

Japan

Congratulations for having decided to take part in an exciting intercultural experience here in Japan.

YFU Japan welcomes you to an interesting and rewarding year ahead in this program. All of us are looking forward to having you. You are probably eager to receive information about your coming year in Japan. We are sending this letter to you in the hope that it will answer some of your questions. Please share it with your parents, too.

What first comes to mind when you think of Japan? Samurai and Sony radios? Mount Fuji and Microchips? You will soon notice that today's Japan is a complex mixture of old and new. It is a modern, bustling industrial nation, steeped in rich history. For hundreds of years the Japanese have been governed by a strict social organisation and discipline and yet they have successfully embraced 20th century western technology and politics as if it were their own. You may be surprised to find that many families actually have a very westernised lifestyle while they live in houses with tatami mats and occasionally wear kimonos.

Most of Japan's population live on plains scattered between mountain ranges throughout the country. Huge cities such as Tokyo and Osaka sprang up on the edge of these agricultural areas. City planning is still a foreign concept and so Japanese cities are often a mixture of light industry, small houses with vegetable gardens and parkland all jumbled together.

You may find yourself in the centre or in the suburbs of a busy, crowded, cosmopolitan city, or in a peaceful rural area where life is quite traditional. But remember whatever you see, it's the people you meet and the friendships you make that will form the core of your experience.



Experiencing Japan



Arriving in Japan

Upon arriving at Narita International Airport, you will be welcomed by YFU personnel who are there to make sure you and your baggage arrive safely. You will be escorted directly to Arrival Orientation site from Narita airport.

Arrival Orientation will take place at the National Olympics Memorial Youth Center in Tokyo. Here is an outline of your schedule upon arrival:

- Day 1 - Registration and check-in
- Day 2-4 - Japanese Society / School / Home
Japanese language
- Day 5 - How to adjust to your host family, field trips. etc.
Check-out and meeting your host family

Area Orientations

There will be an Area Orientation in April (or May) that you and your host family are expected to attend. Before and after summer vacation (in June and September), your Area Representatives will visit or contact you and your host family. These occasions provide you with the chance to candidly discuss any problems you are having in your host family or host school. You can share your new experiences and receive advice about better adjustment to Japanese life. You can also demonstrate your Japanese language skills.

Re-Entry Orientations

Before returning your country, you will have a final meeting in your area to evaluate your inter-cultural experience and talk about your concerns and fears of going back home. You have lived in a foreign country for about a year. It is only natural that you will have some apprehension about leaving. Now is your chance to talk about it.



Respect
for their Elders

Japanese Families

While of course we cannot describe each student's host family in detail, we can make a few generalisations

The Japanese family is a close unit but in most cases, they rarely do things together. Otosan works long and late. Okasan takes care of the household and the family and may have a job too. Brothers and sisters may be busy with schoolwork and preparations for examinations. But when there is free time, families make the most of it, like going out for Sunday strolls followed by dinner at restaurants.

Japanese do not express their affection outwardly with hugs and kisses, but rather with words, attitude and bows. Please don't forget to say "Arigato" or "Arigato Gozaimasu" when your family or friends do something for you.

Japanese are taught from an early age to respect their elders and authority. Children and teenagers are considered the responsibility of their parents. It is therefore important that you follow the advice of your host family, because the community will hold them responsible for your attitude and behaviour in these respects. A willingness to learn is expected and welcomed.



Complex mixture
of Old and new

Meeting your Host Family

Some of you will meet your host families at the Arrival Orientation site, and others will travel to your host families' house. Travel arrangements are made by YFU, and you will be accompanied by YFU personnel to your host family's residence. When you meet your host family, please use this opportunity to speak the Japanese which you will have learned at Orientation. Your host family will be surprised and will appreciate your effort in trying to speak Japanese, even though your Japanese may not be perfect. Your host father will be glad to be called "Otosan" and host mother will be glad to be called "Okasan". Bringing a smile to their faces is a great way to start off the year!

With your host family, you will be treated as a minor and will have to comply with an earlier curfew and stricter rules than you may be used to in your home country. As an exchange student, you are in no position to demand more independence than your host family will allow. You might have the feeling that your family is being overprotective, however, if you look at it from their point of view, they are not trying to change or rest you. They are simply giving you the opportunity to share life in the same way as they would with their own children.

Remember that your host family are volunteers and do not receive any financial assistance from YFU. They open their home and hearts for you. Please keep in mind, you can never show too much appreciation to your host family. Please remember that no kindness is so small that it doesn't merit thanks.

"Host family and my way of thinking were very different, so I made an effort to understand them, like they tried to understand me."

_____ Jason from the U. S. A.

"When I first met my host mother, I could communicate with her only by hugging. But now, she is my best friend in Japan."

_____ Salim from the U. S. A.

'The best thing that happened to me in Japan was meeting my host family. Now this family is not my host family any more. They became my real family.'

_____ Friederike from Germany

Food

Typical Japanese cooking centers around a bowl of rice, miso soup, a small portion of fish or meat and several dishes of vegetables, all eaten with chopsticks. Noodles are also common, and slurping them is not considered as bad manners. Foreign foods are very popular too, and you will undoubtedly enjoy Okasan's spaghetti and curry.

Your Okasan takes great pride in the dishes she prepares for her family. In order not to make her uncomfortable, always try everything and express appreciation for her work. If in doubt about the etiquette for any given situation, observe others or ask someone what is appropriate. In case you encounter food which you cannot eat because of your religion or personal reason, please explain to your Okasan.



New

Flavours

"My family was impressed with my taste for Japanese cuisine. I tried items such as Okonomiyaki, Takuan and Sashimi, appreciating both the new flavours and the aesthetic arrangement of the dishes. I was eager to try something new, regardless of how unusual it seemed."

Grace from the USA



Japanese family

Close unit



Your life in Japan

Japanese Language

Try to learn as much Japanese as you can. Your ability to adjust successfully to your host family and school depends greatly on your Japanese language skills. You will find that most of your classmates, teachers and maybe your host family can speak English although probably not so well. As you ask them to help you, answer their questions about English. You will find that it will provide an endless point for communication. Your life in Japan will get more interesting the more your Japanese improves.

To give you a head start with your language skills, we will be enclosing you "Survival Japanese" so you can begin studying before your departure. This is a booklet with basic phrases and grammar tips.

After arriving in Japan, you will study Japanese by the KUMON method, a correspondence course through which you can progress according to your effort. Many YFU exchange students find this course extremely helpful for learning the language in a short time. You are expected to master at least 46 HIRAGANA/KATAKANA characters before arrival, so please start learning Japanese now. It will definitely be to your advantage.

"Although I went to Japan knowing hardly any Japanese, my family and I were able to communicate by using dictionaries, body language, the English they knew, and the Japanese I knew."

—————Jennifer from the U. S. A.

"I mastered Japanese faster than I expected. I have no trouble understanding Japanese now. It is important to learn the language when you want to learn about their culture and customs. I think it is especially true to Japanese culture."

—————Pauline from the Netherlands

School

School will play an important role in your life here. You will have to work hard to become familiar with the language and get the most out of what is being taught. School is also the place where you will find most of your friends.

The present educational system in Japan was adopted after the American system, and is known as the 6-3-3-4 system. This means as follows.

- 6 years in elementary school from the age of 6
 - 3 years in junior high school
 - 3 years in senior high school
 - 4 years in university
- (School is compulsory up to the first 9 grades.)

Possibly, you will find Japanese school more strict than your school at home. Most schools require uniforms and strict rules of appearance and behaviour. Cosmetics, jewellery, and such are not considered appropriate for high school students in Japan. You are expected to follow these rules as a member of the school body.



Make

Friends

In the senior year, the academic pressure is strong for the students heading for university and they face the formidable hurdle of extremely competitive exams. Therefore, most of you will be placed into the 10th or 11th grade where students can enjoy their high school lives.

Clubs are a major and meaningful part of school life. Whether you choose kendo, soccer, singing or calligraphy, clubs will provide you with the chance to make friends and relax with them after school.

"I joined Kyudo (Japanese archery) club at school, practised everyday after school and had the opportunity to compete in their tournaments"

———Sharyn Australia

"Going on the school trip and joining the Kendo club made it possible for my friends to understand me better. "

———Per Norway

Expenses

<u>School Tuition</u>	Paid by the school
<u>Commuting Expenses</u>	Paid by YFU
<u>Text Books</u>	Usually lent by schools, if not, you will have to pay.
<u>Stationary</u>	Paid by the student (e.g. notebooks, pencils, etc.)
<u>School Uniform</u>	Usually lent by the school, if not, YFU will pay for the jacket and skirt or trousers. Students must pay for regulation track suit, overcoat, shoes, slippers, book bag. They could cost you about Y20,000 – Y30,000, of course it depends on your school.
<u>School Trip</u>	If you are placed in the second year of high school, there will be a school trip. This trip usually lasts 4-7 days and cost around Y70,000 – Y100,000 to be paid by the student. Please consult with your school teacher or Area Representatives about the schooltrip.



Japanese Culture

Living Expenses

As you probably know, Japan is an expensive place to live. Although your room and board, as well as your tuition, are paid by the good will of your host family and host school, you are responsible for other things such as after school snacks, train fares beyond your regular commuting line, stamps, stationary for letters back home, club fees, school excursion fees, etc.



You will probably need at least Y10,000 a month. If you are placed in or near Tokyo, you will need more money than your friends who will be in a rural area.

Open a bank account into which your parents can transfer or deposit money, Never borrow money from your host family or friends as money matters can easily break a relationship. Budget carefully and use your allowance wisely.

The price of some sample items in Japan:

A cup of coffee	Y180 – Y400
A hamburger	Y200 – Y300
A coke from a vending machine	Y110
An ice cream cone	Y100 – Y300
A movie ticket	Y1300
An average 15 minutes train ride	Y200 – Y300
Haircut and shampoo	Y3000 – Y4000
Aerogram letter	Y90
Post card	Y70

Withdrawal of money from ATM through *PLUS* or *Cirrus* system (or any other equivalent of world wide cash withdrawal system) is what many YFU students expect. Unfortunately not every ATM is connected to these systems in Japan. You may have to ask your parents to send an "international money order", which is probably the most inexpensive way of sending money from your parents since post offices are located in even smallest towns and villages throughout the country. You don't have to ask your host family to take you to a big bank in a large city if your parents send international money order issued by the post offices in your country.

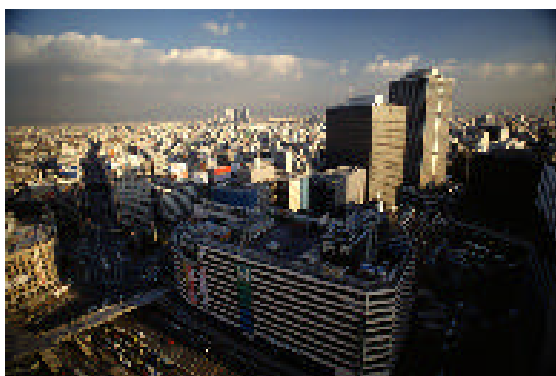
Insurance in Japan

When seeing a doctor in Japan, expect to pay in cash first. Then make a claim to your insurance company for a refund. Please don't forget to bring the Insurance Form as your doctor will need to fill out and sign it.

Special note on drugs and prescriptions

Japanese law prohibits following drugs to be brought into Japan: Vicks inhalers, Sudafed and other types of over-the-counter medicines containing trace amounts of amphetamines or amphetamine-like drugs.

If you need the drugs stated above, instead of bringing them into Japan, you should consult with doctors here to obtain similar drugs which will offer the same kind of relief.



Climate
Varies widely

Throw in a handkerchief or two to keep your forehead dry as you travel to and from school. The warm weather usually lasts into October, then it starts to cool, the rice is harvested, and the brilliantly coloured autumn leaves appear. Winter is a time of clear and sunny skies, but it is cold, with snow in the mountains and in the north. You are limited by your baggage allowance, so please pack carefully. Clothes are usually very expensive and only available in smaller sizes. We advise you to send your clothes, shoes, etc. in advance by sea mail.



Japanese
Cooking

Climate and clothing

Japan is a long and narrow island extending from north to south. It is mountainous in most parts, so weather and climate vary widely from area to area. Northern places like Niigata and Akita may experience snow for 6 months of the year, while southern Okinawa is semi-tropical.

When you arrive in March, it will be spring and clear but chilly in Tokyo. A coat or warm jacket is essential. By June the weather will be warm, and the rainy season will begin. It remains hot and humid through July until August or September. Light cotton clothes are a must for this period, with enough supplies of undergarments for daily changes.

Baggage

We strongly advise you to keep your baggage to a minimum. Over the course of the year, you will accumulate many souvenirs and will return with more than you came with. You will be required to pay excess baggage fees on all airlines in Japan.

For instance, when you fly to / from Haneda Airport, the weight of your baggage must not exceed the Domestic Flight Baggage Restriction (The weight of check-in baggage should not exceed 15kg-20kg, depending on airlines.) If your baggage weight exceeds the Domestic Flight Restriction, you will be charged for an extra fee. Also keep in mind that the Domestic Flight Restriction and International Flight Restrictions differ, with the Domestic Flight Restriction being much more strict. So even though your baggage may pass the international restrictions, they may not pass the domestic.

Also, you will have to carry your own baggage as you transfer to and from airports, train stations, etc. This is made even more difficult by the fact that these places are exceptionally crowded during the time when you come to and leave Japan.



Winter

Clear and sunny skies

YFU Support Systems

There will be one or two Area Representatives assigned to you.. Their role is to support you and your host family. Area Representatives are experienced volunteers who are there to assist you when you need help. It is important for you to try to work out problems with your host family first, but remember, Area Representatives will be always available when you cannot solve problems with your host family. If you still need further help, please contact YFU Japan. Involving your natural parents and/or the YFU staff in your home country can cause misunderstandings and may prolong the time until your problem is resolved.



**24 hour
Support**

Travel

There is no trip organised by YFU Japan. Please understand the program is a family living experience with compulsory full-time attendance and not a travel program. You are allowed to travel with your host family if authorised by YFU Japan.

Phone calls

We strongly discourage you from making too many phone calls to your natural parents and friends at home for your better adjustment in Japan. Phone calls are very expensive in Japan, and you will need to ask for host parents' permission before using the phone. Please pay for your personal telephone costs and avoid calling too often and for too long.

Drinking and smoking

You are under the legal age (20), so you are forbidden by law in Japan to engage in these activities.

24 Hour emergency service

Where ever you are there is a 24 hour emergency service for you to keep you in touch with all your YFU support team from your local community volunteers right through to the support services of both YFU Japan and Australia

Preparing yourself

Your life in Japan will be much easier if you have some knowledge of Japan in advance. Start gathering some information on Japan. At the same time, please make sure you can give the Japanese a fair and accurate picture of your country. Your host family and friends will be eager to know about the place you are from. Also, you may be invited to make a speech in many places such as community meetings and local schools. You may wish to bring your host family a small souvenir from your country. Your host family will want to see pictures of your family, friends, and community you live in.

Before you come, please know what your goals and what you hope to achieve in your YFU year in Japan. In addition, please read YFU materials that are provided to you, and make sure you understand the rules of YFU.

The responsibility to get the most out of your year lies with you. You are expected to be a part of your Japanese family and not a guest. You should be genuinely respectful and considerate for people and customs even if they seem strange, and you should be prepared to enter your year with an eager mind, ready to face new ideas and challenges. Try to accept them as they are different instead of wrong or inferior. By the time you have to say "good-bye" to Japan, you may find them not so foreign any more.



Get the Most

Out of it

