

MOVING TO JAPAN

This information was compiled from expatriates of different nationalities living in Kobe, as well as using information provided by companies with expatriate staff. We hope it makes your move a little easier.

BEFORE YOU MOVE

House Hunting

Some tips from other expat families when deciding and negotiating on a house:

- Look at both houses and apartments. Many families even with small children are satisfied living in apartments. The houses here don't have large gardens and in the summer mosquitoes are quite a problem. Apartments with covered balconies often offer more useable outdoor space.
- Is the location convenient to school or school bus (if applicable), train station, supermarket and of course workplace
- Does the house have good lighting
- Is there access for Cable TV, ISDN, Broadband
- Is the washing machine equipped with warm water
- Good airconditioning/heating
- Quality and condition of the mosquito nets in the windows and doors
- Take note of the size of oven
- Your residential storage area may be limited, make sure to check available space in advance

Ensure you arrange any renovations and repairs prior to contract and that a thorough inspection of the current state of the premises is agreed upon. Also negotiate a gardener if you choose a house.

Some popular suburbs include Sumiyoshi, Rokko, Ashiya, Rokko Island, Kitano, Shioya, Okamoto

Electrical Appliances, Lighting, Audio/Video

Electricity is supplied at 100v and either 60Hz or 50 Hz depending which area of Japan. Transformers are quite expensive in Japan so it's recommended you purchase them before you leave.

Televisions bought in Japan either new or used are usually bi-lingual which means you can receive a program either in Japanese or English. News and movies are often broadcast in bi-lingual mode and you can choose to receive the program in either language. TV's bought here are relatively inexpensive and are often available second hand from other expat families leaving.

Depending which country you are from will determine whether your VCR and video tapes will work here. Japan uses NTSC format which is the same as USA & Canada. Most of Europe, Australia & New Zealand uses PAL which is incompatible with NTSC used in Japan. If possible look into a multisystem VCR & TV in Japan which plays both. Note this also applies to video cameras and tapes.

Other appliances such as food processors, bread baking machines and sewing machines etc should be brought with you as the products available here are quite small and expensive.

Financial

Be sure to bring financial records with you, including the details of your home sale (if applicable). Also include at least three years prior tax returns with supporting data. Check with your tax services department for specific tax returns to bring. Consider consolidating your checking and savings accounts into one bank. Make sure to set up Internet Banking Access and/or get a PIN code on a credit card so you can obtain cash in money machines. Japan is a cash economy; many places do not accept credit cards.

Be sure to bring enough cash with you until you work out your banking arrangements here.

Furniture

Furniture is quite expensive in Japan, especially for Western sized and style furniture. If you need to replace any of your existing furniture in the coming years it's a good idea to think about it before you leave and then it can be included in your shipment. Outdoor furniture/umbrellas can be found but are not widely available, particularly in larger sizes.

Magazine Subscriptions

You can have your subscriptions changed to your new address in Japan. Usually there is an extra charge for overseas mailings. The magazines usually arrive 4-6 weeks late. Foreign magazines purchased in Japan are very expensive.

Medical Work

If you have any medical or dental work that needs attention, get it done before you leave. If you wear glasses, bring your optical prescription and an extra pair of glasses. Also bring a current dental chart and your medicals records. If you are taking medicine now, bring a few months supply with you on the plane and a copy of the prescription. If the prescription is a daily necessity, bring a year's supply. It is recommended to bring a note from your doctor in case Customs questions the large quantity. Many drugs are available here, but it takes time to find the ones you use. Some prescription patent medicines are not available in Japan. Over the counter medications are different here, bring a supply of anything you use throughout the year.

Passport Pictures

Bring 12 copies of each family member's passport photos with you, not in your air shipment. You will need several pictures for various documents after you arrive. Children will need photos for student ID's.

WHAT TO BRING

Air Shipment

You will have two shipment of goods, one by air designed to arrive soon after your arrival and your container of goods which will arrive later. It is always difficult to decide what items you will need when you first arrive in Japan and are waiting for your container. The following list was made from comments of families who recently located to Kobe. Hopefully, this will make the decision of what to pack in your air shipment easier. Don't hesitate to use all the air shipment space made available to you. Your moving company should even move these items from any temporary housing to your permanent housing.

Suggested Items for Air Shipment

- *Favorite Pillows
- *Sheets, comforter/blankets appropriate for the season you are arriving
- *Bath towels
- *Kitchen towels
- *Computer and accessories
- *Alarm clock
- *Bikes
- *Videos and games, mini-stereo system, CDs, tapes
- *Sports equipment for kids
- *Books/Magazines
- *Clothing and hangers
- *Coffee maker, filters
- *Toaster
- *A short supply kit of dishwashing & cleaning items
- *Toiletries
- *Frying pan, small sauce pan/lid, casserole/lid
- *Baking utensils, cake pan, cookie sheet, resealable plastic containers. Smaller size baking tins are best as many ovens are smaller
- *Measuring cups & spoons, spatula, vegetable peeler, paring knife, etc.
- *Pot holders
- *Can opener, bottle opener, corkscrew
- *Some dishes, mugs, and silverware (temporary apartments only furnish the basics: 1 set per person)
- *Favorite cookbook
- *Spices
- *Some of your favorite convenience foods
- *School related items you may need
- *Children's favorite toys/books
- *Children's snack foods
- *Camera and scrapbook to begin recording your adventure!

Clothing & Shoes

You will find that the Japanese adults dress more formally. They will dress nicely even to run errands such as shopping. It is o.k. for you to dress more casually, but it is recommended that you always dress neatly.

You will have the opportunity to attend many functions in Kobe such as private or company sponsored dinner parties, formal events etc. that require dressy attire. For those events you will need a few smarter dresses or pantsuits. Men may have the opportunity to attend events where a tuxedo or formal black suit is worn. Do not expect to find western sizes/proportions in clothing here.

The average Japanese person is smaller than most Westerners and so it is very difficult to find clothes, shoes and even furniture here.

Some people have been able to buy clothes for their children here, others have found that the 'fit' is not quite right and childrens clothing can be quite expensive. Women's clothing (if you are small enough to wear Japanese sizes) is quite expensive. Tall men will find it difficult to purchase clothes here. The best idea is to bring a year's supply of clothes for everyone. You can do mail order but the customs duty and shipping expenses are often very expensive.

You will need a variety of comfortable shoes since you will be walking considerably more than back home. Japanese in general have smaller feet than westerners so it is best to bring a year's worth of shoes with you. Customs duty on footwear is very expensive. Ladies should bring pantyhose as well.

Underwear and bathing suits are also difficult to find in a wide variety of sizes and can be very expensive. Also socks for men with large shoe sizes are difficult to find.

Please check with the school you choose to see if your child needs a gym uniform, special shoes, special supplies etc. Also bring special occasion clothes for children such as a nice dress, suit, dress shirt and tie etc.

Food & Toiletries

There are many western food items available in the Kobe area. There is a catalog order company called The Foreign Buyer's Club, from which you can order items that are not available locally. They have an extensive catalog of American and British products, and the prices are higher than in the source country. The FBC shop is located in the Entente Building on Rokko Island, down the hall from CHIC. Other stores in the area specializing in imported goods are Price Club on Rokko Island, Kobe Grocers in Sannomiya, and Costco in Amagasaki which is a well known American wholesaler. Camembert is located in Rokko and they have a very good selection of cheeses and some imported meats and sausages.

Japanese supermarkets generally don't carry many international products. Ikari & Peacock supermarkets are a little bit more international though their branches are limited.

Japanese supermarkets are fine for basic produce/meat/dairy etc.

There is an American craft store & hardware located on Rokko Island. Ben Franklin (crafts) and next door is Ace hardware.

This is a list of items people have found difficult to find or very expensive.

You may want to bring these things along with you as they are difficult to find or different from what you are used to.

Food:

- Food coloring
- Low sodium products
- Low fat products
- Sugar free soft drinks and sugar free powdered drink mixes
- Iodized salt
- Decaffeinated coffee and tea
- Caffeine free soda
- Good selection of baby food (Japanese brands & Gerber are available but difficult to read labels with contents)
- Items for baking
- Cake decorating materials and pure icing sugar (icing sugar available but not the pure kind)
- Whole-wheat flour
- Uncommon canned vegetables (butterbeans, wax beans etc.)
- Sugar free gum, candy
- Gelatin & pudding mixes
- Powdered milk & buttermilk
- Maple syrup (expensive here)
- Childrens cereal

Toiletries:

Bring one year supply of your favorite brands.

- Shampoos, conditioners (formulated for Japanese hair)
- Toothpaste (Japanese toothpaste usually doesn't have fluoride)
- Deodorant (ineffective due to differences in pH level, plus summer is very hot!)
- Deodorant body soap
- Tampons and pads (Japanese brands are expensive and inadequate)
- Body lotions (usually in small size packages and there is a limited offering)
- Makeup and skincare products (many Japanese products have 'Whitening' formulation)

Miscellaneous

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- Sheets, pillowcases, pillows and bedspreads to fit your bed (Japanese sizing is different)
- Towels and bath rugs (Japanese towels are smaller and thinner)
- Bicycle parts, tire pumps, needles
- Replacement parts for appliances, office supplies, etc.
- Smoke detectors
- Humidifier tablets and filters
- Some contact lens solutions
- Three-way light bulbs
- Software, especially for children
- Children's lunch boxes, brown paper lunch bags
- Vacuums, vacuum bags (Japanese vacuums do not have strong suction)
- Measuring spoons/cups (Japanese are metric)
- Clothing & Shoes see section under Weather/clothing/shoes
- Transformers
- Outdoor/garden furniture
- Books, magazines and videos in your own language
- Lamps and shades
- Sports equipment
- Underwear
- Gas BBQ grill – the moving company should ship the BBQ without the gas cylinder. Cylinders can be purchased here.
- Artificial Christmas tree
- Christmas music, decorations
- Decorations for any holiday you wish to celebrate
- Extension cords
- Small fans
- Gifts for children for 1st Christmas in Japan
- Desk and floor lamps, in general lighting is not very good
- Tools for household/auto maintenance

Medical & Pharmacy

There are some English speaking doctors and dentists in the Kobe area. In general dental offices do not have Western style hygienists or preventative care. Make sure to take care of this before you leave. Plan to bring a year's supply of the medicines your family needs, including over the counter medications. You should also bring a years supply of contraceptives if necessary as the products available here may not be suitable. Make sure to purchase the "Medical Access – A Foreigner's Guide to Health Care in Kobe" if your company does not provide you with one. It is an excellent referral source to doctors, their specialties, hospital information etc.

You should also bring a years supply of regular over the counter medications such as painkillers, cough/cold medicines, antiseptic creams and general first aid type products. You should also bring any vitamins you regularly take.

- Fluoride or fluoride vitamins if advised by your dentist. There is no fluoride in the water.
- Diaper rash ointments and creams
- Mosquito repellent
- Infant & Childrens painkiller (eg Paracetamol, Tylenol). Only available by prescription here and only for 3-4 days at a time.
- Hydrocortizone cream & other pharmaceutical creams
- Acne treatments
- Contraceptives
- Calamine lotion
- Home hair colouring

Pets

If you have a pet, you may want to bring extra collars, leashes and flea collars. Choker collars and collars for big dogs can not be purchased here. Special diet food may not be available. Heartworm medicine is very expensive here. Cat litter is available, but not very good. Pet food is available in small packages.

You might also want to get all their checkups and immunizations done prior to moving. (This is aside from Japanese quarantine regulations for your country)

LOCAL AREA INFORMATION

Religious venues – Kobe Area

There are English language services at two Protestant and several Catholic churches. However, there is no Christian radio or television. So if you enjoy listening to religious music, you should bring your favorites. There are additional details on other faiths in your “Living in Kobe” book. In Kitano, there is a Jewish Center and a Mosque. There are also 3 Indian Temples located in the Sannomiya/Kitano.

There are classes available at some churches for the children to continue their religious education or bring your own material.

Protestant Churches: Kobe Union Church and Kobe International Baptist Church

Catholic Churches: Marist Brothers (near Shioya), Rokko Catholic Church (East side of Kobe), Nakayamate Sacred Heart Church (Kobe).

International Schools

There are five private international schools in the area from which to choose. Your relocation advisors should be able to set up appointments for you to visit the schools during your house hunting trip. Pick up any registration materials at that time. If possible, bring academic records with you.

Canadian Academy on Rokko Island has an extensive web site. www.canacad.ac.jp

Marist Brothers located in Suma, west of Kobe. Christian-Marist approach to education. Web site: www.marist.ac.jp/

St. Michael's International School sponsored by the Anglican Church of Japan offers classes pre-school through grade 6. Instruction is based on the British National Curriculum.

The European School-for elementary school aged children.
Web site: www2.gol.com/users/dsk

Osaka International School , located in Minoh, Osaka
www.sisf.minoh.osaka.jp/

Please be aware that in the Kobe area there is no school that accepts or can provide for students with special educational needs.

English in Japan

English is taught as a second language in most Japanese schools. After years of study some Japanese read and write English, however a small percentage can actually speak English with any proficiency. Foreigners also have a difficult time speaking Japanese with any degree of fluency. However it is helpful to learn as much Japanese as possible to assist in shopping and traveling.

Transportation in Japan

The public transportation in Japan is excellent and relatively simple to use. You will quickly learn how to use the trains, buses, taxis and subways as you travel with others or explore on your own.

You may or may not wish to purchase a car in Japan. There are families that do not own cars. Cars are useful for getting to out of the way places. Generally, trains and subways can get you just about anywhere you need to go in the metropolitan area. You can find both new and used cars in Japan. If you prefer a new car, keep in mind that new cars experience a very steep depreciation in Japan. Depending on the timing of your assignment, you can get a good deal on a used car from another expatriate leaving Japan. In either case, you will need help in completing all the necessary paperwork involved in purchasing a car. You can drive on an international drivers license for 1 year after which you will need to get a Japanese drivers license. Several countries have reciprocity regarding drivers' licenses and no test is necessary. You will need to determine your particular status.

Weather

In Kobe it rarely gets colder than 32⁰F / 0⁰ C. The best option for winter is layering your clothes. It seldom snows in the Kobe area, but do bring a winter coat, gloves, and hat. Most homes do not have central heating and heat with air conditioners/gas heaters. The heating in many public places and in trains is set quite high therefore clothes should not be too thick.

Spring and Fall are extremely pleasant. The temperatures are warm and the sun shines most of the time. Usually a lightweight jacket is sufficient.

Summer is very hot, very humid and very rainy. You will need several umbrellas; folding ones are especially convenient. Average temperature around 95⁰F / 35⁰C and 90% humidity.

Kansai/Japan has many great hiking trails. Bring hiking shoes/socks/clothes with you if you're interested in exploring the mountains in Kansai.

Arriving at Kansai International Airport

Arriving at the airport in Japan for the first time can be a bit overwhelming. This information is designed to give you a preview of what to expect and how you might react to certain events. Arrange with your company in advance to be picked up and taken to your temporary residence or get specific instructions from them on how to get there yourself.

-When you arrive at KIX, disembark along with everyone else. The airport is easy to navigate with signs in English. Your first stop will be immigration. You will ride an automated train to the main terminal building.

-Once you leave the train, go down the escalator into the immigration area.

-Once inside the immigration room, you will see the immigration officers to your right.

-Over each booth will be a sign that says Foreign Passports or Japanese Passports. Go to the foreign passport line. Usually you can step up to the window as a family.

-Once you are through immigration, follow the signs to the baggage claim area. Baggage carts are free. Locate the baggage carousel for your flight and claim your baggage.

-Now head to Customs. The customs officials generally speak a few words of English. You may be asked what company you work for.

-After you clear customs, go through the double doors and you will be in a waiting/pick up area. Outside that area is where you find taxis and buses.

Miscellaneous

Disasters

In Japan, you may experience earthquake tremors and seasonal typhoons, it is important that you recognize there are specific safety measures to take in the event of an emergency. Your relocation personnel should be able to advise you. Your employer may also have a company disaster plan.

Consulate

Make sure to register yourself and your family at your home country's Embassy or Consulate office.

