of tatami mats that will fit in a single room—typically four and a half to six mats. Because tatami are made of organic materials, there is a distinct “tatami” smell that accompanies them, and they tend to collect dust, mold, and pests, and you will want to keep them dry. (We'll talk about how to clean tatami later in this chapter.) Putting heavy furniture or carpet on top of the tatami can also damage the mats, which could have a nasty effect on your security deposit. That being said, having a tatami room is a lot of fun, as it is part of a traditional Japanese house, and sitting on tatami is a lot more comfortable than sitting on a plain wooden floor. The Japanese love floors—most Japanese furniture is designed with the idea that you will be living on or near the floor. No beds here (well, ESID), you get to sleep on a futon! Putting your futon down on tatami is the perfect way to get comfortable.

Your Japanese house will also probably come with a number of sliding doors. Sliding doors, as you'll learn, are super space saving! There are two main types of sliding door: shōji and fusuma. Shōji (障子^{しょうじ}) are translucent paper-covered sliding doors. They are used as room dividers or window covers. Modern shōji can be made of plastic or frosted glass mounted on a wood or plastic frame. Keep in mind that if you have shōji in front of your windows that they

are translucent—you can see shadows on the other side! The other type of sliding door is the fusuma. Fusuma (襖^{ふすま}) are opaque sliding doors that are used to divide large rooms or act as actual doors separating rooms from a hallway. Fusuma can be either plain or decorated with an image. Both fusuma and shōji are about the same size as a tatami mat, and both can be pulled out of their tracks fairly easily for cleaning and repair.

In a traditional Japanese room, along with tatami, shōji, and fusuma, you'll also find oshiire (押入れ^{おしい}), which are traditional two level closets meant to house your futon and other bedding, but also really great for storing all your stuff. Oshiire are usually separated from the main room by fusuma. You can buy lots of storage solutions in the form of plastic tubs and garment bags to keep your clothes and other home items organized in your oshiire.

Another major difference between Japanese and American houses is plumbing. In Japanese houses, traditionally, the toilet is housed in a little room all by itself, completely separate from the rest of the bathroom—that's where you get to use your toilet slippers. The sink is usually located between the tiny toilet room and the actual bath/shower room. This is also where your washing machine, if you have one, lives. The bath/shower room is very different from American bathrooms, as Japanese bathing habits are very different. The room is generally a wet room—designed to get completely wet. The bath itself is deeper than most American tubs, although not necessarily as long, and often has its own tap. As the Japanese do not typically take only showers, the shower head is never mounted straight into the wall, instead, it is a shower hose. How to use a Japanese bath properly will be discussed later in this chapter.

Japanese kitchens tend to be small, with very little space, low counters, and surprisingly high shelves. Dishwashers are never built in and considered an appliance. As Japan is very much into saving space, dishwashers are not particularly popular. Stoves, ovens/microwaves, and refrigerators are also considered appliances, and a JET moving into an unfurnished apartment will have to purchase all of these items. Stoves are mostly gas—two burners and a “fish griller”—and will need to be hooked up when you move in. You can buy induction stoves as well. Most JETs will use a konro (コンロ), which is a two burner “portable” stove with a tiny gas-powered “oven” (fish griller) beneath. This little oven is useful for grilling things and nothing else (its toast making abilities are debatable). As Japan is an earthquake-prone country, gas stoves have an automatic shutoff if they are shaken (and you are advised to turn off the main

gas line as well). The oven/microwave (電子レンジ・オーブン; denshi renege, ōbun) is a bit more complex. The Japanese do not generally use large, American-style ovens. If you want an oven, your best bet is to purchase a microwave that has an oven function. Much like the stove and the microwave, the Japanese refrigerator (冷蔵庫; reizōko) is also generally smaller than the average American fridge—usually a little larger than a dorm-style fridge with a refrigerator and a freezer. Now keep in mind that this kitchen is what the average JET ends up using. Many larger and fancier Japanese homes use bigger refrigerators, bigger stoves, and fancy microwave/ovens. However, most JETs find those sorts of appliances too expensive and permanent to purchase for a one to five year stay, and tend to stick with the lower end of the appliance spectrum. Additional useful kitchen appliances are things like rice cookers (炊飯器; suihanki) and electric kettles (電気ポット; dinky potto).

As mentioned in the What to Bring section, electricity in Japan is a little different than in the States—Japanese outlets run at 100v, as opposed to the American 120v. Due to a hilarious failure to standardize (google for more details), the “Eastern half” of Japan (Tokyo to Hokkaido) runs at 50Hz, while the “Western half” of Japan (Nagoya to Kyushu) runs at 60Hz. Most electrical equipment will work fine (please check the requirements on your electronics before you come)—for example, most laptops (especially if you have a charger with a transformer on it) are fine with 100-240v and 50-60Hz—but some appliances like hair dryers don’t like the low voltage, and running them in Japan can lead to damaging the item and an increased risk of fire. Check before you pack, especially items with heating elements in them and any particularly sensitive time keeping devices.

Luckily, Japanese outlets look essentially like American outlets—two flat prongs, often one slightly larger than the other (polarized). However, the Japanese do not have the third round prong for grounding electrical devices, and it is possible to run into non-polarized outlets (both slots the same size). For grounded devices like computer charging cables, there are a couple of ways to deal with the lack of a third prong in Japanese outlet. The cheapest way is to get a pair of pliers and pull out the third prong on your charger. While this technically won’t affect your ability to charge your computer, modifying electrical plugs is not advisable and you shouldn’t do it. (The third prong does actually do something fairly important.)

- **Note:** Please resist the urge to pull out the third prong on your electrical cables. At a basic level, this will not affect the operation of your device. It will, however, leave your electronics ungrounded, which can lead to damages to your equipment during electrical surges and to an unfortunate incident with electrocution in your future.

The best and quickest solution is to go to your local hardware store and buy a 3-prong to 2-prong electrical adaptor or two. They are amazingly cheap and don't require you to mess with the integrity of your electrical cables. Try to find non-polarized ones (both prongs the same size) so that you can use them in all Japanese plugs.

- **Note:** The clever amongst you will notice that an adaptor will not, in fact, solve the electrical problem mentioned in the prior note. Unfortunately, Japanese electrical code differs from the U.S. and 3 prong grounded electrical outlets were only required by law starting in 2005 (but only for outlets intended for the use of domestic appliances). In Japan, generally only large appliances are “grounded.” (Debatable, but don't go mucking about in them to check.) **Please keep in mind that electricity can and will kill you;** an adaptor is fine for your basic needs, but keep in mind that the standards are different and there is a higher chance of fire and electrocution.

Finally, as soon as you leave Tokyo Orientation, you will notice that the basic construction of buildings is pretty different than it is in America. Firstly, you will rapidly become aware that Japanese buildings do not have HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning). Central heating and air conditioning can only really be found in some hotels and in Hokkaido, where, for some reason, the constructions standards are different. Unlike the States, where central heating is the norm, the Japanese advocate space heating/cooling—more economical, but not always fun in the depths of winter. Air conditioning is becoming more popular, but many offices and homes are not air conditioned as you will promptly notice when you arrive. Prepare to sweat.

Japanese architecture, while being internationally lauded for the clever use of space is also internationally criticized for being pretty shoddy. A couple of the reasons for this may be that the Japanese tend to rebuild every 20-30 years, and as Japan is a particularly natural disaster prone country, the average house has a pretty short shelf life. Also, the Japanese have a particularly strong national love for the traditional house, and the behaviors evolved around living in a traditional house (read: huddling with one's family for warmth under the Kitts, eating

Milan in the winter), so there is fairly strong resistance to changing standards (except in Hokkaido where standards are *different*). As a result, Japanese buildings also tend to be thin on insulation, particularly in older buildings where JETs tend to live. There are a number of reasons for this, one of which is that Japan is super-humid and in walls that are not properly ventilated, the insulation will actually rot, and, as previously stated before, a deep love of traditional ways keep houses looking the same. As the Japanese seem to believe that the Japanese winter is short and mild and that the hot and humid summer is long, there is an emphasis on building houses that are cooler in the summer and letting everyone just suffer through the winter. The Japanese also tend not to use double glazed windows or doors, and all rooms have to be ventilated. That means that Japanese houses are cold in the winter and hot in the summer. Unless you live in Hokkaido, which has building codes for making houses safe for winter.

Cooling and Heating Your Japanese House

Well that's awesome, you say, but I don't live in Hokkaido. How do I keep myself from melting in the summer and freezing in the winter? Excellent question. ESID, but let's talk about it anyway.

Japan has a reputation for heat and humidity during the summer and it is most certainly not unfounded. Temperatures can soar into the 80s and 90s with a double sucker punch of high humidity. Given the architecture of Japanese houses, the inside of your apartment or house could very well be the same temperature as the outside. So what do you do? If you have an air conditioner (エアコン; eakon/aircon), and you don't mind paying the big bucks, you can seal up the room with your aircon in it (space cooling, remember?) as tightly as possible and pump up the cool air—note that this will get expensive quickly as aircons consume a lot of electricity. If you don't have an aircon or you don't want to pay the money—what then? If there's anything resembling a breeze, open all your windows, it's the same temperature outside anyway. If there's no breeze, an electric fan is a great investment, and much cheaper to run than an aircon. Setting up a frozen bottle of water in front of your electric fan is a great way to build a mini aircon.

Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate! Even if you do own an aircon, you're still going to be sweating a lot. Japanese vending machines are ubiquitous and are chock full of delicious cold beverages. Poker Sweat (ポカリスエット) and Aquarius (アクエリアス) are a couple of

options found in nearly all vending machines that provide electrolyte replacement. Think Gatorade, but with less color. Green tea, soda, juice, and flavored water are also available. Remember, friends, products with caffeine, read: tea and soda are not particularly good methods for rehydration, but they do taste good!

Light, moisture wicking clothing (remember your Japanese modesty!), accompanied by a cold shower, if it's not too humid, is great in the summer months. Some light clothes, an electric fan, and some tasty ice cream (Japanese is full of weird and awesome flavors) is what it takes to make a hot summer weekend awesome.

Enough about American solutions, what do the Japanese do to beat the heat? Well, mostly they cluster around their aircons, but let's talk traditional: in your Japanese Tourist Bag (we talked about this way back when), you've already got a hand fan and a sweat towel—these things don't disappear when you're at home, use your towel and pick up a couple of free paper fans (businesses give them out as advertisements) and flap your way to coolness. Another Japanese special is “ice type” cooling body wipes, which are available at any convenience store. (Those with sensitive skin, proceed with caution; these products generally use menthol.) The Japanese also believe that listening to small wind chimes, called fūrin (ふうりん), will make you feel better. It's definitely a placebo, but everyone wants to hear the sound of a gentle breeze in the sweltering Japanese summer. The other thing people like to do is to find a cafe or library that has air conditioning and hang out!

Eat summer foods! Japan is a country obsessed with its seasons, and summer foods are only around in summer. Some of them are even designed to cool you down! Consider eating some nice vegetables (cucumbers are popular) that have been sitting in ice water. Chilled fruit is also great; watermelon is the staple fruit of the Japanese summer. Ice cream (アイス; aisu, ice cream; ソフトクリーム; soft curium, cross between ice cream and frozen yoghurt, often abbreviated as ソフト; soft), naturally, is a national favorite, and most places have a “local flavor” like salt, spinach, charcoal, or squid ink that you should definitely try! Kakigōri (かき氷^{ごおり}) is traditional shaved ice, great for personal cooling and often found at festivals. Eating cold food like chilled udon (うどん), soba (そば), or sōmen (そうめん), or hiyashi chūka (ひやし中華^{ちゅうか}; chilled Chinese noodles)—all noodle dishes—are a great way too chill out. Also available in

some shops is reimen (冷麺^{れいめん}). Not to be confused with hiyashi chūka, which is similar to chilled ramen, reimen is a cold noodle dish from Korea often found at yakiniku restaurants. The other food theory in Japan is to eat spicy or hot food—eat hot food, sweat, and feel cooler, so ramen is a perennially popular choice. Choose your own adventure.

Please note that most of these cooling solutions are for your body, because it's actually pretty difficult to cool your Japanese house if you don't have an aircon. But the best part is that they work everywhere, and most of them are pretty cheap. Group sweating is part of your Japanese experience, and getting to drip in your office while everyone moans about the heat (暑い^{あつ}; atsui, meaning hot is a typical word of summer) is part of the international exchange mentioned in the Exchange part of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program.

Okay, so you survived the intense Japanese summer, enjoyed the breezy and wonderful Japanese autumn, participated in some serious “autumn leaf hunting” (紅葉狩^{もみじが}り; momiji gari, looking for the best fall colors—a truly Japanese past time), but now it's freezing, there's frost on the inside of your windows, and your toilet doesn't flush anymore because it's frozen. Japanese winter has arrived.

For architectural reasons briefly touched on above, your Japanese house is probably going to feel quite a bit colder than your American house, even though the temperature might not actually get as low. Additionally, the Japanese tradition of heating spaces rather than buildings means that certain parts of your house will be warmer and the rest are going to be icy. Those of you who live in apartments will get some extra insulation from the other apartments around you. Those of you who live in attached or detached houses will rue the day you were glad you had so much space.

What can you do so you don't freeze? ESID. If you live in Okinawa, well, this is not a problem for you, but for everyone else, obviously the first step is clothing. Many, many layers of long underwear and woolly socks are going to be the key to staying warm. House coats? Yes, please. Hats? Why, thank you. The next step is choosing a heater. There are a number of different types of heaters, and what you choose is based on your budget, your space, and your personal preferences. Please note that heaters will have the optimum room size written on them in tatami (number+畳). Bigger number, bigger room.

- Aircon (エアコン; eakon): If you enjoyed an aircon in the summer, congratulations, most of them have heating functions, which are pretty effective. Unfortunately, they are very expensive to run, as they use a lot of electricity. Moreover, they cost between ¥30,000-¥40,000 to buy. They do have a number of functions including temperature control, fan functions, and timed heating. Aircons are good for heating entire rooms evenly.

- Kerosene Heaters (石油ストーブ; sekiyu sutōbu, generally refers to kerosene stoves that do not have a fan in them and simply radiate heat, the igniter is often battery-powered; 石油ファンヒーター; sekiyu fan hītā, refers to the kerosene stoves that plug into the wall and have an electrical fan to send heat around the room.): Most of Japan is heated by kerosene heaters, including schools. Kerosene heaters come in many shapes and sizes for many different prices. Some require electricity to ignite, some do not (good for emergencies), but they are quite cheap to operate, as kerosene (灯油; tōyu) is very cheap and sold at gas stations and home improvement stores (pay before you pump). Generally they all have a kerosene burner and a fan to propel warmed air about the room. The downside to kerosene heaters is that **kerosene fumes contain carbon monoxide and will kill you**, and kerosene stinks. If you choose to operate a kerosene heater, **you need to crack a window so you do not die**. This seems to contradict the concept heating a room, but your room will still get plenty warm, and you won't die. Bonus. The nicest kerosene heaters vent outside for you, so you don't need to worry, but the average JET probably won't own one as it involves putting a hole through the wall of your house. The average kerosene heater will let you set the temperature, is portable, probably has a timer, an auto-shut-off, and a number of safety features because every year a number of Japanese folks (particularly the elderly) die in kerosene-related incidents. Kerosene heaters aren't particularly dangerous if you operate them according to the instructions; educate yourself about carbon monoxide poisoning and google how to use Japanese kerosene heaters on the internet so you know what all the buttons do. Kerosene heaters run from about ¥7,000 to ¥50,000 (or higher) depending on the functions you want and the size of the room you want to heat. You will also need to pick up some kerosene tanks (red or blue, available wherever kerosene is sold) and a kerosene pump, which comes in manual or battery powered. Kerosene heaters are good for heating entire rooms.

- Kotatsu (こたつ): Kotatsu is the traditional Japanese solution to winter—a happy Japanese family huddling around their kotatsu eating mikan (winter oranges, similar to the American clementine) is the Japanese mental image of how winter should go. A kotatsu is a low table that has a heater attached to the bottom—traditionally a basket of hot coals—and two panels on top. A thick blanket, designed for kotatsu use, is sandwiched between the two panels on top, creating a nice warm cocoon for you to stick in as much of your body as can fit. While kotatsu seem a bit like an enormous fire hazard, the heaters are pretty safe, although it is possible to burn yourself by touching the heater. Kotatsu consume more electricity than a kerosene heater, but much less than an aircon. Kotatsu run between ¥5,000 and ¥20,000 depending on size and quality; there will be an additional cost for the blanket. However, they are only good for heating whatever is under the blanket, so the rest of the room and your body will be cold.

- Oil Heaters (オイルヒーター; oiru hītā): Oil heaters look like radiators, often on wheels. They are heavy, and use a lot of electricity, so can be expensive to run. They are also extremely slow to warm up, taking twenty minutes to an hour to come to full temperature. That said, they are also quite effective heaters once they've warmed up, albeit quite hot to the touch. They generally cost between ¥5,000 and ¥30,000, depending on size, and come with a couple of intensity settings (measured in wattage), and a timer. Although slow to warm up, oil heaters are good for heating an entire room.

- Assorted Electric Heaters: There are a number of electrically powered heaters available in Japan for those who don't like the above options. Generally they tend to be a bit weaker and better suited for smaller rooms (or heating your toilet room), and function like most American space heaters. Naturally they come in a variety of shapes and sizes and costs. Panel heaters (パネルヒーター; paneru hītā) tend to be the largest and claim to be able to heat an entire room. Halogen heaters (ハロゲンヒーター; harogen hītā) look like most American electric heaters and the smaller ones are only really effective in smaller spaces or paired with a kotatsu. Carbon heaters (カーボンヒーター; kābon hītā) are essentially the same as halogen heaters, although they claim to be more effective. Debatable, and once again, not particularly cost effective for heating an entire room. The final option is the ceramic heater (セラミックヒー

ター; seramikku hītā). These tend to consume a lot of electricity, and as a result, are kind of expensive.

Those are a lot of options. The best and happiest Japanese winter is usually made from a combination of several of these. Naturally ESID, and it's up to you to figure out what will work best in your apartment. (Hint: ask your predecessor, if you have one.) In addition, consider purchasing a hot carpet (ホットカーペット; hotto kāpetto) or an electric blanket (電気毛布; denki mōfu). A nice pile of blankets on your futon is also really great at night (keep in mind that the aircon and the oil heater are the only ones of the aforementioned heating tools that are safe to run all night—everything else is a fire or poison hazard).

So let's pretend you've acquired a heater. Now how do you get all that lovely heat to stay in your room instead of oozing out through the windows and doors. Let's talk heating strategy. As soon as it starts getting cold, you should start making preparations: buy kerosene, air out your winter layers, and choose where you want to live for the next few months. If you have a small apartment, maybe there's no choice, but if you have a couple of rooms, you should pick the room that you want to spend the most time in and winterize it. The first thing you need to do is beef up the insulation in your house. The cheapest and quickest way to do that is to bubble wrap your windows. All Japanese home improvement stores and ¥100 shops will sell plastic or bubble wrap to cover your windows. Generally the instructions are in pictures and fairly self-explanatory: clean your windows, apply tape if needed, apply bubble wrap. You can also buy foam tape to seal any drafts in window or door frames. If you sleep on the floor on a futon, you can buy a panel made of foam or plastic to put up against the bottom of windows or doors to provide a little extra insulation. Pile on the blankets. An electric blanket is a great way to heat up your bed before you get in it, but remember, they are a fire hazard if you leave them running for long periods of time.

Still, you're going to spend a fair amount of time feeling fairly cold (especially when you come home from work in winter and your house is cold, and you have to wait around in your coats until it heats up.) Aside from wearing every pair of socks you own, here are some other body-warming strategies to get you through the icy Japanese winter:

- Kairo (カイロ): little, disposable hand warmers for your hands, feet, and body.

Generally with one sticky side so you can stick them inside your clothing. Do not apply directly to skin; you can burn yourself.

- Lap blankets (膝掛け; hiza kake): an office-acceptable way to keep warm.
- Hot water bottle (湯たんぽ; yutanpo): not just for your grandmother, these are great for cold feet at night.
- Eat hot foods: ramen (ラーメン), nabe (鍋), curry (カレー; karē), shabu shabu (しゃぶしゃぶ), and yakiniku (焼肉) are great ways to stay toasty.

• Hot drinks: remember all those awesome vending machines that dispensed cold drinks in summer, well they will now dispense hot drinks in winter! Tea, coffee, cocoa, and corn soup for all.

• Onsen (温泉) or Sentō (銭湯): Japan is a volcanic country with a long tradition of public baths. Nothing warms a body up like soaking naked in nearly scalding water with a bunch of old folks. Onsen are a naturally occurring hot springs, while sentō are artificial, but both are awesome Japanese traditional experiences that will warm you right up!

• Snow shoveling (雪かき; yuki kaki): You laugh, but some parts of Japan get a truly staggering amount of snow. Keeping the snow out of the way and helping your neighbors clear communal areas is a great way to meet people, keep warm, and participate in Japanese public life.

• Complain: Another fairly serious suggestion. Remember back when it was warm and everyone was wining about how hot it was? Well now we've gone from "Atsui~!" to "Samui~!" (寒い, cold). Complaining about the weather is a national past time in Japan, right up there with baseball. It wouldn't be a quality experience if you missed this opportunity to join in.

There are probably any of a number of awesome solutions to Japan's fickle seasons, and you'll pretty quickly figure out what you need to do to keep yourself and your home as comfortable as possible.

How to Use Your Japanese Toilet and Bath

As mentioned above, the Japanese toilet and bath situation is a bit different from the American. The toilet is usually in its own little room with its own slippers, and the bath/shower combo requires some getting used to.

There are three types of toilet in Japan: regular toilet, Space Age Future Toilet Used by Astronauts, and squatty potty. You could encounter any of the above at any time, and it might even be a pit toilet. We've covered toilet slipper etiquette in the clothing section, but remember not to steal them. We've even mentioned that many public restrooms don't have toilet paper in them, and some don't have soap, so carrying a packet of kleenex and some hand sanitizer in your Japanese Tourist Bag is wise.

Japanese-style (和式; ^{わしき} washiki) toilets, or squatty potties, make up about half of toilets found in public. Whether you have one in your home depends on how old your house or apartment is and how far into the inaka you live. If you've never used one, you will probably have to at some point, and they are much easier than they look. Squat facing the hood and plumbing fixtures, do your business (carefully—if you've ever gone in the woods, you'll know that splashing is a danger), at no point in the proceedings drop your slipper into the toilet, and go about your day. Success. There is some Japanese local knowledge about squatty potties being good for your rectum, and a lot of old people really love them, but it's also easier for folks of Asian descent to squat for longer periods of time. If you can't handle it, find a Western toilet if you're in public, or, if you get a squatty at home, you can buy a cover from companies like Toto that will convert your squatty into a Western-style sit toilet. (For the record, the Toto version is called a suwaretto (スワレット).) Keep in mind that some schools, bars, and restaurants will only have squatty potties, so at some point, you may just have to accept the inevitable. Luckily there are no buttons or bizarre functions for you to worry about, and sometimes there are even handles to help you keep your balance. Remember, it's courteous to keep the stall as clean as you found it.

Western-style (洋式; ^{ようしき} yōshiki) toilets, which include regular toilets and super toilets make up the other half of toilets that you'll encounter in Japan. Regular Western-style toilets are no problem, but eventually you're going to meet a toilet that looks the command chair for the Starship Enterprise. Mostly made by plumbing company Toto under the trademark Washlet

(ウオシユレットト; woshuretto), these super toilets are awesome in so many ways, but sometimes it can be a little tricky to even find the flush! Don't worry too much, most super toilets have a regular flush handle, but if you learn a few simple words, you can enjoy pure super toilet luxury!

Here is a handy chart of toilet vocabulary. (Note: Although some super toilets have their function in English as well, many don't, so while the kanji compounds here have been annotated with furigana, as these exact kanji will usually appear in situ, best to memorize the characters.)

English	Romanji	Japanese
Flush	nagasu	<small>なが</small> 流す
Big (flush)	dai	<small>だい</small> 大
Small (flush)	ko	<small>こ</small> 小
Stop	tomaru; teishi	<small>とまる ていし</small> 止・
Wash for your bum	oshiri	おしり
A more gentle bum cleansing	yawaraka	やわらか
Bidet	bide	ビデ
Water pressure	suisei	<small>すいせい</small> 水勢
Weak	yowai	<small>よわ</small> 弱(
Strong	tsuyoi	<small>つよ</small> 強(
Water temperature	onsui	<small>おんすい</small> 温水
Seat heat	benza	<small>べんざ</small> 便座
Dry	kansō	<small>かんそう</small> 乾燥
Power deodorizer	pawā dasshū	パワー <small>だっしゅう</small>
“Sound Princess”*	oto hime*	<small>おとひめ</small> 音姫
Volume (for sound)	onryō	<small>おんりょう</small> 音量

*What is “sound princess”? Ladies, this one is for you. True story—from back in the days of only squatty potties, Japanese women have had a tendency to be embarrassed about any and all sounds that might occur in a restroom. This modesty has led to a proclivity for flushing

the toilet during use. As you might suspect, that's pretty wasteful in terms of water, which is why most Japanese toilets have the big and little flush options, and, in many public restrooms, an "oto hime" (音姫) machine which will produce a noise from the sound of running water to birds chirping to classical music to cover any unseemly sounds. Some women flush anyway. Basically, it's a modesty device and it's up to you whether or not you want to use it. Oto hime can be found in Western and Japanese-style toilets.

Not all super toilets have the above listed functions, but this list does cover the major functions that you'll encounter. If you do encounter an unknown function on a super toilet, try it if you dare. There are usually labels on the doors of the toilet stalls to indicate whether a Japanese (和式) or Western-style (洋式) toilet lurks behind the door.

Some toilets, when flushed, run water about the tank via an item that looks very much like a faucet, and then down into the tank to refill the bowl. It is completely acceptable to use this water to wash your hands—though there is often a separate sink available. In a few situations—namely small bars—this will be the only "sink" in the toilet room.

In very rural areas, you will often meet pit toilets. Honestly, these aren't as vile as they sound; they never clog and don't waste water! One style, called a drop toilet, even looks and functions mostly like a plumbed toilet. It even flushes. However, it will still need to be emptied on occasion. If you are a particularly lucky inaka dweller, and you live in a house/apartment that has a pit toilet, here is what you need to know:

1. Keep the fan on. If you have a house with a pit toilet, you should also have a tube that runs vertical to your house outside. This tube houses the fan, and there will very likely be a switch for the fan next to the light switch for your toilet room. It might have a little indicator light to let you know that it's on and running to keep your toilet smelling clean and pristine. Always leave the fan on. Failure to do so will lead to sadness and stench.
2. You will still need to "flush" sometimes. To keep things flowing, pour water down your toilet every now and then. This will keep your pit toilet from backing up.
3. Periodically, your pit toilet will need to be emptied. You can do this however often you like, but it should be done at least every few months. Your CO can help you schedule a tank cleaning. Some waste removal companies offer scheduled cleaning. If you set up a schedule, they will visit your house every few months without a call.

Pit toilets, like flush toilets also come in regular and squatty varieties. If you don't like your squatty, you can still purchase a western style cover from your local home goods store. Now that might have been a frightening amount of information on the simple toilet, but forewarned is forearmed.

Next let's talk about Japanese baths. We've already briefly covered onsen and sentō, which are great public solutions, but now let's discuss the bath in your Japanese home. Bathing is a hugely important social part of Japanese culture. The prevalence of public bathes alone attests to this. At home, historically, often the whole family bathed together, and today many Japanese children bathe with their parents for a number of years.

How do you use your bath? First, understand that unlike in the States, you can't simply climb straight into the bath and scrub yourself off. Bathing is a social activity for fun and relaxation—your Japanese tub will be considerably deeper than your American tub, and it is designed for soaking only. In a traditional Japanese bathing situation, you scrub your body and clean yourself off before you enter the bath. (This holds true for onsen, sentō, and your private bath.) That is why the shower hose is often nowhere near the tub in a Japanese apartment. You fill the tub (and Japanese baths are quite hot, running around 40-43°C, 104-109°F), clean your body with the shower hose outside the tub, and then climb in for a lovely soak. Since you don't actually scrub yourself in the bath, the water remains pretty clean and you can even use it more than once. Whether you choose to use your bath Japanese-style or try to rig your shower hose over your bath Western-style, is a matter of personal choice. Public baths are usually segregated by gender.

Regardless of how you choose to clean your body, and we're presuming you choose to, you're going to have to get up close and personal with your Japanese water heater. Unlike many American homes, Japanese houses and apartments tend to use tankless water heaters. These water heaters have to be turned on to produce hot water, and you may have more than one in your house (one for your kitchen sink and one for your bath), depending on the size and layout of your house. The one by your bath may even come with a remote! Naturally there are a bunch of kanji involved.

Here's a cool chart:

English	Romaji	Japanese
Power	unten	うんてん 運転
On/Off	iri/kiri	いり きり 入・
Automatic tub fill	jidō	じどう 自動
Talk (w/ bathroom/kitchen)	tsūwa/yobidashi	つうわ よびだし 通話
Reheat bath water	okidaki	おいだき 追い炊き
Prioritize temperature control	yūsen	ゆうせん 優先
Water temperature	kyūtō ondo	きゅうとうおんど 給湯
Lower temperature	nuruku	ぬるく
Raise temperature	atsuku	あつく
Bath temperature	furo ondo	ふろおんど 風呂
Amount of water for bath	furo yuryō	ふろゆりょう 風呂

Obviously, like the Japanese Space Toilet, there is some variation between quality, age, and cool functions in water heaters. Nonetheless, you will most certainly need to figure out the power and temperature functions. Take a lazy weekend day and, armed with your trusty Japanese dictionary, figure out how to use your water heater (and heck, all the appliances in your house). It's important to take the time to understand how your house works.

A final plumbing note: if you live in the cold country, where it drops below freezing during the winter, you may have to turn off your water at night or during the day when you're out to prevent the pipes from freezing. This is due to the previously discussed lack of insulation in Japanese walls, as well as a tendency to leave plumbing exposed to the air.

- **Note:** If you are instructed to shut off your water to prevent the pipes from freezing, **do it**. If your pipes freeze, they can burst, which is a huge problem and can damage your house and your stuff.

- **Second Note:** It's advisable to keep your water shut off during the day if you will not be home—especially if the temperature is below freezing. This is annoying, but better than a busted pipe.

If your pipes do freeze, the first thing to do is: DON'T PANIC. Usually the problem can be solved fairly simply. Step one is to turn your water on, and make sure that the affected faucet is open. Step two is to heat the room where you believe the pipe to be frozen; move your kerosene or electric heater into your bathroom or your toilet room and turn it up. Heating the room will generally heat the pipe and allow the ice to melt. Watch your open faucet for flowing water. Once the water starts to flow, the pipe will unfreeze very quickly. This can take up to an hour depending on the strength of your heater and how badly the pipe is frozen. This method is good because it brings the pipe up to temperature slowly; heating too quickly damages the pipes. If you suspect that the pipe is damaged in any way, do not turn your water back on—contact your supervisor or landlord as soon as possible. If the heater method does not work, the pipe is probably frozen somewhere outside of your house, and you will need to contact your supervisor or your landlord to bring in the big guns to unfreeze it. If you live in a house or on the ground floor, closing any vents in the foundations will help with this.

Cleaning Your Japanese House

By now you've probably cottoned on to the fact that Japanese houses are a bit different from what you might be used to. Naturally, the way you clean and maintain your Japanese house is a little bit different as well—the two biggest things you need to keep your house clean for are mold and pests.

The key thing you should be watching out for is mold. Despite what you've heard about Japanese insects, mold is the real Japanese Nightmare. If you haven't grasped the fact that Japan is pretty humid, you have not been paying attention, go back to the Introduction and start again. Be prepared for the fact that everything in Japan can grow mold: your futon, your shoes, your clothes, your passport, your walls—nothing is safe. The biggest battle in Japanese Household Cleanliness is fighting the mold. The biggest gun you get is a product called Kabi Killer (かびキラー; kabi kira, kabi means mold). It's mostly made of bleach (漂白剤; ひょうはくざい hyōhaku-zai), but it's your best chance to keep the mold at bay. (Note: because Kabi Killer is basically bleach, you should

be careful when applying it to anything you like and want to keep.) To keep the use of bleach at a minimum, make sure that your belongings are getting regular air and rotation. Be sure to put your futon away every day and air it out in the sun at least once a week in the summer.

Purchasing some desiccant packs at your local home goods store (湿気とり; shikketori) or a dehumidifier (除湿機; joshitsuki) is a good way to keep your belongings a bit drier and happier in the long run. Buying garment bags or sealing plastic tubs are also a good way to control the moisture in and around your belongings. If you really don't like bleach or something fragile grows mold, vinegar (酢; su) is another great cleaning solution.

Pests are also a nuisance during the warm months. While you have plenty of cause to be concerned about the mukade, gejjigeji, gokiburi, and spiders, the most common menace is dani (ダニ; dani). Dani are tatami mites, and, as you might guess from their name, live in your tatami. Much like bedbugs, dani bite and are extremely annoying. The solution to them is a product called Dani Āsu (ダニアース; dani āsu), which is applied directly to your tatami, according to the directions on the container. Usually products like Dani Āsu have lovely pictorial directions on them making them easy to use for everyone. The rest of Japan's pests can also be defeated by chemicals or a decisive squashing. If you chose to use chemicals to deal with a bug infestation, particularly dani, you should probably leave your house for several hours after applying the poison.

Reading the above paragraphs does give one the impression that tatami is nothing more than a black hole of pestilence. That is not entirely wrong, but also not correct. Tatami is great and wonderful and a quality part of your Japanese experience, but only if you maintain it correctly. As it is made of organic materials, tatami is extremely vulnerable to moisture and dirt. Cleaning your tatami on a regular basis with a soft cloth or a vacuum cleaner will keep it in great shape for many years to come. If you do spill something on your tatami, wipe it up immediately and dry the area with a fan. A damp cloth with a very small amount of mild dish soap can deal with most stains. For truly correct tatami maintenance, your tatami should be lifted out of the floor and aired out in full sunlight once a year.

Earlier we talked about the different kinds of doors in a Japanese house: shōji and fusuma. Both of these sound great and they are, but if you are a proud traditional shōji (paper

sliding door) owner, you will probably notice very quickly how easy it is to poke holes in the paper with your finger, a pen, or what have you. If you put a hole in your shōji, don't worry, it's actually pretty easy to fix! You can buy patches for small holes at your local home good store, and you can even replace the entire paper section of the door without too much home repair know-how. Even if you put a hole in your fusuma—which is notably harder to do—you can replace it as well. (See the House-Related Resources section for links to step-by-step instructions.)

A quick note on cleaning sinks—Japanese sinks do not have garbage disposals. Pretty much ever. That is Japanese for: do not put food down your sink. The average Japanese kitchen sink has a removable cover on the drain. Underneath the cover is a small, slotted “bucket,” made of plastic or stainless steel. This little bucket catches any food scraps that might go down your sink and keeps them from entering into your delicate Japanese plumbing. You can buy little nets, called mizukiri nets (水切りネット; mizukiri netto), at your local home goods store or grocery for only a couple hundred yen. These mean you don't have to stick your hand down in the little bucket and touch gross rotting food (which you have not dropped down your sink). Buy them. If you change out your little sink nets frequently and clean your sink trap bucket and the drain cover on a regular basis, you will not develop horrific stinking mold in truly terrifying colors. Clean frequently, suffer less.

Naturally, mold and strange bugs tend to congregate in wet places—we've already covered your sink, your bathroom is another place where creepy crawlies may appear. Running a fan, keeping a window open, and wiping down the walls of your bathroom after you bathe is a good way to keep the mold at bay. Your washing machine is another danger area. Japanese washing machines are cold water only, and in-home dryers are extremely rare. (There is a way to make your Japanese washing machine wash with hot water, but it requires the right washing machine and a pump running from your bathtub. We will skip this.) Here is yet another amazing vocabulary chart (as always, your milage may vary):

English	Romaji	Japanese
Washing Machine	sentakuki	せんたく <small>き</small> 洗濯
Power	dengen	でんげん 電源

Start	sutāto	スタート
On	iri	いり入
Off	kiri	きり切
Pause	ichiji teishi	いちじていし 一時
Wash	arai	あら洗い
Rinse	susugi	すすぎ
Spin	dassui	だっすい 脱水
Dry (spins the water out)	kansō	かんそう 乾燥
Regular Wash	hyōjun kōsu	ひょうじゆん 標準
Fast	oisogi	いそ お急
Blanket and large item wash	mōfu	もうふ 毛布
Hand wash	tearai	てあら 手洗
Time remaining	nori jikan	の残り <small>じかん</small>
Time	jikoku	じこく 時刻
Hour	...ji	...時
Minute	...fun	...分 <small>ぶん</small>
Water quantity	suiryō	すいりょう 水量
Water level	suii	すいい 水位
High	kō	こう 高
Medium	chū	ちゅう 中
Low	tei	てい 低
Fill with Water	kyūsui	きゅうすい 給水
Select Course	kōsu sentaku	コース <small>せんたく</small>

Preset	yoyaku	よやく 予約
Setting for in-house drying	shitsunai boshi	しつないほ 室内

You will very likely dry all your clothing on clothes lines using the sun as a dryer, which will be more difficult in winter. Nonetheless, while your clothes will dry very quickly in the sun during the summer, the inside of your washing machine, particularly the parts that you cannot see, can get very moldy during the hot months. In the home goods store or the home goods aisle in your local grocery, you can find a variety of products intended to clean the drum of your washing machine. (There is no specific product name, but if your washing machine starts to smell a bit funky, go looking for the item with the right pictures on it.) If you desperately need a dryer, public laundromats (コインランドリ; koin randori) generally have them.

Finally, the trickiest part about living in and maintaining a Japanese home: trash. In the States, trash is pretty easy; we have trash and recycling. Sometimes you have to sort your recycling. Japan is different. The first thing you'll notice in Japan, as early as at Tokyo Orientation, is that there are virtually no public garbage cans in Japan. This is because the Japanese trash sorting process is so complex that the Japanese don't even understand it, and the lack of public trash cans is to keep people from dumping their home garbage without sorting it. What makes this trash situation more complicated is that ESID—especially since every municipality has slightly different rules and your trash pick up days may even vary depending on where in your municipality you live. Now that we've established how difficult Japanese trash is, let's talk about how to deal with it. There are three basic types of trash in Japan: burnable, nonburnable, and recycling.

- Burnable Trash (燃えるゴミ・可燃ゴミ; moeru gomi, kanen gomi): Japan is a tiny country with a large population, so there is no place for extensive landfills. As a result, the Japanese burn as much trash as possible. Generally speaking, food scraps, food containers and organic waste is burnable. This includes paper products that have food on them (and would not be considered recycling by American standards). Paper products (newspapers, cardboard, milk cartons, etc.) may fall under the category of recycling or burnable. Clothing, shoes, plastic products (that do not otherwise fall under the recycling category), and wood products are usually burnable. Burnable trash pick-up is usually once or twice a week.

- Nonburnable Trash (燃えないゴミ・不燃ゴミ; moenai gomi, funen gomi): This is the stuff you really wouldn't want to light on fire, and isn't obviously recyclable. It includes items like broken glass, ceramics, light bulbs, aerosol cans, batteries, metal cookware, small appliances, etc. Big items are not part of nonburnable trash. If it doesn't fit in the average trash can, it has its own category. Nonburnable trash is usually picked up once or twice a month.

- Big Items (粗大ゴミ・大型ゴミ; sodai gomi, ōgata gomi): the mysterious “fourth” category. Actually, big item trash is basically nonburnable, but it includes large appliances, TVs, furniture, bicycles, futons, and etc. Unfortunately you do not get to haul these things to the curb and never see them again. In order to get rid of these things, you have to call the local trash management center and either schedule a pick-up (which will cost money, and will be more expensive depending on the size of the item), or figure out how to transport the item to the trash center yourself. You can get your supervisor to help you with this.

- Recycling (リサイクル; risaikuru): Japanese recycling is awesome because it has subcategories that may require additional sorting and separate bagging. Do you have a headache yet? Recyclables may include: PET bottles (ペットボトル; petto botoru, that would be any plastic bottle out of a vending machine, type 1 plastics), assorted plastic items including plastic cups, trays, bottles, containers, bags, etc. (usually labeled with プラ; pura), aluminum and steel cans (アルミ缶・スチル缶; arumi kan, suchiru kan), glass bottles (びん; bin), and occasionally batteries, cardboard, newspaper, magazines, and milk cartons. All recycling must be clean and dry, and is picked up once or twice a week.

Additionally, trash pick-up does not come to your house, you have to take out your garbage to a specific location, your local trash station (ゴミステーション; gomi sutēshon), on the right day (and not before) for pick-up. Keep in mind that there might be a more complex system at your posting, and you may be required to not only divide your trash, but also use specific bags for different types of trash. Your municipality will probably have a large colorful chart with many pictures that will help you figure out what kind of trash is which—ask your supervisor if you are really confused, but spend some quality time figuring out the trash schedule. Firstly, you need to do this to actually get rid of trash, which is a good thing.

Secondly, you need to understand the trash schedule because your local trash station is generally governed by a little old lady whose social function to make sure everyone is doing their trash correctly. These ladies have been known to return incorrectly sorted trash to its owner. If you can figure out and master the trash in your municipality, you will never get it returned to you, and you will also win bragging rights with everyone you know.

Furnishing or Inheriting Your Japanese House

A large number of you will be inheriting a apartment, a house, or a bunch of stuff from a predecessor. This is awesome because it simplifies your initial few weeks a lot. However, you may notice, once the glow of arrival has started to wear off and you actually sort through all that stuff in your closet, that you've acquired a number of useful things and a lot of totally random trash. Naturally if you inherit a lot of things that you don't want, use the section on trash above to figure out how to get rid of the junk. Obviously your predecessor did not earn Japanese Trash Bragging Rights. More power to you. Your predecessor may also offer to sell you a bunch of things—this is a fairly good strategy because it means that no one has to deal with the Japanese trash service, and you arrive in Japan to a fully furnished apartment, which is a huge relief when you're jet lagged and confused.

The first rule of buying things from your predecessor is to know what you're getting. Ask for a complete list. Ask for pictures. If the apartment or house is owned by your CO, ask what items the CO paid for, because your predecessor should not be selling those to you. Judge the quality of the things that you're getting for yourself. Generally your predecessor wants to sell you stuff honestly and to save you time and effort. Sometimes they are trying to scam you. Assume the first, prepare for the second. The second rule of buying things from your predecessor is to arrange payment in a way that everyone is happy with. No one likes getting screwed over, so make arrangements—will you mail them yen? Write a check? If you meet them, will you hand over money then? Clear and direct communication is good here. Finally, you are in no way obligated to accept anything your predecessor is trying to sell you. If you don't want it, say so. They are then obligated to get rid of it (although that depends on their skills with the Japanese trash systems).

If you don't have a predecessor and are panicking about how on earth you're going to purchase all the things you need to buy to live, or if you arrive and you only have a fridge, a

stove, and a futon, worry not! There are affordable ways to find lots of things in Japan! Start at your local home goods store. Big shops like Homac or Sundays carry everything you need to furnish your house. If you go there and get sticker shock, the next place to investigate is the nearest thrift shop—called a recycle shop in Japan. While these places are not nearly as cheap when compared with American thrift stores like Goodwill, they still offer plenty of quality stuff for a considerable discount. (As always, be sure to look over everything before you buy it. Recycle shops occasionally sell things that only partially work. Bring a friend or a supervisor if you need a linguistic boost.)

For smaller home goods, the absolute best place you can go is the ¥100 store (100^{えん}ショップ; hyaku en shoppu). While American dollar stores tend to sell items of lousy quality, Japanese ¥100 shops are goldmines of awesome, cheap products of reasonable quality. Places like Daiso or Seria are perfect for picking up plates, glasses, bentō boxes, and bizarre stationary. Please note that ¥100 stores do charge between ¥100-¥500 for their items, but they are perfect for the newly arrived JET. Some even carry basic produce—although it will be of a lower quality than the produce found in the local grocery store.

Finally, Facebook is a pretty great resource for finding other JETs and acquiring furniture. Most prefectures have a prefectural page on Facebook, and often people try to sell their stuff there before dragging it all to the trash or recycle shop. If you're looking to pick up some gently used stuff that might be too expensive to buy new, check out the folks in your area—maybe someone wants to sell or trade something.

House-Related Resources

- An overview of Japanese houses: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Housing_in_Japan
- How to use your aircon: <http://www.survivingnjapan.com/2012/07/use-air-conditioner-japan.html>
 - A break down of the pros and cons of different heaters: <http://www.survivingnjapan.com/2012/11/how-to-heat-your-home-and-stay-warm-in.html>
- How to use a Japanese super toilet: <http://www.survivingnjapan.com/2013/07/how-to-use-electronic-japanese-toilet.html>

- Layout for a standard super toilet command panel: <http://livedoor.blogimg.jp/atosatu/imgs/1/4/14fa784d.jpg>
- Useful appliance kanji charts: <http://www.tokyoapartments.jp/rental-apartments/moving-to-tokyo/appliances.html>
- Mending shōji: <http://www.accessj.com/2010/10/mendingchanging-paper-in-shouji-screens.html>
- Mending fusuma: <http://www.accessj.com/2012/07/changing-paper-in-your-sliding-doors.html>
- Mending sliding screen doors (網戸^{あみど}, amido): <http://www.accessj.com/2012/08/changing-mesh-in-your-amido-bug-screens.html>
- Japanese laundry detergent: <http://www.survivingnjapan.com/2011/11/guide-to-laundry-detergent-in-japan.html>

Cellphones & Internet: How to Keep in Touch with the People Who Love You

Cellphones

けいたいでんわ
(携帯電話 ; keitai denwa, often abbreviated to “keitai”)

Japan is the land of the cellphone. Japanese cellphones have had many capabilities, such as internet service, that are relatively new to American cellphones. Even cheap Japanese flip phones can log on. However, smartphones are the name of the game, and you will be able to find all the latest from Apple, Samsung, and any other phone running the Android interface. There are three major carriers in Japan: SoftBank, au by KDDI, and NTT DOCOMO. All of them now carry all of the latest smartphones, so which one you pick will be mostly governed by what your BOE would like you to have, what has good service in your area, and which plan you want (it is probably not worth it to be too anxious about the plans, someone from your workplace will go with you to figure it out). Naturally, flip phones will be cheap and smartphones will be expensive.

Flip phones will do all the basics, calling, texting, email, and internet access, and they will do it cheaply. Some of them even have Japanese-English dictionaries. The downside is the learning curve. Some will have an English mode, but many don't, so expect to stumble around with your new phone for awhile.

Smartphones are a great tool to have in Japan, and, while more expensive, will be affordable on a JET salary. All of them will have multi-lingual settings, so you can keep your phone in whatever language makes you comfortable. Additionally, smartphones have GPS—super useful as most Japanese roads don't have street names and you're going to get lost at some point—and apps. Japanese dictionary apps can be a real life saver (but not recommended for class). For iPhone, from the US store: Japanese (\$9.99), Midori (\$9.99), and imiwa? (free) are very good and don't require access to the internet to use. For Android, also from the US store: JED Japanese Dictionary (free) and Aedict Japanese Dictionary (free) are also good and don't require internet. There are also a number of excellent kanji and kana learning apps to be found.

Internet

(インターネット ; intānetto)

Despite having had access to the internet for years on their cellphones, the internet is not nearly as ubiquitous in Japan as it is in the U.S. Finding free Wi-Fi, especially in areas outside of Tokyo and other major cities is a little like finding a needle in a haystack. McDonalds, surprisingly, is one of the bastions of free Wi-Fi service in Japan. However, it may be hard to get on the internet when you arrive in Tokyo, so it's best to tell your friends and family that when you leave, you'll likely be out of contact for awhile—it may take as many as three weeks or longer to get internet set up in your new home.

ESID, but if you are lucky, you'll be inheriting your predecessor's internet account with their apartment. This is great—make sure to ask your supervisor to change the name on the accounts if they haven't done so already. Unfortunately, there is a high chance that you will have to create a new account when you arrive.

- **Note:** There are two parts to accessing the internet in Japan. They are the ISP and the Supplier. You will need an account with both of them to get online.

Typically, the Supplier will be NTT (Nippon Telegraph and Telephone) or a similar company. They will provide you with the actual hardware. In order to gain access to the web, you'll also need to have an account with an ISP. Major ISP suppliers are NTT Plala, ASAHI Net, and Open Computer Network (OCN). Your supervisor should help you set all this up, but it will probably take some time, so prepare to be without internet for a number of weeks when you first arrive.

Communicating Overseas

So now that you're connected to the internet and have a nifty cellphone, how do you talk to all your friends and family back at home, who are super jealous of all the fun you're having? Well, things have changed a lot since the beginning of the JET Program, and the internet has revolutionized expat life. Email, naturally, is great. Those with iPhones can use iMessage to text with anyone in the world who has an iDevice for free (it counts as data, but there is no crushing international charge). WhatsApp (\$0.99) allows for free international texting across all mobile platforms.

In the world of audio and video chatting, Skype, Google Hangouts, and FaceTime (between iDevices only, requires Wi-Fi) are all great options. And are free for basic service. Skype and Google also have an option to connect a phone number with your account, so that you

can make and receive phone calls with anyone in the U.S. for very reasonable prices. This is a great way to communicate with people who might not be on the video chat bandwagon or to conduct business in the States without paying exorbitant fees.

That Job Thing

This guide is mostly intended to be about life in Japan and how to survive it, and not to be a guide on How to Be an JET, but it would be remiss to not discuss the jobs for which you all have been hired to do. Most of you are ALTs and will be working in Japanese schools teaching English. A few of you will be CIRs, and will mostly work in an office helping to translate, interpret, and provide foreign language support for your prefecture, international center, or other. Perhaps one of you will be a SEA, whose main job will be to organize and plan sports training and sports-related projects. Given the numbers, the majority of this chapter will be intended for ALTs with some side commentary for CIRs. (Sorry, SEAs, your job is too mysterious!)

If you have a predecessor, you should plan to quiz them mercilessly about your situation in terms of number of schools, weekly schedule, number of students, what kind of classes, etc.

A Brief Introduction to the Japanese School System

Working at Japanese schools is the ALT's primary job. The CIR position may also involve school visits. As has been clearly established, ESID, and the number and variety of schools each ALT or CIR will visit is radically different depending on posting. Nonetheless, some things are universal within the Japanese school system, but that the newly arrived JET may find rather different from their own American educational experience.

Japanese education formally starts in elementary school (小学校; しょうがっこう shōgakkō), although many students go to kindergarten (保育所; ほいくしょ hoikusho) or preschool (幼稚園; ようちえん yōchien) beforehand. Japanese elementary school runs from first to sixth grade and is very similar to American elementary school in many respects. Once they graduate from sixth grade, all students are required by law to continue on to junior high school (中学校; ちゅうがっこう chūgakkō). Junior high school has three grades—first, second, third—and corresponds to the American seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. In Japan, education is only compulsory through junior high school. Most students do go on to senior high school (高等学校・高校; こうとうがっこう こうこう kōtōgakkō, kōkō), but they must pass a series of exams in order to attend. Better test results mean that the student can go on to attend a better senior high school; lower test scores generally result in the student continuing on to a vocational

school. Senior high school has three grades—again, first, second, and third—which correspond to the American tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades. After senior high school come another series of intensive examinations, which determine whether the student will go to college and which colleges will accept them.

ALTs and CIRs (and SEAs) will most likely work in junior high schools and senior high schools where foreign language education is compulsory. Many will also work in elementary schools, given that as of 2011, foreign language study once a week is mandatory for fifth and sixth graders. Some JETs will also do simple lessons for other elementary school levels or at the local kindergartens and preschools.

Japanese Schools are Different from American Schools

Japanese schools differ from American schools in several key ways. A solid understanding of these differences will help you in your first few weeks and may also provide a teaching opportunity in the future. The first thing you should know is that throughout elementary school, junior high, and even sometimes in high school, the entire class of students rises together. That means everybody graduates at the end of the year (or goes up a grade level) regardless of their yearly results. This may seem to be an anathema to an American JET, but you must understand that, in Japan, it is more important for the class to advance as a unit and that no one student is singled out for academic punishment. Naturally, Japanese teachers want all their students to do well, but because they are required to pass every student, sometimes you will encounter a student who is having a lot of trouble in your classes because they fell behind earlier and don't know how or don't want to catch up. Keep in mind that your JTE probably knows about that student and provide whatever help you can. Pointing out that student in class is not the solution and is contrary to the Japanese way of doing things.

The class is the core unit of the Japanese school. Within each grade, students are divided by class (transcribed as grade-class, ex: 1-A, 3-D, etc.). In elementary school, each class has a single teacher who teaches each subject—as in American elementary schools. This changes from junior high school on. Unlike in an American school, in Japanese junior and senior high schools the students do not change classrooms for each lesson; the students remain in their classroom, the teachers are the ones who switch. That means that each class of students has every lesson together, and they tend to participate in all school events as a group. It should also be noted that

once students enter junior high school, the class has a level of autonomy that an American JET may find surprising. The students are responsible for maintaining their classroom, taking roll call, serving lunch, and keeping the weekly schedule. Each class is supervised by a homeroom teacher, but, for the most part, the students are responsible for running the daily life in their class. The homeroom teacher is another role that differs between Japanese and American schools. The Japanese homeroom teacher is far more involved in their students' lives than the American. The homeroom teacher's responsibilities do not end when the students leave school; he or she is involved in the students' home life, their academic progress, and their general wellbeing. This is a pretty big job, and you'll see that the teachers who are also homeroom teachers work long hours to ensure their students' happiness.

Another big difference is school lunch (給食^{きゅうしょく}; kyūshoku). Most Japanese schools do not have cafeterias; students eat in their classrooms. In elementary and junior high school (and some senior high schools) lunch is usually delivered fresh from the local "School Lunch Center," usually made of food grown locally. At lunch time, student representatives from each class come to pick up that class's lunch, take it back to the classroom, and serve it to their classmates. There is a strong emphasis on balanced, healthy, and varied meals (especially compared to American school lunches), and students are expected to eat all of their lunch—even the parts that they do not particularly like. Dessert is generally rare and mostly consists of fruit. Students are not allowed to bring lunch from home except on special event days or in the case of special dietary needs, and the contents of their lunches is monitored. That is not to say that you will never see fried foods or eat a school lunch that seems a bit greasy, but on the whole, Japanese school lunches are phenomenal in their health and taste value.

As a JET, you may be asked to eat in a classroom with the students or in the office with the teachers. Unless you have strict dietary requirements or severe allergies, you will probably be expected to eat school lunch. If you eat with the students, keep in mind that the students are expected to eat their entire meal without complaining—you too should be prepared to clean your plate even if it's a food you don't like. Also, if you bring your own lunch, keep in mind that students are not allowed to have snack foods or sodas or desserts in their lunches, and if you eat with the students or where students might be (say, the office), you should leave these things out of your lunch because you are trying to set a good example to your students. At most senior high

schools, students are allowed to bring their lunches from home and boxed lunches (弁当; bentō) will be available for purchase. Once again, the focus is on healthy, fresh food, so if you bring your own lunch, you should take that into consideration. The contents of your lunch will be a topic of conversation, so be prepared to talk about what the American-sensei likes to eat.

Navigating Your Schools or Offices

As an ALT or a CIR, you'll probably be based in one location, such as a school, board of education, or government office, and then travel to a number of other places. But how do you figure out what's happening once you arrive? Firstly, Japanese offices are all open offices. No one is ever in a cubical, but desks are usually organized into clusters by type of work being done. Also, many offices have large chalkboards (and sometimes whiteboards) with the monthly schedule written out on it. If you apply your Japanese Deductive Skills by taking a picture of the schedule board or sitting in front of it with your Japanese dictionary, you will be able to figure out what's happening for the entire month, and you'll be in the know about any special events. This is a good thing to do because while your coworkers, particularly your JTEs, will try to keep you informed about what's happening, they're only human and if you make the effort to understand the schedule, your life will probably be a lot less stressful. (You'll be able to see when you need to wear a suit or when a track suit will be better and you'll always know when to bring your lunch.) You also should be able to get a copy of the weekly class schedule, which will be key if you want to know what classes your teaching when.

Generally you will have a desk at your home office, which may be full of really useful teaching aids, or trash from a JET ten years prior—open every drawer and investigate. If you visit a school frequently, likely you will have a designated desk there, and you can store teaching aids and worksheets. If you visit infrequently, you will probably sit at a visitor's desk, so you'll need to bring all of your materials. Every office will have a copy machine, and you should ask someone to show you how to use it, especially if you're an ALT and will be making and/or copying worksheets. As a CIR, you may also be charged with using the office printers and fax machines. Your desk may also come with a computer that may or may not connect to the internet—remember, responsible browsing, folks! If you bring a personal computer to work, please keep

in mind that you may not be allowed or capable of connecting to the internet, so ask before trying to log on.

Many Japanese offices have a small kitchenette where the tea and coffee lives. Note, the tea and coffee may not be free for everyone's use! Many offices have a "coffee club" type of arrangement, wherein everyone pays a little bit of money and purchases coffee/tea for the club members to drink throughout the year. You can also bring your own coffee or tea to keep in your desk at your main office. Since Japanese offices don't always own a collection of public mugs, bringing your own mug to keep on your desk is a good idea. When you visit schools, especially if you only visit occasionally, someone will probably bring you a cup of tea or coffee to be polite.

Free Time in the Office

Depending on your job responsibilities and the number of classes you will be teaching, you may have some free time in the office. This will certainly be true when you first arrive, as all the schools will be on summer vacation, so you will be spending some weeks in your main office trying to prepare and not die of boredom. Certainly you are supposed to be preparing for classes, and this will definitely take a considerable portion of your time, but depending on your JTE and your class load, there might just be too many hours in the day.

What can you do? Of course ESID, and you can ask your coworkers or supervisor about what is acceptable, but use your common sense—watching videos and surfing Facebook are probably not acceptable activities. Studying Japanese may or may not be an acceptable activity. You need to be engaged and involved or at least appear that way. Ask if you can help other teachers, either your JTEs or otherwise.

Interacting With Students

Yes, you'll have to do this. Regardless of your Japanese ability. Of course, ESID, but even if your only role in the classroom is that of human tape recorder (as a native English speaker, you will undoubtedly be doing some of this), you will still interact with the students outside of class and during class activities. If you live in a small town, you will probably even see your students outside of school during your daily life and on weekends.

- **Note:** Don't take pictures of students. Especially don't take pictures of students and post them on your blog. That sounds fun sucking, but it's for the kids' safety, so don't be that guy. If you want to take pictures of your students, ask a teacher first. If they say okay, then you can go ahead and take pictures, but you should keep them private—keep them off your Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, whatever. You don't want people taking pictures of you and posting them across the internet without telling you. It's even more dubious with a minor.

Younger students, particularly kindergarteners and elementary school students will be a bit handsy. A popular school prank, especially for young boys toward male teachers, is the *kanchō* (カンチョー), which is a slang term derived from enema. It consists of the boy in question clasping his hands together leaving the pointer fingers sticking straight out and attempting to insert their fingers into the unsuspecting victim's anus. Usually while shouting “Kanchō!” Female teachers will need to be concerned about younger students who are interested in their breasts and bum. Older students will hopefully have grown out of their touchy feely behavior, but they are generally more interested in asking you awkward questions (see Invasive Personal Questions). Do try to discourage this behavior—students can smell fear, and if they realize that they are making you uncomfortable, they will keep doing it. Redirecting and feigning incomprehension are helpful here.

A great way to get to know your students beyond the bizarre personal questions is to get involved in other classes or participate in club activities. Likely you'll have a fair amount of free time in the office, and instead of sitting around looking bored, pursue your interests! If you play a musical instrument, like to paint, or have an interest in learning Japanese, try talking to the teacher responsible for that class. Maybe you can sit in. Your students will love watching you flail around in their class (as long as you're not an enormous distraction). If you love sports, ask what kind of clubs your schools have. Club activities (部活; bukatsu) are an important part of the Japanese school system. You may notice that your students sometimes spend several hours after school at their clubs. Sports teams, band, English, cooking, and traditional activities like judō, kendō, kyudō (archery), ikebana (flower arrangement), shodō (calligraphy), and chadō (tea ceremony) are all possibilities for clubs. Joining a club is a phenomenal way to become better acquainted with your students and pursue something you're interested in. Keep in mind that club activities are taken quite seriously by the students and teachers, so if you join a club, you may be

expected to participate at the same level as your students. This can mean daily hours of practice and weekend commitments. If that's not for you, you should articulate your expectations clearly at the beginning so that no one is upset or disappointed.

If your students are trying to decide something amongst themselves, you will probably notice very quickly that the instant solution is Rock, Paper, Scissors. Called janken (じゃんけん・ジャンケン), Rock, Paper, Scissors seems to be the solution to all interpersonal conflicts amongst Japanese children. You can use it as an excellent teaching tool, and teach the English version to your students as a part of the cultural exchange that you are fostering. The Japanese version works mostly the same way as the English one. The first round, everyone says "Saisho wa gū, janken pon!" (最初はぐう、じゃんけんぽん!) whereupon everyone shows their hand. If there is a tie, players say "Aiko desho!" (あいこでしょ!) and show their new hand. Rock is gū (ぐう), paper is pā (ぱあ), and scissors are choki (ちょき). Use janken frequently to settle quarrels, disagreements, decide on speakers, or during games.

Work Outside of Work

As part of your contract, you may be asked to do things like teach an English conversation class for children or adults (英会話; eikaiwa) or to translate for your local office (if you're an ALT) that seem like they might not be what you're actually there to do. They are, but only if your CO asks you. Your JET contract says that you cannot hold a second job. They mean it. You cannot have a second job and receive a second, or third, paycheck. That doesn't mean you can't hold eikaiwas outside of your CO—it just means that you can't accept money for them. If you really want to teach an eikaiwa in the next town over, and your students want to reimburse you for your time, ask for a transit stipend, or let them buy you dinner (a great way to find delicious and awesome restaurants), but you can't accept money. If you do, and your CO finds out about it, you could get in a lot of trouble.

Alcohol and Drugs in Japan

On the subject of drugs, as was mentioned earlier, Japan has a **zero tolerance policy towards drugs**. That includes anything from marijuana to heroin to meth. All of it. No matter

the quantity. It is all illegal and possession, use, or knowledge of possession/use will result in jail time and/or deportation. What that means for you: Do not do drugs. Do not do drugs. Do not carry drugs. Do not go to a party where drug use may be occurring. Do not order drug paraphernalia on the internet; it could affect you or your successor. Getting jailed in a foreign country is horrifically expensive and equally terrifying. Getting deported from a foreign country is the kind of thing that goes on your record forever. That kind of stuff affects your career for all time. Just don't do it.

Alcohol, on the other hand is ubiquitous. The drinking (and smoking) age in Japan is 20, and there are severe consequences for underaged drinking. Drinking is a social activity in Japan and you will likely be invited or obligated to go to a number of office drinking parties (宴会; ^{えんかい}enkai). As you're probably aware, all Japanese parties start with a toast (乾杯; ^{かんぱい}kanpai), which is usually done with beer, the drink of preference at most office parties. At a Japanese party, you are not responsible for your drink, everyone else at the party is responsible for your drink, and it's polite to fill the drinks of people around you. If you don't want to drink at a party or you are a nondrinker, it's important to establish that you are not interested in drinking alcohol before the kanpai, and pick a nonalcoholic beverage of choice to enjoy. What happens at an enkai, stays at the enkai. It's not always appropriate to discuss the events of a party during work the next day. There is also an open can policy, so you will often see people drinking in public spaces or on public transit.

Keep in mind that Japan has a **zero tolerance policy on drinking and driving**. (This includes drinking and bicycling.) Much like drug use, there are severe consequences for being caught driving while inebriated, which can include losing your job. These consequences extend to anyone who is in the car with a driver who has been drinking. Luckily, Japan has a number of ways to get around after drinking. Public transit is great when you're inebriated. If there's driving involved, probably your office mates will arrange a carpool with a designated driver. The other option is taxis. Japanese taxis are fairly expensive, but can be found nearly everywhere, especially around train stations. If you have a car and drove to a party, but decided to drink, you can get a special kind of taxi called a daikō (代行^{だいこう}), which is a taxi with two drivers. One of the drivers will drive you and your car back to your home, while the other driver follows in their car.

Daikō service is slightly more expensive than a regular taxi, but a really great way to deal with drinking and driving.

Invasive Personal Questions

Okay, so you made it to Tokyo Orientation, and you have no idea why you thought living in Japan was going to be difficult. You're staying in a fancy hotel, eating delicious food, attending assorted seminars, and trying to meet as many people as possible so you'll have endless futons to crash on for your epic Trans-Japan Adventure. Bad news. Tokyo Orientation is a little bubble that will pop the moment you leave.

But you survive the trip to your posting, you're exhausted, you've been introduced to your entire office, driven all over your town and have no idea what anyone's name is. And then you go to your welcome party. Your coworkers are inquisitive; you're new—maybe they've never had a JET from Indiana, or a female JET, or an African-American JET, or a JET who can speak Japanese—once the beer starts flowing, so will the questions. The first few are super easy: where are you from, what's your family like, how old are you, do you like Japanese food, can you use chopsticks? Easy peasy. Then they get more complicated: do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend, do you like Japanese men/women, what are your measurements, how much do you weigh, do you like me, what's your blood type, do you have (insert name of item here, ex: four seasons) in America? It may get overwhelming very quickly. Or turn into something that you find very uncomfortable. Why does your boss want to know if you have a boyfriend/girlfriend? Eek.

Stop. Take a deep breath. Your coworkers are curious and they want to get to know you. Your students will be the same. They are probably not intending their curiosity to sound like the second coming of the Spanish Inquisition, but there is only one of you and a lot of them. And just because you tell one person, doesn't mean everyone will have gotten the message. You're going to get asked the same questions repeatedly until you want to punch the next person who asks you if you can use chopsticks right in the face. Try to avoid that. How you choose to answer invasive personal questions—especially ones about your body and your personal life (everybody gets this)—is up to you. Probably you don't want to share your deepest, darkest secrets to your coworkers or your students. Feel free to not answer the questions you don't feel comfortable answering—but don't just brush them off. You are a representative of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program. And the Exchange part is important. Tell people it's a secret (this works well for adults). Tell jokes (this works well for kids). Tell joking lies like: "Oh,

yeah, my boyfriend? I'm dating a guy named Peter Parker. Let me tell you a secret, he's actually Spiderman." A little research into Japanese pop culture (what shows kids like, what bands are popular, what movies have come out recently) will help you pull off your joke. Over-exaggerated body language is a great tool to help punctuate jokes when your Japanese language ability fails.

Even when you're thoroughly sick of questions that seem invasive or obvious, do your best to be a good sport about it. Most people you talk to will be genuinely interested in talking to you about you, and you can even deflect questions by asking questions (naturally, try to be sensitive) to people around you. You can also explain that certain questions make you uncomfortable, because, hey, those questions aren't polite in America. (Teaching moment! Teaching moment!) Finally, take into consideration that, much like in America, there are a number of filler questions and phrases inherent in every language. People may be asking you what sound like repetitive or fairly self-evident questions because they'd like to talk to you, but don't quite know what to say or are trying to gauge your level of Japanese. Invasive personal questions are annoying, but there are plenty of ways to move beyond them in daily conversation.

Emergency Situations in Japan

Japan is hilariously prone to natural disasters for a small island nation. It experiences earthquakes (地震; jishin), tsunamis (津波; tsunami), volcanoes (火山; kasan), typhoons (台風; taifū), avalanches (雪崩; nadare), mudslides (土石流; dosekiryū), and the periodic tornado (竜巻; tatsumaki). With all the disasters that happen on a regular basis, it's kind of surprising that anyone actually lives in Japan. While events like the 3/11 earthquake and tsunami are quite rare, you should expect to experience at least one earthquake during your time in Japan. If you don't come from an area where natural disasters are common, you should plan on doing some preparatory research. Even if you do come from an area where natural disasters are common, you will probably be surprised by the Japanese ability to quickly and effectively deal with natural disasters. Don't be shy asking about anything you may need to know to survive in an emergency — your supervisor or coworkers are happy to help.

- **Note:** Emergency services in Japan can be reached by dialing 119. (Easy, right?)

How do you prepare for an emergency in a foreign country? First, read all the information the JET Program distributes about natural disaster preparedness. Second, follow the instructions! When you arrive at your placement, particularly if you are near the coast, you should locate your nearest evacuation point (避難所; hinansho). You can do this by asking your supervisor or looking for signs with a green running figure on them. (Evacuation signs are usually in English and Japanese.) At any time, if you need to evacuate, air-raid-like sirens will go off and generally there will be a city-wide announcement including the word “evacuate” (避難; hinan), although keep in mind that occasionally towns run evacuation drills (訓練; kunren, drill). If you're at work, your coworkers will be able to help you. If you're at home, peer out a window until you can figure out what your neighbors are doing. The citizens of Japan have been running disaster preparedness drills since kindergarten. They know where to go and when, so it is in your best interest to follow them. The best disaster resource is the Japan Meteorological Agency (link below), which will not only tell you the weather, but provides the most up-to-date information to the entire country about disasters. The JMA has a comprehensive English website accessible from computer and smartphone. If you have some Japanese language skills, and

access to a TV, whenever there is an earthquake, tsunami, or volcanic eruption, there will be scrolling updates across all programming.

Earthquakes are the most common natural disaster in Japan, and can be felt at anytime, nearly anywhere in the country. The Japanese use a different measurement system for earthquakes than we do in America. While the Richter scale is used to measure magnitude, the Japanese generally use a seismic intensity scale which runs from 震度^{しんど} 0 (shindo, seismic intensity), imperceptible, to 震度^{しんど} 7, where human beings are thrown and unable to move due to shaking. Shindo levels 5 and 6 have “weak” and “strong” subcategories (弱^{じやく}; jaku, weak; 強^{きょう}; kyō, strong) Japanese cellphones are also required to ring an alert if the seismic early warning system predicts the incoming earthquake to be a “Weak 5” (震度^{しんど} 5 弱^{じやく}; shindo five jaku) or higher on the seismic intensity scale. If you experience a strong earthquake, the best thing to do is to copy whatever your coworkers are doing. You may need to hide under a sturdy table or desk. Standing in a reinforced doorway is also a good strategy. If you are outside, you will want to get away from buildings, trees, and power lines in order to avoid falling objects.

If you live by the seaside, and there is a strong earthquake, either nearby or somewhere in the Pacific, there very likely could be a tsunami. If you feel a strong earthquake, be prepared to evacuate the area. Tsunami are very fast and frighteningly silent; they do not look like actual waves, only a fast incoming tide. If you are on the beach, and you see the water pulling away from shore, leave immediately. If the tsunami alert goes off in your town or city (and it will sound like an air-raid siren), evacuate. If you are in an office, follow what your coworkers are doing. If they evacuate or move to a higher floor, follow. Tsunami are measured by the size of the wave in meters—not how far inland they are predicted to go! Even a small tsunami might travel far. If you travel around the coast of Japan, you will see signs that predict the estimated tsunami inundation sections, if there is concern about a large tsunami, don’t be in those. Monitor the Japan Meteorological Agency’s website and ask your coworkers.

Japan is also full of volcanoes, being a volcanic island, and a great number of these are still active. This is wonderful, because visiting hot springs is a part of living in Japan, and without volcanoes, there wouldn’t be any hot springs. However, active volcanoes (and even inactive volcanoes) can still erupt. If there is a serious volcanic eruption, evacuate. Once again, the JMA has a comprehensive section dedicated to active volcanoes.

Evacuation due to natural disaster is a part of Japanese life, albeit hopefully a part that won't affect your time there. The JET Program advises you to create an emergency bag, which will include items like your valuable documents, some food and water, and basic tools like a flashlight. While this kit is annoying to set up and you will probably set it up and never look at it again, in light of the 3/11 earthquake and tsunami, better to do it than be without. Another thing you should do, and which can be done at any time during your time in Japan, is to enroll in STEP (Smart Traveller Enrollment Program) run by the State Department. This is the program that replaces registering with your local embassy. Enrolling in STEP is free and helps the US government know where its citizens are so that it can find you in case of a disaster. It will also help you contact your family when a disaster derails the normal lines of communication.

Resources for Emergencies

- Japan Meteorological Agency: <http://www.jma.go.jp/jma/indexe.html>
- A Guide to the Japanese Seismic Intensity Scale: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan_Meteorological_Agency_seismic_intensity_scale
- An Explanation of JMA's Volcanic Warning System: <http://www.data.jma.go.jp/svd/vois/data/tokyo/STOCK/kaisetsu/English/level.html>
- The STEP Program: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

Your Japanese Doctor and You

Naturally we hope that you are one hundred percent healthy the entire time that you're in Japan. Realistically, we know that's not going to happen. Schools and offices are excellent gathering places for germs. Even if you don't get sick at all ever (and this may change in Japan because you will be exposed to slightly different variations of familiar illnesses), your office may require you to get a yearly physical to prove your health (which often includes an x-ray of your chest to check for TB), or you may wish to dodge the Yakkan Shōmei by switching a similar Japanese medication. So at some point you're going to see a doctor (医者; ^{いしや} isha).

Since you have clearly already read the GIH from cover to cover, you already know that you have health insurance under the Japanese National Health Insurance plan. You will also already be aware that anything termed “preventive care” (i.e. birth control, routine check-ups, dental cleaning, routine eye examinations, etc.) is not covered under your health insurance plan. Japanese doctors know this, and often if you go in for a check-up, they will find something to “fix,” so that your visit will be covered under insurance. Please be sure to check with your doctor to make sure that your visit is covered by your insurance.

Many Japanese doctors can speak some English as part of their medical training, but if you are planning on visiting the doctor for a specific reason, it behooves you to do some preparatory research into what vocabulary words you need to know in order to communicate your needs. Making a list of important terms relating to the reason for your visit on your smartphone or on a sheet of paper that you can show to the doctor will make it a lot easier for you to visit the doctor by yourself, without having to bring along your supervisor, JTE, or really awesome Japanese-speaking friend. If you are trying to switch an American prescription for a Japanese one, bringing a copy of your American prescription with the name of the medicine *clearly* written on it will help you enormously. Nonetheless, visiting a Japanese doctor for the first time, especially by yourself, can be a little scary. This chapter is intended to give you some idea what to expect when visiting a Japanese doctor and how to prepare.

Of course there are some differences between the American medical tradition and the Japanese. Firstly, the Japanese consider clinics (クリニック; kurinikku) and hospitals (病院; ^{びょういん} byōin) to be fairly interchangeable. It is perfectly normal to go to the hospital for a mild cold.

You will also go to the hospital for any major medical treatment, just as you would in the States. Both hospitals and clinics have specializations in internal medicine (内科; ない か naika), ears, nose, and throat (耳鼻科; じ び か jibika), OB/GYN (産婦人科; さん ぶ じん か sanfujinka), and etc. Dentists (歯科; し か shika) generally own their own practices. Whether you go to a hospital or a clinic is dependent on where you live, what is near you, and when you want to go, as Japanese doctor's offices generally have very specific hours. Ask around when you first arrive, and/or spend some time scouting out the medical options near you—you'll be wanting to know what your options are before you actually need them. Quiz your predecessor—they probably have inside information about the best places to go. Additionally, much like everything in Japan, your local medical office may look like it belongs on the USS Enterprise or like nothing has been updated since 1954. For example, wearing a lead apron is not mandatory for getting x-rayed (レントゲン; レントゲン rentogen), but the average MRI machine is an open MRI that looks like a stargate.

- **Note:** Unlike in the States, Japanese doctors do not take appointments. You cannot call for an appointment, everything is walk in.

- **Second Note:** You may be required by your office to take a yearly physical along with all your coworkers. This is required by law and may be difficult to get out of. ESID. Part of this physical is a chest x-ray to test for tuberculosis. As a country full of elderly people, who are medically vulnerable, TB is a big deal in Japan. Even though you just got an x-ray to come to Japan, and you're reasonably sure you don't have TB, accept the x-ray anyway and be glad you don't have tuberculosis.

Sick Days

(病氣休暇; びょうききゅうか byōki kyūka, sometimes abbreviated 病休; びょうきゅう byōkyū)

In America, taking a sick day is fantastically easy. Tell your boss that you're sick, and you are done for the day. In Japan, not so! It is traditional for people to take regular leave (年次休暇; ねんじきゅうか nenji kyūka, often abbreviated 年休; ねんきゅう nenkyū, sometimes 年次; ねんじ nenji) instead of sick leave. A doctor's certificate (診断書; しんだんしょ shindansho) is required to receive sick leave. In order to get a doctor's certificate, you have to go to the doctor. In order to go to the doctor, given the usual doctor's hours of operation, you probably have to leave work. That means you should save

a couple of your regular leave days to use just in case. (These can retroactively become sick days. But only if you get the certificate. Which costs money.) As a JET, you are entitled to up to 20 consecutive days of sick leave, but you should plan on taking regular leave until you can confirm that you will be able to take sick leave.

Having a Cold in Japan

(風邪を引く; kaze o hiku; to catch a cold)

Likely at some point you'll catch a cold and have to suffer sniffles, coughing, a sore throat, and the incessant sympathy of your Japanese coworkers. In Japan, a cold is defined as every kind of sniffly-type illness that isn't actually influenza (インフルエンザ; infuruenza).

People who have colds are generally expected to attend work unless they are quite sick. If you suspect you have influenza, inform your supervisors, and proceed to the doctor immediately for a flu test.

Probably by the time you get sick, you will have seen a number of your fellow teachers, students, and/or officemates all wearing surgical masks. The paper surgical mask (衛生用マスク; eiseiyō masuku, often abbreviated to マスク; masuku) plays a dual role in Japanese society. The mask is worn by people who are sick in order to keep their illness from spreading. Masks are also worn by people who want to avoid sickness. Whether or not they are actually effective is a matter of debate. Nonetheless, the paper surgical mask is a well-established part of Japanese society. If you come to school with the sniffles, someone is probably going to ask if you want to put on a mask, and it is polite to do so. Unfortunately masks make teaching difficult, and if you wear glasses, mask-wearing is going to be downright terrible. Occasionally people use them as a fashion statement. As a representative of your country, you are hereby advised not to do this.

In addition to suggesting you wear a mask, your coworkers may also ask if you need to go to the hospital. While it's up to you to decide when you need to go to the doctor, if your coworkers or supervisors are really concerned about you, the suggestion may be rephrased as a command. Discuss your leave options with your supervisor and make sure that everyone is on the same page before you leave work.

Visiting the Doctor

When you visit the Japanese doctor, the first thing you need to know is when they are open. Much like banks, post offices, and the grocery store, Japanese clinics and hospitals have operating hours—even in the emergency room. (If you are unfortunate enough to need a ride in a Japanese ambulance, they will take you to the nearest open hospital, which might not be the closest.) Usually weekday mornings are the best for getting in to see the doctor, and as it's a first-come, first-serve policy, the earlier you arrive, the better. When you walk in, you will need to have your Resident Card, National Insurance Card, and possibly your hanko handy. You'll walk up to the front desk and let the receptionist know that you want to see the doctor. The receptionist will then take all your cards to make copies, and hand you a form to fill out that will include your address and allow them to make a file for you. They will then give you a patient's card (診察券^{しんさつけん}; shinsatsu ken), which you will need to bring to every subsequent visit.

You will then be directed to wait, and possibly be handed a form to fill out about your medical history. If your Japanese language ability does not extend to medical terminology, having a prepared list or a friend will be key. You may be shuffled through several waiting areas (you may be weighed and your blood pressure taken, even if you're seeing a specialist) until you are shown in to the doctor's cubicle. Listen for your name, as the nurses will call patients back. Please note that there you are often not put into a separate examination room, and that there may be an extremely frank discussion of your medical condition well within the hearing of others. Confidentiality works differently, especially because of the language barrier—if the subject is extremely sensitive to you and you don't want word of your condition to migrate around the waiting room or get reported back to your office, please alert the doctor as soon as possible that you would like it kept quiet.

The doctor will examine you and provide a diagnosis. Often times they will be able to translate their diagnosis into English via a book of medical terms. You can also ask them to write it down for you. Japanese doctors are generally seen as the authority on all things medical, and you are expected to accept the diagnosis without asking too many questions—however, if you do have questions, do not be afraid to ask them; it's better to completely understand your diagnosis than leaving dissatisfied. You are welcome to explore a second opinion. Once you get your diagnosis, you will also get a prescription either from the doctor, a nurse, or from the

receptionist. When the doctor is finished with his or her examination, you will be sent back out to the front where you will wait until the receptionist calls you up to pay your bill (お会計; ^{かいけい}okaikai), and your patient card will be returned to you.

Depending on the office, your prescription may be filled and given to you with the bill. If your prescription is not fulfilled in-house, you can proceed immediately to a pharmacy (^{くすりや やっきょく} 薬屋・薬局; kusuri-ya, yakkyoku), which are often found clustered around clinics and hospitals.

Hand them your prescription, and they will produce the correct medications. Keep in mind that the Japanese medical tradition prescribes a different medicine for each symptom, so it's very likely that you will walk out of the doctor's office with a prescription for several things.

Whoever fills your prescription will explain to you how to take each medication and will provide a comprehensive printout that explains each medicine and when and how to take it. This is convenient because it will list the medicine's name in Japanese and also the product name, sometimes in English. If you are worried about taking a medication you don't know, you can take this sheet home and look up the product. Japanese medications are often in powder or tablet form, and are often considered to be weaker than American medications.

If you are unlucky enough to have to visit the emergency room, your visit will likely go much the same as a regular doctor. If you walk in under your own power, you will check in with the receptionist and then wait until the doctor calls you in. The doctor will make the executive decision about what sort of immediate treatment you need. If the doctor decides that your condition is not critical, you will receive necessary treatment, and be advised to visit the hospital during regular hours.

Dentistry

^{しかい} (歯科医)・^{はいしや} (歯医者); shikai, haisha; dentist)

If you live in the inaka, you will probably realize really quickly that dentistry has only recently (within the last twenty years or so) become popular in Japan. As a result, a large number of adults have some truly frightening teeth, and there is mandatory toothbrushing time at most elementary schools after lunch. Orthodontics is also becoming popular. This does mean that Japanese dentistry has some catching up to do. For the record, you should not avoid the dentist, but it does mean that you should proceed cautiously—many of the compounds Japanese

dentists use are considered outdated in the States. Japan does not add fluoride to its water, so you may actually want to monitor your dental health more carefully than you do in America.

Additionally, routine cleanings or check-ups are not covered by your insurance, so your dentist may endeavor to find something to fix, just so that your visit will be covered by insurance. If you do have an actual dental problem during your time in Japan, it may take a number of trips to the dentist to resolve given that Japanese dentists tend to like doing procedures in baby steps. This kind of thing can get expensive.

The Lady Doctor (OB/GYN)

さんふじんかい
(産婦人科医; sanfujinkai; OB/GYN)

If you are a lady on birth control, you are probably wondering about whether you should follow the instructions in the GIH and applying for the Yakkan Shōmei (やっかんしょうめいしょ 約款証明書; yakkan shōmeisho) to bring your birth control over in quantities of more than one month. If you don't do this, keep in mind that it's pretty expensive to mail one month of birth control over every month. Another solution is paying a visit to your local Japanese OB/GYN. Birth control (さんじせいげん ひにん 産児制限・避妊; sanjiseigen, hinin) is easy to get in Japan, although as it is a “preventive medication,” it is not covered by your insurance. Even so, one month of birth control pill (けいこうひにんやく 経口避妊薬; keikō hinin yaku, or more colloquially, ピル; piru) generally costs about ¥3,000, so it is certainly affordable. IUDs (ひにん 避妊リング・しきゅうないひにんきぐ 子宮内避妊器具; hinin ringu, shikyūnai hinin kigu) are also available, albeit far less common.

To ensure your personal happiness, get a copy of your American prescription that you can show your Japanese doctor, who can generally translate it into the Japanese equivalent. Although it will usually have a different brand name, a variety of birth control pills are available in Japan that use the same hormones that American birth control uses. The Japanese OB/GYN will usually also have you fill out a form that discusses your reproductive health before prescribing you anything. Bringing a friend or a list of health terms will be very useful to you here. Birth control prescriptions are usually filled at the doctor's office, and can be delivered in up to three month quantities.

The Japanese OB/GYN can also provide the “morning after pill” or Plan B (緊急^{きんきゅう} 避妊薬^{ひにんやく}・モーニングアフターピル; kinkyū hinin yaku, mōningu afutā piru). Plan B can also be found at some hospitals, but as it can be quite expensive. You should consider doing your research before you need it. If you become pregnant while in Japan, your Japanese OB/GYN will be your new best friend, and you will be monitored closely throughout the length of your pregnancy. Finally, regardless of your political affiliations, opinions, or religious beliefs, you should be aware that first trimester abortions can be obtained in Japan, although they require written consent from both the woman and her partner. Japanese abortions are very expensive, and can only be performed by licensed doctors if the pregnancy is the result of rape or if the continuation of the pregnancy will endanger the mother due to physical or economic reasons. Japan does not hold the same social stigmas that America does about abortion.

Resources:

- A list of birth control pills available in Japan: <http://www.survivingjapan.com/2010/12/guide-to-birth-control-pills-in-japan.html>
- Other methods of contraception in Japan: <http://www.survivingjapan.com/2011/07/contraception-in-japan-condoms-iuds-and.html>

Driving in Japan

Driving in Japan can be an awesome experience. It can also be terrifying. As we have clearly established, ESID. Depending on where you live, driving to your schools or office may be necessary if public transit does not exist. Your CO or predecessor will be able to specify if you need to drive or if you are allowed to drive to your workplace, and if an office car will be at your disposal for work. Some JETs will be allowed to drive to conferences and business meetings; some will not. It is best to ask your supervisor early if you plan on using a car so that everyone is clear on the rules. Additionally, while your CO cannot dictate your actions outside of working hours, they sometimes feel responsible for your ongoing wellbeing, and might be uncomfortable with you owning a car. Ask permission, not forgiveness. Especially since your CO may be able to help you find a car and navigate a purchase or rental agreement.

Of course you will be arriving with your International Driver's License that you purchased well in advance of your arrival in hand. This will make driving infinitely easier. Remember, the Japanese drive on the left, and the windshield wipers and turn signal handles are switched. You should plan on driving *very* cautiously for the first few months—Japanese roads are extremely narrow and there are many blind corners. The Japanese Automobile Federation (JAF), the Japanese equivalent to AAA provides a book called *Rules of the Road*, which gives an outline of Japanese driving rules. The book costs a little over ¥1,000, but is an excellent introduction to driving in Japan.

Navigating the Japanese road system is extremely complicated. Only the national expressways (高速道路; こうそくどうろ; *kōsoku dōro*) and national roads (国道; こくどう; *kokudō*) have names and numbers, smaller roads are generally nameless. Luckily, Japan is fairly well-signed, and all official road signs will be written in Japanese and Romaji, as place names are difficult to read in kanji even for the Japanese. If you drive frequently, you may consider investing in a GPS (ナビ; *nabi*) or buying a smartphone. Japanese GPS systems can locate places by address or landline phone number, and are often found built into the dashboard in nicer vehicles. Paper maps are also ubiquitous and frequently updated. Also, keep in mind that the national expressways are all privately owned tollroads, and they can be quite expensive at fees of up to \$1/mile. Parking is also at a premium. Car owners are expected to register their parking space and can pay quite a

bit for the privilege. Parking lots are more common in rural areas. JETs posted in urban areas are advised to stick with public transportation, as it will be cheaper and more convenient in the long run.

Acquiring a Vehicle

You have three options for acquiring a vehicle: rent, lease, or buy. If you live in an urban area or drive infrequently, a short term rental is right for you. You do need a valid Japanese driver's license or an International Driver's License to rent a car. Rentals come without the infamously expensive safety inspection and often with ETC, the Electronic Toll Collection system, which makes driving on the expressways a breeze.

If you drive more frequently, consider leasing or buying a car. If you are only planning on being in Japan for one or two years, it may be more cost effective to commit to leasing a car. A car lease requires a monthly payment that depends on the size of the car. Leasing is a good idea because most maintenance fees and the expensive car inspection are included as standard, so all you pay is gas and perhaps the price of materials. Although more expensive in the long run, and sometimes difficult to get (often leases require a Japanese guarantor and sometimes a minimum contract of three years), leasing a car is a good way to get around.

Buying, the third option, a vehicle in Japan is an arduous process, although it pays off in the long run. While the car itself may be cheaper than you are expecting—new cars can be purchased for less than one million yen—purchasing a car may also mean paying for the infamous mandatory safety inspection (自動車検査登録制度; jidōsha kensa tōrokuseido, abbreviated as ^{しゃけん}車検; shaken), which is required every two years and three years after purchase of a new car. Shaken generally costs between ¥100,000 and ¥200,000, which includes compulsory weight tax and vehicular insurance. You may also pay additional vehicle taxes annually, and as the included vehicular insurance does not provide full coverage, additional insurance may be necessary. There are a lot of very official documents necessary to purchase a car in Japan, so if your Japanese language ability does not extend to reading legal contracts, you should plan on bringing a friend or a coworker to help you navigate car purchase.

All About Japanese Cars

There are two types of cars in Japan, each designated with a different license plate. Regular vehicles (普通自動車; futsū jidōsha) are standard cars and are identified by white plates. Kei-cars (軽自動車; kei jidōsha) are smaller vehicles, restricted in size and engine power. Kei cars have yellow plates. Kei cars are smaller and cheaper in every way. Unfortunately, the side effect of being smaller, lighter, and cheaper is that kei cars are closer to aluminum cans than actual vehicles in an accident. The classic white pick-up kei-truck (軽トラ; kei tora) is a ubiquitous sight in rural Japan.

While many Japanese drivers appear to have terrifying road rage and may attempt to run you off the road as they zoom from Point A to Point B, it is up to you to drive cautiously and respectfully. Having a run-in with the police, especially over something like driving is to be avoided to the best of your ability. You can be ticketed for any of the same violations that you might get in trouble for in the States. This is even more undesirable in Japan, as the police, who generally have a multilingual phrasebook, may be disconcerted to find a foreigner driving poorly. It also reflects badly on your CO, and if you have too many encounters with the police while driving, your CO may ask you to stop. Let's just avoid that whole sticky mess of interpersonal relations, shall we? Accidents are especially tricky, as the Japanese system holds everyone involved responsible in certain percentages.

Gas stations (ガソリンスタンド; gasurin sutando) in Japan are all full service unless otherwise marked (セルフ; serufu). Full service stations are only slightly more expensive than self-service. Self-service stations only operate in Japanese, although an attendant is usually present to help. Full service stations require some simple Japanese, but the vocabulary is the same for both. Much like driving in the States, know what you're doing before you roll up to the gas station.

Introducing, a chart!

English	Romaji	Japanese
Diesel	dīzeru, keiyu	ディーゼル・ <small>けいゆ</small>
Regular (gas)	regyurā	レギュラー

High octane	hai oku	ハイオク
Full (tank)	mantan	まん満タン
...yen, please.	...en kudasai.	えん ～円
...liters, please.	...ritoru kudasai.	～リトルください。
Cash	genkin	げんきん 現金
Credit card	kurejitto kādo, kādo	クレジットカード・カード

It may take a couple of tries for you to perfect your Japanese Gas Station maneuver, and you never recover from having the windshield wipers and turn signals swapped, but once you've practiced, you can go to any gas station ever, rock out on the national expressways, and enjoy driving your awesome car anywhere in the country.

Getting Your Japanese Driver's License

じどうしゃうんてんめんきょ
(自動車運転免許; jidōsha unten menkyo; driver's license)

We are so, so sorry. Once you've lived in Japan for a year, your International Driver's License expires, and if you want to continue, or need to continue to drive, you will need to acquire a Japanese driver's license. This is particularly irritating for Americans because unlike our English-speaking brethren from Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, we can't simply go to the local DMV with a translation of our licenses and get a shiny Japanese driver's license. We have to bleed for the privilege.

Now to be fair, there is a legitimate reason for this. The countries who can just get their license translated have had their driving rules translated into Japanese, scrutinized by the Japanese National Police, and found to be equivalent to the Japanese system. Or they allow Japanese nationals to have their licenses translated while in the aforementioned countries. As you're all aware, in the States, driver's licenses are distributed by each state. There is no way that the National Police are going to translate fifty sets of driving rules into Japanese and scrutinize them to decide if they are all equivalent to the Japanese licensing system. And getting all fifty states to allow Japanese nationals to simply translate their licenses is never going to happen. So, sorry, fellow Americans, you're going to have to gaman (我慢; endure) and do the

long and complex exchange of paper, sweat, blood, and tears that will allow you to drive legally in Japan.

To make you feel better, understand that the Japanese who want to be drivers are obligated to attend extremely expensive driving school (costs up to ¥300,000) for the sole purpose of passing a longer and more complex test than you'll be faced with. That won't be much consolation by your fourth try on the test—consider that it takes an average of 3-7 tries to pass the driving test—but remember that as you slowly navigate the driving course.

Welcome to the Boss Level of Winning Japan.

In order to get a Japanese license, you must go through a process called “Gaimen Kirikae” (外免切り替え; foreign license conversion). There are different licenses for driving manual and automatic vehicles. A person with a manual license can drive automatics, but the opposite is not true. Know this going in.

- **Note:** Start early! It's going to take a while to collect all your documents and pass the test. If driving is critical to your daily life, you're going to want a cushion before your IDL expires. Think several months.

The first thing you have to do is get an official translation of your American license in Japanese. You do this through JAF. Fill out the application, and mail it off with a nice copy of both sides of your license and the required fee in the appropriate envelope. This may take a couple of weeks. Use this time to gather the rest of your documents. At every appointment, you will need:

- Your passport (and any recently expired passports)*
- Resident Card
- American Driver's License (any expired licenses if still in your possession)
- Official JAF translation of your license
- Proof of Residence in Japan (住民票; じゅうみんひょう jūminhyō), acquired at your local city hall
- Your valid International Driver's License
- A couple of passport-sized photos (This can be done there, but it's easiest if you prepare in advance.)
- A copy of your driving record (Optional)
- A friend or coworker or PA who speaks excellent Japanese.

- **Money.** Getting your license converted is expensive. Every step of the process requires money. Bring lots.

- *You will need to be able to prove, without question, to the Japanese DMV that you were in the States for three consecutive months after the issuance date of your driver's license. Check your passport. If you left the States after the issuance date on your license, check to see if U.S. Customs stamped your passport upon reentry. Japan always does this, but the US does not. If there isn't a reentry stamp, the Japanese National Police will assume you never returned to the country. Even if this makes no conceivable sense. If you don't have a reentry stamp, you should plan on bringing a second piece of proof—academic records, such as an official or unofficial transcript (if it looks reasonably “official”) with clearly demarcated dates, are good for this.

Keep in mind that folks at the local DMV, which is run by the National Police, probably don't speak English, so if your Japanese is not immaculate, bring a friend, and possibly plan on bringing solid translations of any of your supporting documents to expedite the process.

Once you have collected all your documents, you need to make an appointment at your local DMV (運転免許センター; unten menkyo sentā). Not all driving centers offer foreign license conversion! Figure out which centers in your prefecture do, and have your supervisor, PA, or friend set up an appointment over the phone for you. Sometimes your local driving center will be pretty far from your CO. Communicate with your supervisor during the entire process—you may have to take a day of leave in order to travel to the driving center.

On the day of your appointment, dressed nicely and conservatively (ladies, no heels or open toed shoes, they will fail you immediately), go to the driving center. Much like an American DMV, you will be shuffled through a number of windows and asked to fill out a number of forms. Once you are in the system, you can actually begin the process of changing your license over.

The first stage of the process is reviewing your documents and an interview about your driving history. This can happen at your first appointment or at a second appointment. The interview will be conducted entirely in Japanese and is the reason you brought a friend. You will be asked questions about your documents, particularly about whether or not you were in America for three months after receiving your license. You may be asked to talk about every single stamp

in your passport. Then the interview will move on to driving. Because every state is different, the interviewer will want to know the details about the laws in your state. Be prepared to talk about the licensing process (learner's permit, provisional licenses, full licenses, what age can you obtain a license, what age did you obtain all of the above, how many hours did you have to practice, etc.), driver's ed (was it required, how long, how much did it cost, what kind of things did you learn, did you practice on a course, etc.), the driving test (how many times did you take the test, did you use your own car or the center's, was there a written test, how many questions were on it, how many correct answers were needed to pass, how many did you get correct, what kind of questions were on the test, what was on the practical section, did the practical section involved driving on a roadway, did your drive a manual or automatic, etc.) If you got your license way back when you were sixteen, you might be excused for not remembering these things, but, so help you, you had better have an answer during your interview.

- **Note:** Preparation is the watchword for succeeding at getting your Japanese license! If you don't remember the exact nature of how you ended up with a driver's license, get to your local DMV website, and **look it up**. Having prepared answers, even if you can't speak Japanese, makes you look more responsible and more worthy of owning a Japanese driver's license.

- **Note Two:** While the folks at the driving center are not actively malicious, they are looking for a way to fail you. The fewer opportunities you give them, the better everything will be. Suave and sophisticated are your watchwords.

The second stage is the written test and the eye test. You will be given a simple, ten question test. This will be in English, and is True/False. If you fail this, you might as well leave Japan right then because you are not prepared to continue on. (The questions ask you to do things like identify a stop sign.) If you read *Rules of the Road* and have any sort of common sense, you will pass. The eye test will require you to indicate the direction of shapes and identify colors. Practice your directions and colors in Japanese. You only do these things once (if you pass).

Then you will make another appointment for the practical driving test. Go home, enjoy your life, and, if you can, try to spend a couple of hours at a driving school practicing for the test—it will be worth the money. On the day of your next appointment, **bring all of your documents**, and your friend for emotional support. Note that your friend/translator will not be

allowed in the car with your for the test, so studying some Japanese (especially directions), and reviewing the course before you drive on it, is pretty key. The car will be provided by the testing center and is the equivalent of a land whale. During the test, verbally acknowledging directions and exaggerating your movements are helpful to ensure the proctor sees that you hear and understand and are doing everything correctly. The parts of the practical test are:

- The Initial Vehicle Check: Are there any babies around, under, or near the car? Are all four wheels present? Is the car frame all right? Is there oncoming invisible traffic? Invisible bicyclist? If you have checked for all these things, you may enter the vehicle.

- Prepare to Launch: Adjust your seat. Lock the car door. Check all the mirrors (the side mirrors will be farther forward than you are used to, probably you will fail your initial test for that reason alone). Put your foot on the brake. Check the mirrors and check for invisible cars, bicyclists, babies, etc. in your blinds spots. Start your engine. (With your foot still on the brake.) Put car into drive, take the emergency brake off. Mirror check. Incoming threat check. Blinker on. GO. Mirror and Threat check.

- The Test: Proceed carefully, the proctor will tell you where to go. There is often a speed part of the test, but for most of the test, you should expect to go slowly and hug your turns. Turning is a careful process of mirror and threat checking, turning on the blinker, mirror and threat checking again, moving to the side of the lane in the direction you plan to turn (a maneuver called *yoru* (寄る; to approach), mirror and threat checking again, and finally making a tight turn. The parts that worry the American driver the most are the S-curve (an s-shaped squiggle) and the crank (two right angle turns)—these are fairly easy if you go slowly and carefully. Reversing during the s-curve and the crank are acceptable, but tell the proctor that you're going to do so.

- Returning: Whether you fail immediately or finish the test, you are still being monitored until you have driven the car all the way back to the starting point and reversed the starting process. Mirror and threat check before you get out of the car.

Once you leave the car, the test is actually over. Usually the proctor will have you get back into the car. This is the golden time. If you failed, they will generally offer some advice and explain some things you did wrong and how to do better in the future. Note that they will

not tell you everything you have done wrong. And it will be all in Japanese. Your emotional support/interpreter may or may not be allow to participate at this point.

If you passed, hooray! You are permitted a moment to perform your best victory dance. You'll be shuffled back inside and passed from window to window until you are given your shiny new license and Bragging Rights. If you failed, which is more likely, you will go back in to schedule another practical test appointment. Stay strong and keep trying. Going to a couple of hours of driving school might be really useful, especially after you've taken the test once and you know where the danger zones are.

The real trick with the practical test is that you have to fail to understand it. Additionally, it is based on a number of Strange Japanese Rules that are implied, but never actually stated (like doing yoru during the Turning Process). It is also in no way helpful to being a safe Japanese driver. Treat it like a video game boss level, and you'll be much happier. Good luck!

Driving Resources

- Japan Automobile Federation English homepage: <http://www.jaf.or.jp/e/index.htm>
- JAF, *Rules of the Road*: <http://www.jaf.or.jp/e/road.htm>
- Driving in Japan, an article courtesy of the National Police Agency: https://www.npa.go.jp/annai/license_renewal/english.pdf
- Ishikawa JET Guide to getting a license: http://ishikawajet.wikia.com/wiki/How_to_get_a_Japanese_Drivers_License_-_From_Start_to_Finish
- Iwate JET Guide to getting a license: http://iwatejet.com/wordpress/?page_id=92
- JAF Application for License Translation: http://www.jaf.or.jp/inter/translation/pdf/pdf_apli_english.pdf

Traveling in Japan

Coming soon!

Appendix I: Acronyms

AET	Assistant English Teacher, a variant of ALT.
ALT	Assistant Language Teacher, the primary JET position. (ALTs are not solely English teachers, there are ALTs for Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and French as well.)
BOE	Board of Education, the local government that employs ALTs
CIR	Coordinator for International Relations, the second JET position.
CLAIR	Council of Local Authorities for International Relations, the government entity that oversees JET.
CO	Contracting Organization, the local government that actually employs JETs, often a BOE.
COH	Certificate of Health
ESID	Every Situation Is Different, the JET motto.
GIH	General Information Handbook, or, the JET Bible
JTE	Japanese Teachers of English
MEXT	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (First of the Big Three)
MIC	Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (Second of the Big Three)
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Third of the Big Three)
PA	Prefectural Advisor, current or former JET who oversees the prefecture, helps JETs out.
PC	Program Coordinators, former JETs employed at CLAIR HQ
PDO	Pre-Departure Orientation, orientation in your departure city the day before traveling to Japan.
POG	Proof of Graduation
SEA	Sports Exchange Advisor, the third JET position.
TO	Tokyo Orientation, 2-3 day orientation after you arrive in Japan.

Appendix II: Collected Resources

A collation of all the links referenced in the Survival Guide.

General Resources:

- The GIH online: http://www.jetprogramme.org/documents/pubs/gih2014_e.pdf
- JET Program Survival Guide Miami: <http://jet-programme.com/jet-programme-survival-guide.pdf>
- AccessJ.com, all about life in Japan, written by ex-pats: <http://www.accessj.com/p/live.html>
- A guide to living in Japan: <http://www.survivingnjapan.com>
- Nengō calculator: <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2272.html>

Japanese Language Learning:

- Basic Hiragana Chart: http://japanese-lesson.com/resources/pdf/hiragana_chart.pdf
- Hiragana Chart with Stroke Order: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/28/Table_hiragana.svg/768px-Table_hiragana.svg.png
- Basic Katakana Chart: http://japanese-lesson.com/resources/pdf/katakana_chart.pdf
- Katakana Chart with Stroke Order: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/0d/Table_katakana.svg/768px-Table_katakana.svg.png
- Jim Breen's WWWJDIC, The Online J-E, E-J Dictionary: <http://www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jwb/cgi-bin/wwwjdic.cgi?1C>
- Denshi Jisho, online J-E, E-J dictionary: <http://jisho.org>
- Tae Kim's Guide to Learning Japanese, good grammar reference: <http://www.guidetojapanese.org/learn/grammar>
- The Japanese Language Proficiency Test: <http://www.jlpt.jp/e/>
- KanKen (Japanese only): <http://www.kanken.or.jp>

Women and Minorities on JET:

- Dating in Japan:
 - <http://zoomingjapan.com/life-in-japan/about-dating-in-japan/>

- <http://zoomingjapan.com/life-in-japan/dating-japanese-men/>
- From the Japanese perspective: <http://www.tofugu.com/2013/10/18/what-its-like-to-date-a-non-japanese-person-my-experience/>
- Sexual Harassment (Refer to the GIH for complete info):
 - CLAIR JET Line: 03-5213-1729 (Mon-Fri, 9:00am-5:45pm)
 - CLAIR JET Mail: jet@clair.or.jp
 - AJET Peer Support Group: 050-5534-5566 or Skype: AJETPSG (Sun-Sun, 8:00pm-7:00am)
- Stonewall Japan: <http://stonewall.ajet.net>

Money Matters:

- Transferring Money
 - JPost Bank: http://www.jp-bank.japanpost.jp/kojin/tukau/kaigai/sokin/kj_tk_kg_sk_index.html
 - Western Union: <http://www.wu-moneytransfer.com/en/transfer/index.html>
 - GoRemit: <https://www.goremit.jp/index/en>

Your Japanese House and You:

- An overview of Japanese houses: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Housing_in_Japan
- How to use your aircon: <http://www.survivingnjapan.com/2012/07/use-air-conditioner-japan.html>
 - A break down of the pros and cons of different heaters: <http://www.survivingnjapan.com/2012/11/how-to-heat-your-home-and-stay-warm-in.html>
 - How to use a Japanese super toilet: <http://www.survivingnjapan.com/2013/07/how-to-use-electronic-japanese-toilet.html>
 - Layout for a standard super toilet command panel: <http://livedoor.blogimg.jp/atosatu/imgs/1/4/14fa784d.jpg>
 - Useful appliance kanji charts: <http://www.tokyoapartments.jp/rental-apartments/moving-to-tokyo/appliances.html>
 - Mending shōji: <http://www.accessj.com/2010/10/mendingchanging-paper-in-shouji-screens.html>

- Mending fusuma: <http://www.accessj.com/2012/07/changing-paper-in-your-sliding-doors.html>
- Mending sliding screen doors (網戸^{あみど}, amido): <http://www.accessj.com/2012/08/changing-mesh-in-your-amido-bug-screens.html>
- Japanese laundry detergent: <http://www.survivingnJapan.com/2011/11/guide-to-laundry-detergent-in-japan.html>

Emergency Situations in Japan:

- Japan Meteorological Agency: <http://www.jma.go.jp/jma/indexe.html>
- A Guide to the Japanese Seismic Intensity Scale: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan_Meteorological_Agency_seismic_intensity_scale
- An Explanation of JMA's Volcanic Warning System: <http://www.data.jma.go.jp/svd/vois/data/tokyo/STOCK/kaisetsu/English/level.html>
- The STEP Program: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

Your Japanese Doctor and You:

- A list of birth control pills available in Japan: <http://www.survivingnJapan.com/2010/12/guide-to-birth-control-pills-in-japan.html>
- Other methods of contraception in Japan: <http://www.survivingnJapan.com/2011/07/contraception-in-japan-condoms-iuds-and.html>

Driving in Japan:

- Japan Automobile Federation English homepage: <http://www.jaf.or.jp/e/index.htm>
- JAF, *Rules of the Road*: <http://www.jaf.or.jp/e/road.htm>
- Driving in Japan, an article courtesy of the National Police Agency: https://www.npa.go.jp/annai/license_renewal/english.pdf
- Ishikawa JET Guide to getting a license: http://ishikawajet.wikia.com/wiki/How_to_get_a_Japanese_Drivers_License_-_From_Start_to_Finish
- Iwate JET Guide to getting a license: http://iwatejet.com/wordpress/?page_id=92

- JAF Application for License Translation: http://www.jaf.or.jp/inter/translation/pdf/pdf_apli_english.pdf