

## WHAT YOU SHOULD DO BEFORE DEPARTURE

New York JET Pre-Departure Conference | Presented by Nathaniel Locke (nlocke04@gmail.com)

**June 2016**

# Agenda

	Page
What to Pack	1
What Not to Pack	2
Loose Ends	3
Preparing for Japan	4
Contacting Your Predecessor	5
Self-Introduction in Japanese	6
Useful Resources	7

# What to Pack

## ■ Clothing

- Conservative suit and tie or formal women's business attire for Tokyo Orientation, Opening Ceremony, etc.
- Comfortable summer clothing is a necessity
- Professional-looking business casual attire for work – Japan is a conservative society, so be mindful of your first impression
- You can buy clothes at stores like Uniqlo at a low cost, so don't worry about bringing every last item
- Plan on bringing a few pairs of comfortable shoes if you have a large shoe size
- Larger clothing sizes may be more difficult to find in Japan

■ **Omiyage (souvenirs):** For your school office(s)– individually-wrapped food and candy is best. Chocolate can and will melt in your luggage. Don't spend a lot of money on this. It's the thought that counts.

■ **Money:** Around \$2,000 should be more than enough, but every situation is different. Be prepared to not receive your first paycheck for 2-3 weeks after arrival. You will want money to buy essentials, go out for food, buy a public transportation card, and attend JET-organized parties in your first few weeks. Exchange your money in the U.S. prior to departure, which you can do by arranging pick up with your bank at a local branch (takes about 1 week). Credit cards are not widely used in Japan

■ **Toiletries:** Anti-perspirant deodorant, fluoride toothpaste, cosmetics, and other items can be difficult to find, especially as a newcomer

■ **Photographs or Personal Objects:** You might want to bring some small items to show for your first lesson, your self-introduction

■ **Suitcases:** You can bring one carry-on item and two 50 lb. checked suitcases on your flight. You can only bring your carry-on bag and one of the large suitcases to orientation, so please ensure it has all items you will need in the first week or so. Your other suitcase will be sent by delivery to your contracting organization or school, so be prepared in case the suitcase is delayed. Attach luggage tags and write down your new home address in Japan on a sheet of paper in each item

## What Not to Pack

- **Books:** Download the Kindle app and register for a NYPL card to download eBooks
- **DVDs:** Look into an external hard drive or even consider purchasing a VPN to access streaming websites. Still, remember to bring some downloaded movies or TV shows since you may not have Internet for over one month after arriving!
- **Winter clothing:** Japanese summers are very hot and humid and winter clothing is bulky. It's likely easier to buy a winter jacket in Japan or ship your winter clothing by sea (takes several months but it's the cheapest option)
- **Towels and blankets:** Towels are bulky, and you can find them for \$5 at many stores. Japanese towels are made of thinner materials and dry faster. You can also find a cheap thin blanket at household goods stores like Nitori or Nafco as you will likely not need anything warmer until late October
- **Prescription medications:** You can bring up to one month's supply without documentation. You will need to file a *Yakkan Shoumei* document in order to bring more than one month's supply. This includes contact lenses, certain forms of birth control, and some common OTC pain relief medication. Failure to comply may result in deportation or prison, so it is very important you pay attention to these regulations. Detailed information is available in the General Information Handbook, and your school supervisor should be able to assist as well

## Loose Ends

- **Cell phone bill:** Either cancel your cell phone plan (and lose your number) or put your number on hold for a monthly fee so you have the same number when returning from Japan. Your cell phone may not work with the Japanese network, so you might need to purchase a new smartphone upon arrival
- **Subscriptions:** Cancel any recurring magazine, streaming, or delivery subscriptions you won't have access to in Japan
- **Utilities:** Be sure all utility bills have been paid in full. Collection agencies can go after you if you don't pay outstanding bills, and this will hurt your credit score
- **Student loans:** Ensure you have enough money set aside in your bank account to pay off student loans before you are able to remit money from Japan to the U.S. Federal loans usually have a 6-month grace period after graduation, but private loans may not offer this grace period
- **Banks and credit cards:** Notify your bank that you will be living in Japan and to set a travel notice on your cards in case of an emergency in Japan. You will rarely use your card in Japan (cash society), but you will be glad you notified your bank ahead of time. If you plan to remit money to the U.S., be sure to have your bank's routing number and your account number
- **International Driver's License:** If you have a driver's license, you can apply for a temporary international license at a AAA office. It will be in effect until one year after your arrival date in Japan. This will allow you to drive a car without a Japanese license. However, it must be transferred to a Japanese license after one year if you wish to continue driving
- **Graduate school letters of recommendation:** If you recently graduated from university, ask any close professors to write these letters while your academic record is still fresh in their mind. You can then reach out to them in a few years once you are filling out graduate school applications
- **Tax documents:** You should collect your W-2 and any other pertinent forms before going to Japan. Though your Japanese income is likely tax exempt, you should still file 2016 taxes as you may get a nice tax return from Uncle Sam
- **Thank you notes:** Be sure to send out all thank you notes to all necessary friends, family, and faculty if you recently graduated
- **Register with the U.S. Embassy:** They will send you important travel notices, and it helps the government know of your location in case of an emergency

## Preparing for Japan

- **Study:** There are many online resources and smartphone apps in addition to traditional textbooks
  - **Katakana:** Phonetic Japanese alphabet most often used for foreign loan words. This is very useful as the Japanese language uses many English words but with a slightly different pronunciation
  - **Hiragana:** Japanese alphabet usually used for grammar and to modify kanji, the Chinese-adopted written characters
  - **Kanji:** Chinese characters adopted for the Japanese language. It's good to start learning these as soon as possible as your life will be immeasurably easier once you can recognize even 100 kanji characters
  - **Pronunciation:** Japanese has a phonetic alphabet and is quite simple to pronounce words you have never heard before. It would be wise to learn pronunciation since you may be required to read a brief speech in Japanese at your school's opening ceremony
  - **Dictionary:** Research pocket dictionaries and see which is best for your style of learning. It's best to purchase one with a durable cover made of synthetic materials
  - **Google Translate:** Download the Japanese language pack so you have offline capability
- **Avoiding foods or notifying of allergic reactions:** Learn how to tell coworkers or chefs you have specific allergies or would like to avoid eating certain foods (religious/moral/health reasons). *Dashi* (bonito stock) is used in many dishes and fish is often considered a vegetarian food by Japanese chefs, so you will need to tell a chef if you don't eat fish
- **Emergency info:** Write down all important names, addresses, and numbers. It might be best to keep this information on Google Drive or Evernote. At the very least, save your apartment address, contracting organization address and number, and your supervisor's name, address, and number
- **Sending money home:** Research remittance companies to see which ones make the most sense for your needs. You will typically pay a flat fee and then a percentage of the total amount remitted, but these fees vary based on the company and the amount you are sending

## Contacting Your Predecessor

- **Lesson plans:** Ask your predecessor to leave behind a flash drive and/or a binder of lesson plans and activities from their time on JET. You might not even use these, but they will be invaluable to see both successful lessons and ways to improve in addition to giving you new ideas for your own future classes. Find out which games the students love to play (and which games failed to draw interest)
- **Faculty and students:** Learn what type of environment you'll be working in. Is the coursework focused on preparing students for university or for entering the job market? What sports teams are notable at school? What club activities are offered and is there a way to get involved? What tasks will you be assigned aside from classroom teaching (English club, test prep, etc.)? What are some of the teachers' interests (particularly the JTEs)?
- **Furniture and belongings:** Ask what items he or she plans to leave in the apartment and these items will be given to you for free or sold. If you buy items from your predecessor, make sure you are not overcharged for second-hand goods. You are not obligated to buy anything. Also, find out which items belong to your contracting organization (often the air conditioner, refrigerator, and other major appliances) since they will most likely be obligated to make repairs if anything is broken
- **Apartment maintenance:** Make a list of anything you should be aware of when moving in – neighbors, utilities, building maintenance fees, recycling, quick fixes for the apartment, how to use appliances (air conditioner remote translated into English, how to turn on the hot water in the shower, etc.)
- **Internet access:** Ask if it's possible to transfer the Internet package. It might be too confusing to transfer, but you will go about one month without Internet if it's not taken care of
- **Neighborhood:** Find out where the train station, bus station, convenience store, grocery store, dollar store, and best or friendliest *izakaya* are located
- **Transportation:** How do you get to school(s)? To the city center? Will a bike be available?

## Self-Introduction in Japanese

- Prepare a short self-introduction in Japanese for when you meet anyone in your first few weeks. Don't be afraid to read directly from the script. Everyone will simply appreciate your trying to speak their language

はじめまして。私は「NAME」です。よろしくお願ひします。アメリカから来ました。趣味が「HOBBY ONE」と「HOBBY TWO」です。鳥刺しが大好きです!

Hajimemashite. Watashi wa 「 NAME 」 desu. Yoroshiku onegaishimasu. Amerika kara kimashita. Shumi ga 「 HOBBY ONE 」 to 「 HOBBY TWO 」 desu. Torisashi ga daisuki desu!

Nice to meet you. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. Please be kind to me. I'm from America. My hobbies are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. I love chicken sashimi!

## Useful Resources

- **How to Pack for JET:** <https://www.tofugu.com/japan/jet-program-packing-guide/> (Tofugu)
- **2016 Pre-Departure Documents:** <http://jetaany.org/2016-pre-departure-documents/> (JETAANY)
- **2015 Pre-Departure Documents:** <http://jetaany.org/2015-pre-departure-documents/> (JETAANY)
- **General Information Handbook:** [http://jetprogramme.org/wp-content/themes/biz-vektor/pdf/publications/gih2016\\_e.pdf](http://jetprogramme.org/wp-content/themes/biz-vektor/pdf/publications/gih2016_e.pdf) (Jet Programme)
- **Study Blue:** Computer and smartphone flashcard study app which tracks your progress. You can create your own decks or search for crowd-sourced decks
- **Google Translate**
- **Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP):** <https://step.state.gov/step/> (U.S. Department of State)