



## Commonly Asked Questions for New JETs

The JET Program is a great opportunity, as well as a major life change. Every year, JETs have tons of questions when preparing for their departure. We alumni want to make things a little easier for the transition, and have compiled the most common questions here with our answers. Please keep in mind though that **every situation is different**, so what might apply for one person may not be the best solution for another.

### What should we bring with us?

- Keep in mind that you're only allowed two (2) 50 lbs check in bags and one (1) carry on. Weigh your bag ahead of time; just because it fits doesn't mean it's below the weight. **Use space saver bags or other packing helpers**
  - You don't get your checked bags at the Tokyo Orientation. **Put your work clothes/suit in your carry-on with anything else you may need the first week.**
- Specific deodorant, shampoo/conditioner for specific hair types, tampons, and toothpaste with fluoride.
- Medication, such as ibuprofen, Tylenol, or cold medicine, are typically sold over the counter here in America, but not in Japan. The effectiveness of Japanese medicine can also vary from person to person. Check with the Consulate or look up if the medicine you're considering taking is legal to bring in your bags.
- One to two things that reminds you of home
- Shoes
  - For women with shoe sizes 8 and up, bring your own
  - Indoor shoes are a big deal. One pair of unworn shoes per school or carry them between schools
  - Gym shoes also must not have been worn outside; many schools require them to NOT have black soles
- If you're on the fence, bring your game console anyway! Region locking, etc. will make it difficult if you don't.
- International debit or credit cards are very helpful. **Look for one with no/low fees or travel points.**
- Omiyage! You'll want to bring something to give to your staff members when you arrive. Specifically:
  - Individually wrapped foods. Cookies are a good option, or salt water taffy. **Don't bring anything that melts like chocolate.**
  - Things that represent where you come from. Locally made items are always greatly appreciated. Local teas also go over well.
  - Your Principal and Vice Principal should receive something a little better than the rest of your staff.
  - Make sure you get enough for the amount of schools you have, so budget accordingly!
    - If you have many schools, it might be easier to get the major things for the Principals, Vice Principals, and Coordinators at your BOE.

### What are things to leave behind?

- Anything heavy or things you could buy in Japan
- Anything very specific that you *might* use for a day or two. If you really need it, you can buy it (ie. Heavy duty hiking boots for a warm climate).
- Jewelry you would be upset if you lost
- Multiples of clothes, especially if you fit into Japanese sizes. Don't bring 5 pairs of pants, 5 shorts, etc.
  - If you know you'll be in a very warm climate (places like Okinawa or Kagoshima), you might not even really need pants unless it's for your suit.
- **Ship whatever else you need/want that won't fit in your bag.** Though it's not really recommended to bring more than what your 2 bags can fit, it's still an option if you have some other important items that can wait to meet you in Japan.
  - **Ship your winter clothes if needed.** If you're placed in somewhere like Hokkaido or Aomori, you have a couple months til you need your bulky winter clothes. You can ship these clothes

right before you leave for Japan, and have it arrive there later. Shipping by sea is usually the cheapest, but takes 2-3 months. You should also research that they have a good track record.

### **Can we take Japanese classes while working to help us in our daily lives?**

- Yes! You can look into your local communities or libraries for Japanese classes.
- If you're in an area where this is not offered, **make work your class!** Always ask questions about words and grammar and try to use them. Use whatever free time you have between classes for self-study.

### **Do we get time off while working?**

- Yes, but...
  - You may request a day off and not get it approved
  - Some schools would like you to request days off well in advance. 3 weeks is usually a good amount of time, but sometimes they ask for much further in advance.
  - **Know your school schedule!** Time off during the students' vacation time is easier to get

### **What's the process of buying/insuring a vehicle?**

- We recommend buying from JETs leaving their placement. Make sure to look at it thoroughly and ask many questions.
- You can buy at a dealership, but the dealers might not speak English.
- You should discuss with your BOE what's the best insurance in your area for your vehicle.
- Shaken (しゃけん) is a mandatory vehicle inspection that takes place every 2 years. Always keep this in mind if you're purchasing a car.
  - Cars can range from \$1k - 3k in price, but shaken may be \$800 or even more expensive than the car itself.
- An International Driver's Permit (IDP) is only legal for **one year after you obtain it**. You'll want to apply for one as **close to departure** as possible.
  - If you plan on staying longer than a year, you'll want to start the driver's license process very early. You may need to take days off for the test or practice runs. **The test is not a test of skill, it's a test of memorization. Take the practice runs before the test if you can.**

### **Between now and departure, how can we prepare ourselves to be the best teacher possible?**

- It's very difficult to prepare for this. It really depends on your school. You will learn once you get there.

### **What is something you wish you had known before participating on JET Program?**

- For ALTs, you may not necessarily be relied on as a teacher. There will be instances where you will be the "tape recorder" in the class, where your only job is to repeat words so the students know how to pronounce it. On the other hand, you might be relied upon entirely for getting a class together.
- If you join a club or after-school activities, know what the full commitment is!
  - You may be expected to go to every meeting, lead practices, go in on the weekends, etc.
- 4th and 5th year JETs may not be as "genki" as you expect. Don't let that deter you from trying to get to know them (after all, they know about all the good dives and deals in town). However, you also want to surround yourself with people that will build you up, so **keep in mind your own mental health and wellbeing.**
- Your position may involve extensive public speaking.
- You may be the only foreigner representing your country.

### **What is something you were glad you knew (or did) before beginning your contract with the JET Program?**

- Learn Japanese! Even just a little bit helps a lot.
- Prepare your "Jiko Shoukai"/Self introduction. You will have to speak in front of the whole school, and then have a separate self-introduction class with your students.
  - The class should include details about you, as well as where you're from so the students get an idea of life in America/your culture. A powerpoint is pretty common, but it's also good to have

some physical representation that you can show off. Even pictures that can be passed around the class is nice.

- You can ask your teachers to help you translate your speeches if you need help. If you plan to speak in English, **SPEAK SLOWLY** and use gestures.

### **If you could have done anything differently during your time as an ALT (or CIR), what would you change?**

- For those of us who were only there for a year, most of us would have recontracted for a second year. Everyone says culture shock is hard until you get past the holidays, and it's TRUE! Unfortunately, you recontract or not before then.
- Make more Japanese friends
- Go to more local restaurants
- Travel more. There are other countries so close and cheaper to travel to.
- Be more involved in the community

### **How did you deal with instances of bullying?**

- If kids are bullying kids - Mention it to a teacher but don't get involved
- If kids are bullying you - Show no fear! Genuinely, do not give them the satisfaction.

### **What did you miss most about home, and what are some ways that you helped to remedy that?**

- Family and Friends
  - Skype, Facetime, Email, Text, etc. Reach out whenever you can make time.
- American gyms
  - Get creative your workouts and use the environment
- Mexican food, cheese, and American breakfast
  - Bring packets of whatever you need (spices, hot sauce, etc.)
- Vegetarian/Vegan options
  - Make a lot (almost all) of your food at home and get better at meal prep
  - At restaurants, you can ask for "Shojin Ryouri" or "Niku Nashi", but this doesn't work all the time.

### **What are some good ways to get involved in my community and meet new people/make friends in Japan?**

- Go out and do things! Seriously.
- Go to enkais, attend every matsuri, find your hobby
- Check out the community center, volunteer, join English conversation groups
- Local restaurants and markets
- Your BOE may have events. Look to your CIR to see what events are coming up and if you can help.

### **How were you able to penny-pinch in unexpected ways?**

- Since Japan is mostly a cash country, you can take part of each paycheck and put it somewhere in your house/apartment as "no-touch" money.
- Do not carry as much cash *on* you; Spend less if you have less.
- Carpool! Split the cost on toll roads.
- Find things in your community instead of travelling farther.
- Don't drink/party as much. Save it for typhoon/snowed-in karaoke or game nights.

### **What was your most rewarding moment throughout your experience working in Japan?**

- Helping the students work on their college entrance essays and interviews, and watching them get into their dream school.
- At the end of your contract, schools will make you a scrapbook/good-bye video sometimes. They're very rewarding to have.
- Seeing the students apply what we've taught them outside of school

## When it comes to paying student loans in the US while living in Japan, how easy/difficult is transferring money abroad?

- GoRemit is a fairly easy to use program
- Your bank might have this option available
- Keep an eye on transaction fees
  - You should send it in big chunks, avoid sending in small increments
- Your US bank account should be able to accept international transactions
- We recommend sending money over as a regular schedule, and not to think about the change in exchange rates. Things will work out.

## Is it possible to share living accommodations with other JETs/Significant Others?

- Yes, but...
  - It is not funded by the BOE if you do so. For most situations, you are provided with a subsidized housing that is ONLY for you.
  - You can look for an apartment or place on your own with your friend/SO. You'll have to report it to your BOE and city hall.

## What are some cooking tips and ideas for Japanese food and what to buy at the grocery store?

- Buy everything fresh to cook that day - that is the Japanese way!
- Do not buy anything in bulk **except** for everyday essentials
  - Bags of rice, cartons of milk, frozen food
- Don't just buy at supermarkets. Look into farmers markets, co-ops, make friends with farmers if you can!

## What kind of etiquette should we be aware of while in Japan?

You will be going over a good amount of this at Tokyo Orientation as well.

- Shoes off indoors. Always bring a pair of socks with you just in case!
- Be ready for bowing
- Know the proper process for receiving/giving a business card
- Don't start drinking until **after** the Kanpai at enkais
- Don't eat/drink in public (or while walking to/from) and on public transportation
- Don't blow your nose in public
- *Try* to be quieter in public transit. **Don't** answer the phone or have a phone conversation on a train, etc.
- Eye contact - be aware of how people react to copious eye contact (break eye contact more often!)
- Don't put your hands in your pockets
- Formal language depends on who you're talking to
  - Though they usually give you a pass since you're a foreigner, it's more impressive if you can properly use formal language with your superiors (Principal, Vice Principal). Especially so if you are requesting something (ie. time off).

## Helpful Japanese to Know

Kanji/Hiragana	Romaji	English
おはようございます	Ohayou Gozaimasu	Good Morning
どうぞよろしくお願いたします どうぞよろしくおねがいます	Dozo yoroshiku onegaishimasu	It's nice to meet you This is the formal way of greeting someone new, usually followed with a bow
お疲れ様です／でした おつかれさまです／でした	Otsukare sama desu/deshita	Good work/Thank you for your hard work Said after someone completes a task or is leaving for the day
お先に失礼します おさきにすれいします	O saki ni shitsureishimasu	I'm leaving for the day Said before leaving the office, normally to everyone there
すみません	Sumimasen	Excuse me Used to ask someone a question, also to call a waiter in a restaurant (can yell across restaurant)
「ありがとうございます。」 「どういたしまして。」	“Arigatou Gozaimasu.” “Dou itashimashite.”	“Thank you.” “You're welcome.”
休憩 きゅうけい	Kyuukei	Short Rest/Break/Recess
「日本語を話せますか／分かりま すか？」 「少しだけ／ちょっとだけ。」	Nihongo wo hanasemasu/wakarimasu ka? Sukoshi dake/Chotto dake	“Do you speak/understand Japanese?” “Only a little.”
お任せ おまかせ	Omakase	I leave it up to you Leaving a decision up to someone else, often of a meal to be selected by a chef
お会計 おかいけ	Okaike	Bill/Check (at a restaurant)
(食べ物) なしお願いたします (たべもの) なしおねがいます	(Food) nashi onegaishimasu	Without (food) please If you are requesting food exclusions for things like dietary restrictions/allergies
入口 / 出口 いりぐち / でぐち	Iriguchi / Deguchi	Entrance / Exit
押す / 引く おす / ひく	Osu / Hiku	Push / Pull
言って／見て／書いて 下さ い。 いって／みて／かいて ください。	Itte / Mite/ Kaite Kudasai	Please say it/ look / write it When asking your students to do something

## **Helpful Japanese to Know – Resources**

Your fellow alumni group has some other suggestions for Need-To-Know Japanese to help you out in everyday life. Please take some time to look through these resources:

### **Understanding Menus**

<https://gurunavi.com/en/japanfoodie/2017/09/how-to-decipher-japanese-menus.html>

### **Shopping Terminology**

<https://www.rocketlanguages.com/japanese/vocabulary/shopping-in-japanese>

<https://www.dummies.com/languages/japanese/japanese-vocabulary-for-shopping/>

### **Keigo vs. Casual**

<https://www.tofugu.com/japanese/keigo/>

<https://cotoacademy.com/keigo/>

### **Classroom Lingo**

<https://www.learn-japanese-adventure.com/common-japanese-phrases.html>

<https://www.japaneseprofessor.com/lessons/beginning/classroom-expressions/>

<https://www.all-about-teaching-english-in-japan.com/basicjapanesephrases.html>

### **Trains and Directions**

<http://www.hyperdia.com/en/>

<https://www.jrailpass.com/blog/japanese-trains>

<http://japanese-phrases.sakura.ne.jp/page86j.html>

<https://matcha-jp.com/en/2480>

<https://www.tsunagujapan.com/the-japanese-commuter-train-system-a-comprehensive-guide/>

Once again, congratulations on getting into the JET Program. We at the JET Alumni Association are excited for your next steps as ALTs and CIRs, and can't wait to hear stories about your experiences. No matter what your situation, we want you to remember you have a whole network of JETs to rely on for help. Always feel free to reach out to JETAA Rocky Mountain's board and members.

We're wishing you the best for your time on JET!