

## Tips and Resources for LGBT JETs in Japan

### Overview

Homosexuality or same-sex attraction isn't a new concept in Japan. Much like the Ancient Greeks, same-sex (specifically male-male) relationships in ancient Japan were considered a higher form of love.

Modern Japan has no laws prohibiting homosexual activity, and discrimination against LGBT individuals may not be as strong as in other countries. Same-sex marriage is not legally recognized, but symbolic same-sex wedding ceremonies have become more popular in recent years. Transgender people who have completed sex reassignment surgery can legally change their gender. Notably, openly LGBT politicians have been elected to public office in the last decade, and pop culture increasingly features LGBT characters, and Japanese LGBT literature and movies are certainly available. The blurring of gender lines through acting and cross-dressing is also a well-established device in both traditional Japanese arts such as Kabuki and in modern entertainment such as J-Rock. And the major cities all have some LGBT-centric nightlife areas. All in all, living in Japan can be a very fun and eye-opening experience as an LGBT person!

However, it is important to be aware that sexual orientation is not protected under national civil rights law, and despite continued progress towards equality, discrimination against LGBT individuals still occurs in different areas of life.

Also, many Japanese LGBT people do get married to opposite-sex partners. Japanese culture values conformity, and refusing to marry is a mark of egregious nonconformity that may even prevent you from advancing in your career. Being openly gay in Japan only rubs in the fact of this nonconformity, making for an environment many LGBT 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.

### Coming Out

Whether or not you've come out before, you'll have the choice to do so yet again when you get to Japan. In general, the JET community will be accepting of your sexuality – the kind of people who like to travel the world are generally open-minded, and they typically come from countries where LGBT people are a common part of daily life and in popular media.

Your Japanese friends probably won't have a problem with it either, but likely you'll need some time to get a sense for if, when, and how you want to come out to someone. You may also encounter some confusion at first as you observe Japanese behavior, fashion, gender norms, etc. that differ from what you're used and may not conform to your own expectations of typical heterosexual and non-heterosexual behavior.

Coming out at work may turn some heads and raise some eyebrows. Japanese people are not likely to display negativity towards your sexuality, but they might be confused or disapproving. The general view at most Japanese workplaces is that your private life should remain private, and what you do in your own time is of no concern to your colleagues so long as it does not reflect badly upon your organization.

### School Life

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

# LGBT Nightlife 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 and lesbian bars. The 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 judgment. 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 Kyoto, Matsuyama, or Ehime, there are 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) or other websites, (2) ask other JET's – yes, there will be at least one other LGBT JET in your region!, and (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** – <http://stonewall.ajet.net/> - The JET Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgendered Special Interest Group (SIG) provides an email list serve, information about coming out, books, videos, information about queer events in Japan, referrals, etc. They can also refer people to transgender-specific links. The group is on Facebook.

**LOUD (Lesbians of Undeniable Drive)** <http://space-loud.org/modules/english1/>

## Other 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)

**East Asia M4M** <http://eam4m.com/>

**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 Mix** <http://mensmix.jp/>

Most of your Japanese friends will be on Mixi, the Japanese Facebook of sorts. It's not too hard to navigate with a dictionary. Join any of the multitudes of LGBT groups out there to make friends. You'll need a Japanese mobile phone number to join.

**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**

# Pocket LGBT Glossary

同性愛者 (**dōseiaisha**)

Homosexual

(lit. same-sex-loving person)

両性愛者 (**ryōseiaisha**)

Bisexual (lit. both-sexes-loving person)

異性愛者 (**iseiaisha**)

Heterosexual (lit. opposite-sex-loving person)

性転換者 (**seitenkansha**)

Transsexual / transgender

(lit. sex-change person)

ゲイ (**gei**)

Gay

レズビアン (**rezubian**)

Lesbian

-- also: レズ (*rezu*) or ビアン (*bian*)

ニューハーフ (**nyūhāfu**)

A transgender person, usually used for a biological male transitioning to woman. (lit. new half)

コンドーム (**kondōmu**)

Condom

ホモセクシュアル (**homosekushuaru**)

Homosexual

-- also: ホモ (*homo*)

バイセクシュアル (**baisekushuaru**)

Bisexual

ヘテロセクシュアル (**heterosekushuaru**)

Heterosexual

トランスジェンダー (**toransujendā**)

Transgender

普通 (**futsū**)

Heterosexual person (lit. normal, average)

外専 (**gaisen**)

Japanese person interested in foreigners.  
(lit. shortened compound of “foreigner” and “specialty”)

セーフセックス (**sēfu sekkusu**)

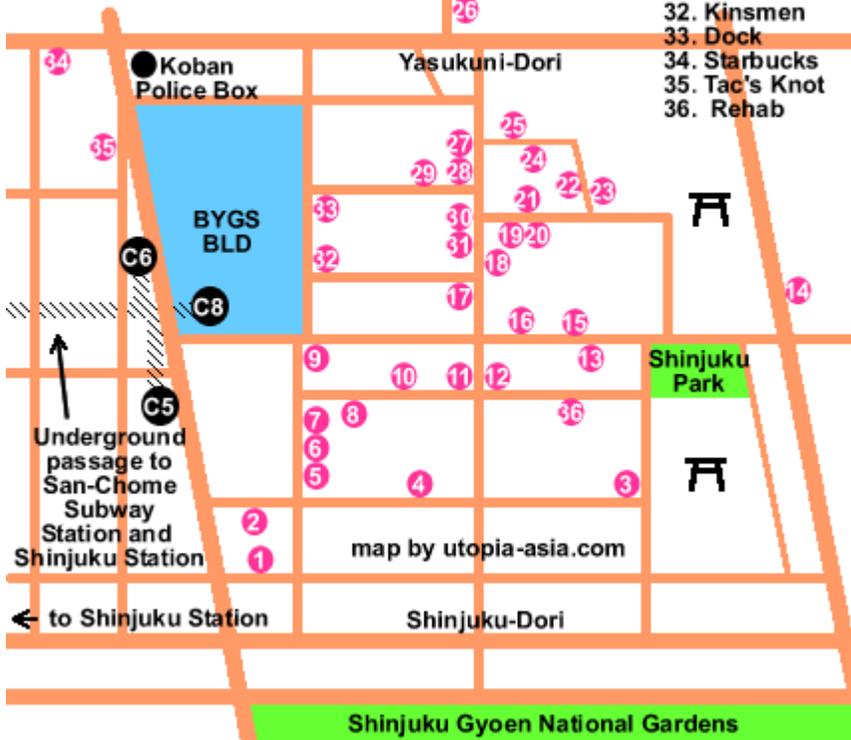
安全なセックス (**anzen na sekkusu**)

Safe sex

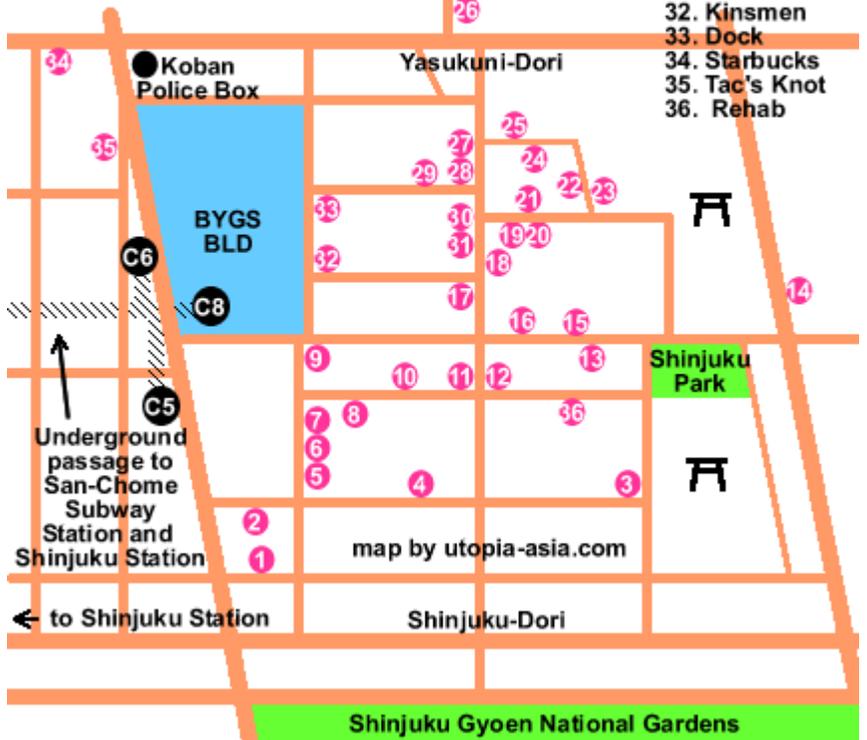
デンタルダム (**dentarudamu**)

Dental dam

1. Dragon Men 2. Arty Farty 3. 24 Kaikan sauna 4. Free Man
5. Baan Kirao 6. GB 7. Hotel S 8. Fuji 9. Lorn Star 10. Lamp Post
11. Tamago 12. DNA 13. Base 14. Hotel Park Inn 15. Arch
16. Cocolo 17. Advocates 18. Monsoon 19. Books Rose 20. Annex
21. Kinswomyn 22. Agit 23. Sunny 24. Mars Bar 25. AKTA 26. HX
27. Kinkan Tei 28. Lumiere 29. Ku Su O 30. Check 31. Pandora
32. Kinsmen 33. Dock 34. Starbucks
35. Tac's Knot 36. Rehab



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## Queer/Trans\* Life in Japan 2015

'Stonewall Japan' was founded in the early 90's as a resource for queer/trans\* JETs. 'Stonewall' refers to the 1969 riot in New York City, which is often cited as the beginning of the modern queer/trans\* rights movement in America. Stonewall is now an international symbol for queer/trans\* rights.

Stonewall Japan is an AJET special interest group with the purpose of bringing together queer/trans\* people and their allies. Stonewall Japan offers queer/trans\* English-speakers in Japan the opportunity to connect and receive support from the JET / English-speaking community; we provide updates about events in your area as well as maintain online platforms for sharing experiences and fostering mutual learning.

*\*Please note that in this handout we use the word “**queer**” as a reclaimed umbrella term to represent the sexual minority community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, and many more). It is **not meant to offend**, but rather to more fully encompass the community without the inherent limitations of an acronym. It is also important to note the word “queer” is an incredibly Western way of thinking about (sexual) identity, so “queer” in quotations is a convenient term, but a term that may or may not work in Japan (ese culture). **Trans(gender)** is also an umbrella term for non-cisgender identities (genderqueer, two spirit, pre-op/post-op, and many more) that is used throughout this resource and has similar limitations to the word “queer.”*

Connect with local and national social events hosted by Stonewall Japan through the following:

**Website:** <http://stonewall.ajet.net>

**E-mail:** [stonewallsig@ajet.net](mailto:stonewallsig@ajet.net)

**Facebook Group:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/stonewalljapan/>

**Twitter Account:** @StonewallJapan

## ***A Bit About Being “Queer/Trans\*” in Japan***

Originally widely accepted before Western influence, same-sex relations in Japan are now seen through quite a different lens<sup>1</sup>. Most Japanese aren't aware of the 'queer' community, and those that are, are often dismissive. Being queer, being trans\*, and cross-dressing—though completely separate concepts—tend to be lumped together and thought of as one identity by many Japanese people. This is often because there is a large visibility of gay and transgender celebrities in Japanese media (primarily comedians).

Being 'queer' is not illegal, but legal protections for sexual orientation are rare or non-existent. Both workplace and residential discrimination can, and sometimes do, occur. Recently, employment discrimination has become illegal in Tokyo and a few other cities. Sex changes are legally recognized throughout Japan, however, same-sex partnerships are not recognized, apart from the ward of Shibuya, Tokyo. The activism that has spawned has primarily been a result of the international (Western) feminist movement<sup>2</sup>.

Within the 'queer' and 'trans\*' communities' themselves, there are often many subgroups based on other facets of identity. This is known as 'compartmentalization' and you can see this most clearly in Tokyo's gay district Nichome. Bars and clubs are often 'known' for certain types of subgroups such as 'guys who like foreign guys,' 'guys into jocks,' 'girls into femmes' and kink communities. This might be a different style of community than your home country.

### ***Coming Out***

Choosing to come out or not is a hard choice for anyone, but the position of the JET participant presents its own unique challenges. The best advice is the simplest—do what's best for you. Many JETs come out to their fellow JETs and close Japanese friends, but are more cautious with co-workers. Some never come out to anyone and others are completely out to everyone in their life here in Japan. Make the decision based on how comfortable you feel in your everyday life and at your workplace.

Most Japanese people don't talk about their personal lives at work. Sexual identity may fall into the category of 'too much information' for the Japanese workplace, so it's important to keep that in mind. Coming out may cause issues with co-workers, parents, or friends who don't know how to feel about 'queer' people. It could also cause unnecessary stereotyping and might further 'Other' or 'foreign'nize' you. The important question to ask yourself when deciding on coming out is **how important is your queerness to you?** Is it worth risking **possible** ostracization and friction in your workplace? As JETs, we can be role models for our students and share our culture with others. Our queerness can be an important aspect of our culture and sense of self too. Many queer/trans\* JETs gain fulfillment through sharing their experience as

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<sup>1</sup> Pflugfelder, Gregory "Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950. University of California Press 2007.

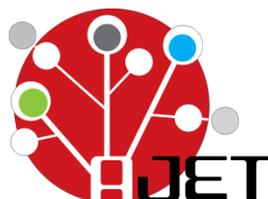
<sup>2</sup> Shigematsu, Setsu "Scream from the Shadows: The Women's Liberation Movement in Japan" University of Minnesota 2012.

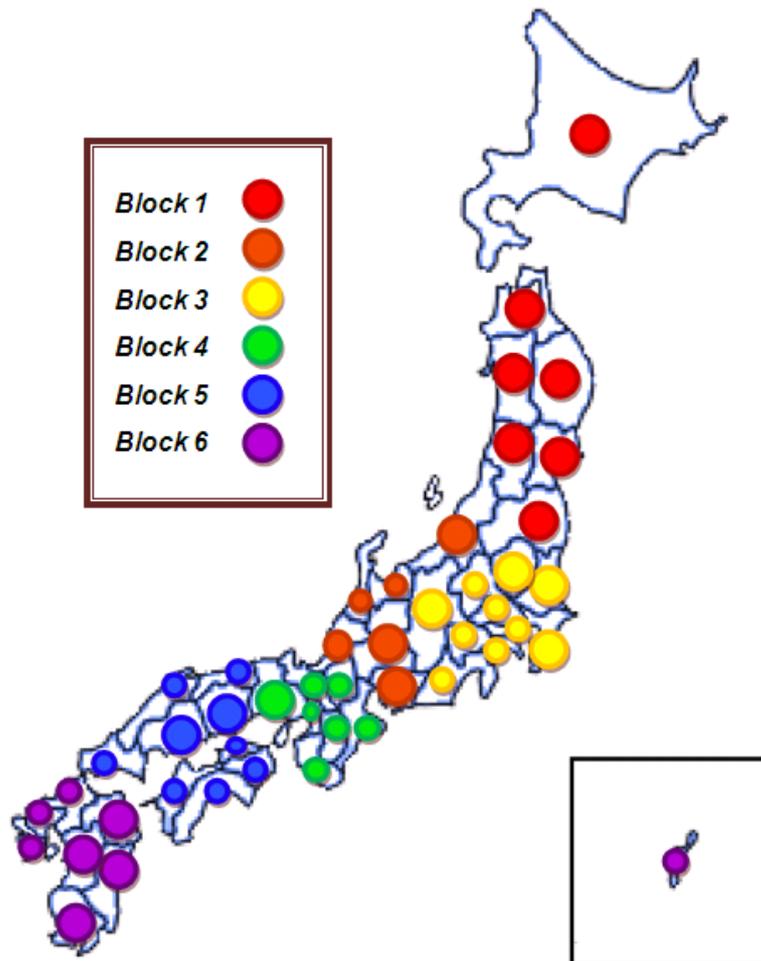
queer/trans\* individuals. It's important to make the choice that is best for you after a lot of thought, consideration, and observation of your surroundings.

## **Building Community**

Indeed, Japan has a 'queer/trans\*' community; you may have to do a bit more searching for it than you might have done in your home country though. Major cities (Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Fukuoka, and Sapporo) will generally have some sort of 'scene,' i.e. some bars and maybe a dance club or two. Modern resources (the Internet and smartphone applications) will help you greatly – find one or two places online, then ask the people you meet there about the rest! Asking senpai-JETs in your area—that you trust and identify as allies—is also an excellent way to get connected.

Stonewall Japan strives to create community with monthly events, meetups, and newsletters. Stonewall Japan utilizes the Block System. We have split up the country into 6 blocks, and assigned a 'Block Leader' for each area. Your Block Leader will be the best resource to get you connected to your specific area. Please find your prefecture / area on the map attached and contact your Block Leader directly for more information about your region.





**Block 1 Rep** (Hokkaido, Aomori, Iwate, Akita, Miyagi, Yamagata, Fukushima)

**stonewallblock1@gmail.com** Caroline Noel

**Block 2 Rep** (Niigata, Toyama, Ishikawa, Fukui, Gifu, Aichi)

**stonewallblock2@gmail.com** Rhys Coleman

**Block 3 Rep** (Tochigi, Gunma, Nagano, Chiba, Tokyo, Kanagawa, Shizuoka, Yamanashi, Ibaraki, Saitama)

**stonewallblock3@gmail.com** Ana Laraia

**Block 4 Rep** (Shiga, Kyoto, Hyogo, Mie, Osaka, Nara, Wakayama)

**stonewallblock4@gmail.com** Sarah Leck

**Block 5 Rep** (Tottori, Shimane, Okayama, Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Tokushima, Kagawa, Ehime, Kochi)

**stonewallblock5@gmail.com** Alan D. Evans

**Block 6 Rep** (Fukuoka, Saga, Nagasaki, Oita, Kumamoto, Miyazaki, Kagoshima, Okinawa)

**stonewallblock6@gmail.com** Karmen Rabe [Kyushu]

Lucas Tyler LaPlante [Okinawa]

## **Resources**

*We have a lot of resources on the Stonewall Japan website (<http://stonewall.ajet.net/>). However, we know most JETs won't have Internet for quite a while. Here is a list of important phone numbers, upcoming events, and a few essential websites. For more resources, please check out our website and contact your Block Leader!*

### **Phone Numbers:**

Tokyo English Lifeline Lifeline (TELL):	03-5774-0992
Tokyo English Lifeline (TELL) Counselling:	03-4550-1146
AIDS Helpline:	0120-04-8840
HIV & Human Rights English Information	03-5259-0256 (Tokyo – Saturdays 11am-2pm) 07-2043-4105 (Osaka – Saturdays 1pm-6pm)
Suicide Hotline	(English Services in Tokyo) 03-5286-9090 (Osaka) 06- 4395-4343
AJET Peer Support Group	050-5534-5566 8pm-7am Everyday

### **Events:**

Tokyo Rainbow Pride	<a href="http://tokyorainbowpride.com/en/parade">http://tokyorainbowpride.com/en/parade</a>
Kansai Rainbow Pride	<a href="http://blog.kansaiparade.org/">http://blog.kansaiparade.org/</a>
Kansai Queer Film Festival	<a href="http://kansai-qff.org/index_en.html">http://kansai-qff.org/index_en.html</a>
Tokyo International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival	<a href="http://tokyo-lgff.org/2014/?lang=en">http://tokyo-lgff.org/2014/?lang=en</a>
Nagoya LGBT Festa	<a href="http://nlgr.net/">http://nlgr.net/</a>
Pink Dot Okinawa	<a href="http://pinkdotok.jp/">http://pinkdotok.jp/</a>
Fukuoka Pride	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/fukuokanow/posts/10152497322587810">https://www.facebook.com/fukuokanow/posts/10152497322587810</a>

## Websites with Further Resources:

Stonewall Japan	<a href="http://stonewall.ajet.net/">http://stonewall.ajet.net/</a>
Kanto Dyke Weekend	<a href="http://dykeweekend.wordpress.com/">http://dykeweekend.wordpress.com/</a>
Tokyo Nichome Event Guide (Japanese)	<a href="http://www.2chopo.com/">http://www.2chopo.com/</a>
Lesbian Life in Japan (Blog)	<a href="http://lesbianjapan.wordpress.com/">http://lesbianjapan.wordpress.com/</a>
Utopia-Asia (Gay men's resources in Asia)	<a href="http://www.utopia-asia.com/tipsjapn.htm">http://www.utopia-asia.com/tipsjapn.htm</a>
List of Gay bars in Shibuya (Tokyo)	<a href="http://keivi.com/">http://keivi.com/</a>

