

## Overview

The concept of homosexuality in Japan isn't a new concept. Much like the Ancient Greeks, same sex (specifically male-male) relationships in ancient Japan were considered a higher form of love. In modern times, Japan has no laws against homosexual activity, and has some legal protections for gay individuals. In addition, there are some legal protections for transgender individuals.

In the kind of environment where being gay is not considered 100% 'real,' it is natural that many LGBT people do get married. Like most of Asia, Japan is a highly conformist society, and refusing to marry is a mark of egregious nonconformity and may even prevent you from advancing in your career. Being openly gay in Japan only rubs the fact of this nonconformity in, making for an environment where gay & lesbian Japanese people rarely venture out of the closet - at least before night falls.

But the good news is that you are a foreigner! Foreigners are already "weird" and "different," so you're not necessarily expected to be normal according to Japanese social norms. It has also been said that being gay is a foreign problem (akin to how much of the crime in Japan is blamed on foreigners) but don't worry, the perceptions of the LGBT community are changing for the better. More and more, gay characters are on variety shows, written into plots, in popular culture, and even in political office.

## Coming Out

Whether or not you have come out before, you'll have the choice to do so yet again when you get to Japan. In general, ALTs/CIRs will be accepting of your sexuality – the kind of people who like to travel the world are generally very open minded, they also come from western countries where homosexuality is a part of daily life and in popular media.

Your Japanese friends probably won't have a problem with it either, but likely you'll get a sense for how, when and if you want to come out to someone. Coming out at work may turn some heads and raise some eyebrows. The Japanese are not likely to display negativity towards your sexuality, but they might be confused or disapproving.

## School Life

A casual observation of Japanese high school boys reveals a lot more touching, horseplay, bonding and open displays of male devotion and intimacy than are generally tolerated in English-speaking countries. Tales abound of ritualized homosexual activity between initiating older members of a group and receptive younger members on high school sports teams.

Very few, if any, students are out of the closet and the concept of a Gay/Straight alliance is completely foreign. Unlike their American counterparts, students aren't usually going around calling each other 'okama' every five seconds (the Japanese equivalent of faggot), but you might hear

## gay glossary

ゲイ  
(gei)  
gay

ホモ, ホモセクシュアル  
(homo or homosekushuaru)  
homosexual

レズ, レズビアン  
(rezu or rezubian)  
lesbian

同性愛者  
(dōseiaisha)  
lit. same-sex-loving person

ニューハーフ  
(nyūhāfu)  
A transgendered person, usually used for a man transitioning into a woman., lit. new half.

普通  
(futsū)  
heterosexual person,  
lit. normal, average

セーフティーセックス  
(Sēfutī sekkusu)  
safe sex, lit. safety sex

コンドーム  
(kondōmu)  
condom

外専  
(gaisen)  
a Japanese person interested in foreigners. Compound word from *gaikokujin* (foreigner) and *senmon* (major/specialization)

an occasional remark. This is less likely in junior high school and elementary.

## Gay Places In Japan

### Tokyo

**Shinjuku Ni-chōme (新宿二丁目)**, referred to colloquially as Ni-chōme or simply Nichō, is Japan's hub of gay subculture, housing the world's highest concentration of gay & lesbian bars. Shinjuku Ni-chōme neighborhood provides a specialized blend of bars, restaurants, cafes, saunas, love hotels, gay pride boutiques, cruising boxes (hattenba), host clubs, nightclubs, massage parlors, parks, and gay book and video stores. In fact within the five blocks centering on street Naka-Dori between the BYGS building at the Shinjuku San-chōme Station and the small Shinjuku Park three blocks to the east, an estimated 200-300 gay bars and nightclubs provide entertainment. Visit <http://tokyo.gaycities.com/> for listings.

### Osaka

Osaka is home to the second largest gay community in Japan after Tokyo, though for a big city, the gay scene is small. The gay and lesbian scene is centered around **Doyama-chō (堂山町)** which is a district in the Umeda area. Much like the gay "ghetto" of Tokyo, Nichome, Doyama has pretty much the same amenities. Some people say that Doyama is more foreigner friendly than Nichome, but let yourself make that judgement. Visit <http://osaka.gaycities.com/> for listings.

### Other Cities

Many of the other cities in Japan have some form of gay life, even in a smaller major city like Matsuyama, Ehime, there were a few options. There are a few ways to find out what's going on in your area. 1) Check online at Utopia (info below), 2) Ask other gay JETS – yes, there will be at least one other LBGT JET in your prefecture 3) Ask your prefectural advisor about the gay scene in your area – he or she will know something or be able to refer you to someone who knows more.

## LGBT GROUPS

**Stonewall** – JET Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgendered Special Interest Group (SIG)

[groups.google.com/group/stonewalljapan](http://groups.google.com/group/stonewalljapan) – Provides an email list serve, information about coming out, books, videos, information about queer events in Japan, referrals etc. They can refer people to transgendered-specific links. The group is also on facebook.

**LOUD (Lesbians of Undeniable Drive)** [www.space-loud.org/loud/modules/english1/](http://www.space-loud.org/loud/modules/english1/)

## WEBSITES & EMAIL LISTS

**Utopia Asia** <http://utopia-asia.com/>

This is Asia's most comprehensive gay & lesbian web resource. It has great listings for Japan within Tokyo, Osaka, and for the other cities of Japan. It also has info on other places Asia, personals, message boards...etc.

**Kiss Japan** [www.kissjapan.com](http://www.kissjapan.com)    **J-Guy US-Guy** <http://jguyusguy.org/>    **Manhunt** <http://www.manhunt.jp>

These three websites provide personals and online support for the GLBT community living in Japan. Kiss Japan is for both men and women, but the other two are for men only. All sites can be accessed from your PC or mobile phone.

**Mixi** <http://mixi.jp/>    **Men's Mixi** <http://mensmix.jp/>

Most of your Japanese friends will be on Mixi, the Japanese facebook of sorts. They're only in Japanese, but it's not too hard to navigate with a dictionary. Join any of the multitudes of gay/lesbian/trans groups out there to make friends. You'll need a Japanese mobile phone number and an invite to join (email me and I'll send you a referral).

**Tokyo Wrestling** [www.tokyowrestling.com](http://www.tokyowrestling.com)

Japan's first international lesbian & queer webzine, focuses on tough, creative women.

**Nihon Dykenet** <http://mailman.gol.com/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/nihon-dykenet>

An email list for lesbians in Japan – includes events, meet-ups, and resources.

## PHONE RESOURCES

**OCCUR Helpline 03-3380-2269**

The line is in Japanese but the group has foreign/English-speaking members for whom you may leave messages. 19:00-22:00, 13:00-16:00 (Men: Tues – Thurs; Women: every 1st and 3rd Sunday).

**Tokyo English Life Line 03-5774-0992**

**AIDS helpline 0120-04-88-40**