

# THE UNOFFICIAL GUIDE TO STUDYING IN JAPAN

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition  
updated August 2011



## 1. Pre-Departure

### 1.1. Applying for Visa

The certificate of eligibility (COE) is a document issued by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), and is required for all foreigners wishing to stay in Japan for a period of more than 3 months. Additionally, the document is necessary to apply for a student visa. You will normally require a document verifying your financial ability to pay for your education, as well as a copy of the letter of admission to your educational institute. You will require a proxy in Japan to apply for the COE on your behalf, who will then have to post you the COE upon approval. The processing time varies from between 1 to 3 months. Please visit <http://www.immi-moj.go.jp/english/tetuduki/kanri/shyorui/01.html> for more information regarding the COE.

You can only apply for your student visa after obtaining your COE. This can be done at the Embassy of Japan in Singapore. There will be an application fee of S\$47. In addition, you will also require the original copy and a photocopy of the COE. The processing time for the visa can be up to 1 month. Please visit <http://www.sg.emb-japan.go.jp/visiting.htm> for the application forms and more details. As the entire process from applying for the visa and COE to obtaining them take a certain amount of time, it is advisable to apply for these documents early.

### 1.2. Financing your education

#### 1.2.1. Monbukagakusho Scholarship (文部科学省奨学金)

This is a bond-free scholarship provided by the Japanese government. Please refer to [http://www.sg.emb-japan.go.jp/culture\\_Scholarships.htm](http://www.sg.emb-japan.go.jp/culture_Scholarships.htm).

#### 1.2.2. Scholarships from PSC/government-linked agencies

PSC and other statutory boards such as EDB and STB offer bonded scholarships to students wishing to further their studies in Japan. Undergraduate scholarships usually cover 1 year of language study and 4 years of undergraduate education, and come with a 5 year bond. Conditions may differ for other scholarship schemes.

#### 1.2.3. Financial aid from universities/organisations in Japan

Many universities provide a certain amount of financial aid for needy students, such as a waiver or reduction of school fees. In addition, many organisations also offer

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one-time or monthly scholarships to foreign students. Please enquire at your university's or department's student affairs office for more details.

#### 1.2.4. Part-time work

Most university students in Japan do part-time work, or *arubaito*, to cover their living and study expenses. However, as foreign students living in Japan on a student visa, you must first apply for a "Permit to Engage in Activity other than that Permitted by the Status of Residence Previously Granted" from your nearest immigration bureau once in Japan. There is also an upper limit to the amount of hours foreign students may work per week/day. Please refer to <http://www.studyjapan.go.jp/en/inj/inj03e.html> for more information.

#### 1.3. Finance matters

Banks normally require you to have your Alien Registration Card (ARC) before allowing you to open a bank account. The processing time for this card is normally 2 to 3 weeks. Hence, it is advisable that you bring sufficient cash to tide you over the first few weeks. You are recommended to bring between JPY300,000 to JPY500,000.

For example, if you were to reside in a dormitory which costs JPY30,000 monthly, the estimated expenditure during the first month is as follows:

NO.	ITEM	COST (¥)
1	First 3 months of dormitory fees (Advance payment is usually required)	90,000
2	Deposit and electricity bill	30,000
3	Bus/Train ride from airport	3,000
4	National Health Insurance	15,000
5	Food	50,000
6	Household appliances and necessities	75,000
7	Electronic Dictionary (電子辞書)	40,000
8	Mobile Phone (携帯電話)	50,000
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3,53,000</b>

*The average rent for a 20 square metre room in Tokyo is approximately JPY70,000. It is Japanese culture to pay 2 to 3*

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months' worth of rent as key money (non-refundable) to the landlord as a form of thanks, and normally 1 month's worth of deposit money (refundable when you move out) that is used to cover any damages to the property. In addition, if you find your room through a housing agent, you will have to pay a commission (not more than 1 months' rent) to the agent. In all, it is not surprising to pay 5 months worth of rent when moving into your new place. Also, as most apartments do not come furnished, it is encouraged to allocate a certain amount of money to buy the required furniture/household appliances.

## 1.4. Things to bring to Japan

- 1.4.1. Original copies of academic transcripts, certificates of achievements, and testimonials.
- 1.4.2. Science students may want to consider bringing their junior college (JC) notes for reference purposes. Some areas in the syllabus of the Examination for Japanese University Admission for International Students (EJU) (日本留学試験) overlap with the JC syllabus. For more details, visit [http://www.jasso.go.jp/eju/syllabus\\_e.html](http://www.jasso.go.jp/eju/syllabus_e.html).
- 1.4.3. It is advisable to avoid bringing electrical appliances (e.g., rice cooker, electric kettle, iron etc) due to the difference in voltage: Singapore (240V), Japan (100V). Laptops and digital cameras usually have chargers that can accept a range of voltages, but it is best to check each individual item before bringing them over. However, it should be noted that power sockets in Japan are || shaped and plug travel adaptors will then be needed to use these devices.
- 1.4.4. It is not advisable to bring too much clothing, especially warm clothing. The fashion in Japan is very different from that in Singapore, and in many cases, you may end up not wearing the clothes you have brought over. There are many places to get cheap and fashionable clothes in Japan, such as chain outlets like Uniqlo.

## 1.5. Airline choice

It is recommended that students coming over to Japan for the first time take All Nippon Airways (ANA). ANA provides a check-in baggage allowance of two 23kg bags, up to a total of 46kg. In

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contrast, most other airlines, such as SIA and JAL, provide a maximum check-in baggage allowance of only 20kg.

In addition, for students coming to Tokyo or the Kanto region, you are recommended to fly to Haneda airport rather than Narita airport. Narita is located in Chiba Prefecture, approximately 2 hours away from central Tokyo, while Haneda is located within Tokyo itself. As such, moving from Haneda airport to your residence in Tokyo will be less of a hassle.

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## 2. Upon Arrival

### 2.1. Alien Registration (外国人登録)

All foreigners residing in Japan for more than 90 days are required to register at the city/ward office (市・区役所) for the Alien Registration Card (ARC or 外国人登録証明書), which is a personal identification document for foreign residents in Japan. (This is equivalent to our NRIC/FIN.) You are required to register for the ARC within 90 days of arrival. Registration is required by law to facilitate trouble-free everyday living in Japan, and you should carry the card with you at all times. The ARC is required for many other procedures such as opening a bank account and applying for a mobile phone line.

Please apply in person at the Foreign Resident Registration Section of the Family and Resident Registration Division of the City Office. Registration is free of charge and the processing time is normally between 2 to 3 weeks. You can obtain a set of documents for foreign resident registration directly from your city office. You will require your passport and two 4.5cm by 3.5cm photographs. Please visit <http://www.studyjapan.go.jp/en/faq/faq03e.html> for more information.

A Certificate of Registered Items in the Foreign Resident Registry (外国人登録原票記載事項証明書) can be obtained for an administrative fee of JPY300 as the ARC can take some time to process. This document certifies the information recorded in a foreign resident's registration and can be used in lieu of the ARC for opening bank accounts and applying for mobile phone lines, as well as various other administrative procedures. Hence, it is strongly encouraged to obtain this certificate so as to facilitate these applications. NOTE: Some mobile phone companies do not accept this temporary certificate when signing up for a mobile phone line and some banks do not accept this certificate in lieu of the ARC.

### 2.2. National Health Insurance (国民健康保険) Registration

Everyone who lives in Japan is obliged by law to enrol in public health insurance so that everyone can receive medical treatment at affordable rates when ill or injured. Eligibility for health insurance does not start from the date of application, but instead the date on which enrolment should have been completed (usually 14 days after arrival). You are also required to complete foreign resident registration within 14 days of arrival in your city of residence. As

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such, it is advisable for you to register for the National Health Insurance (NHI) at the same time as your Foreign Resident Registration at the city/ward office.

When the NHI card is shown, members will bear 30% of the medical fee, while the remaining 70% will be borne by the National Health Insurance.

The costs of the insurance premium will be calculated and mailed to you. You can opt to pay the premium in one lump sum for the entire year or in monthly instalments. The deadline is at the end of the month for each payment period, and there are two methods of payment – by paying cash using the invoice\* or by debiting the amount from your bank account. The annual premium (for 12 months) will be divided into 10 portions, each to be paid from June to March of the following year. (The system is the same for both methods of payment.)

\*You can pay at banks, post offices and other financial institutions, the City Office, Branch Offices or convenience stores designated by the City Office.

## 2.3. School registration

Registration is conducted at the school administrative office (事務室). You will receive a document from the school pertaining to important information such as school semesters, rules etc. In addition, you will receive a student card (学生証) with your photograph affixed. The student card will enable you to purchase a commuter pass (定期券). The commuter pass provides unlimited rides between the train station/bus stop nearest to your place of residence and your school at a discounted monthly rate. Please note that this pass can only be purchased at designated train stations authorised by the various train companies.

## 2.4. Bank Account (銀行口座)

Unlike Singapore where some banks open until 7pm, Japanese banks usually close at 3pm. Hence, it is strongly advised that you open your bank account within the first few days of your arrival into Japan (before school starts) so that you do not have to skip lessons. This explains why you are first advised to obtain your Certificate of Registered Items in the Foreign Resident Registry at the city office, before going to open your bank account.

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You will require your ARC (外国人登録証明書)/Certificate of Registered Items in the Foreign Resident Registry (外国人登録原票記載事項証明書) and personal seal (印鑑) *inkan*\* to open a bank account. Some banks do accept signatures in place of an *inkan*.

*\*In Japan, personal seals are used as a symbol of agreement or approval, much like a signature, to verify official documents such as contracts. You can order a personal seal for your name at a stamp engraving outlet. It is not necessary that you register the imprint at the City Office. Banks do not require you to register your inkan at the City Office. Please note that personal seals are not unique and can be easily duplicated.*

The list of major banks in Tokyo is as follows:

- Japan Post Bank (ゆうちょ銀行)
- Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ (三菱東京UFJ銀行)
- Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (住友三井銀行)
- Mizuho Bank (みずほ銀行)
- Citibank Japan (English available)

The choice of banks is dependent on the individual's preferences. Different banks offer different premium services. One should also take into consideration the availability of ATMs for cash withdrawal.

Please note that unlike Singapore, ATM cash withdrawal in Japan is free only for a certain period of the day during weekdays. Handling charges will be incurred if you withdraw cash outside the specified hours. Some banks, however, provide free cash withdrawal services 24/7. These are usually small banks with a limited number of ATMs.

Please note that if you are under 20 years of age, you are still considered a minor in Japan, and will need a guardian/guarantor who is above 20 when opening your bank account.

## 2.5. Mobile Phone (携帯電話)

Mobile phones are commonplace in Japan and have a variety of functions such as mobile television, e-wallet, etc.

You will require your ARC (外国人登録証明書)/Certificate of Registered Items in the Foreign Resident Registry (外国人登録原票記載事項証明書), your bank book/credit card and personal seal (印

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鑑) *inkan* for the mobile phone line registration. Some mobile phone companies do accept signatures in lieu of an *inkan*.

In Japan, the telecomm provider provides subscription plans together with the mobile phones (*keitai denwa* or 携帯電話). The mobile phone is locked to the telecomm provider, i.e. a mobile phone bought from NTT Docomo can only be used with a NTT Docomo line. Japanese phones are designed at a hardware and software level to work with only a particular service provider. As a result they are not interchangeable even between Japanese service providers. You are hence advised to obtain your mobile phone in Japan instead of bringing a 3G phone over from Singapore, as it will not be fully compatible with the service network.

Telecomm providers provide an assortment of differentiated packages and services tailored to the needs of the individual. Phones can be subsidized or even free, although that usually requires the signing of a 2-year contract. It is highly recommended to bring along someone who is fluent in Japanese when applying for your new mobile line, as the plans and packages can be highly confusing, and you may end up with a very expensive monthly subscription when various unneeded option packages are added in.

Also, it should be noted that instead of using SMS to send text-based messages, mobile phones in Japan instead use email. However, SMS services are available for both NTT Docomo and Softbank, but not au by KDDI. Incoming calls are generally free.

The list of the major telecomm providers and some of their pros and cons are listed below:

- NTT Docomo
  - The best mobile network coverage.
  - The most expensive of the three major telecomm providers
- Softbank
  - Calls between Softbank users are free except from 9pm to 1am.
  - Offers the cheapest plans of the 3 major telecomm providers.
  - Has the worst mobile network coverage.
- au by KDDI
  - Decent mobile coverage.

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- Plans are slightly more expensive than Softbank but cheaper than NTT Docomo.
- No SMS function.

Please note again that if you are under the age of 20, you are not legally considered as an adult in Japan and hence, you will require a guarantor/guardian in your application for your mobile phone.

## 2.6. Re-entry permit

A re-entry permit is necessary if you wish to re-enter Japan after leaving the country once. If you do not apply for one, you may find yourself unable to enter Japan based on your visa. The application for your re-entry permit can be done at your nearest regional immigration bureau, and must be done before you leave Japan. The processing fee for a one-time re-entry permit is 3,000JPY, while the fee for a multiple re-entry permit is 6,000JPY. Please go to <http://www.immi-moj.go.jp/english/tetuduki/kanri/shyorui/06.html> for more information.

It is recommended that you apply for the re-entry permit together with the "Permit to Engage in Activity other than that Permitted by the Status of Residence Previously Granted" at the same time so you will only need to visit the regional immigration bureau once. It is also advisable to apply for a re-entry permit as soon as possible in the event that you need to leave Japan in a hurry.

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## 3. Contact Persons

### 3.1. Singapore Students' Association (Japan) (SSAJ)

The Singapore Students' Association (Japan), or SSAJ in short (在日シンガポール留学生協会), is an organisation for Singaporean students studying in Japan. Members are mostly full-time students doing their tertiary education here in Japan as well as exchange students here for a short period of time. SSAJ's main objective is to bring fellow Singaporeans studying in Japan closer. SSAJ holds seasonal events such as Hanami (spring), Momiji (autumn), as well as welcome parties for new students in April and October. At the same time, SSAJ works closely with the Singapore Embassy in Japan, Singapore Association in Japan (SAiJ) and Japanese University Graduates Association of Singapore (JUGAS) to ensure greater bonding between Singaporeans. SSAJ is also a member of the ASEAN Youth Network of Japan (AYNJ), which jointly organises activities such as the AYNJ Festival.

Please visit our website at <http://www.ssaj.net> and join our exciting activities!

### 3.2. Singapore Embassy in Japan

The Embassy organises functions and events to bring Singaporeans from all walks of life together, including the Singapore Student Reception, National Day Reception and the Year-end Reception.

New updates can be obtained from the embassy website: <http://www.mfa.gov.sg/tokyo/>.

### 3.3. Singapore Association in Japan (SAiJ)

The Singapore Association in Japan (SAiJ) is a non-profit volunteer association that helps to foster a community of overseas Singaporeans and friends of Singapore in Japan. The SAiJ online platform (<http://www.saij.org/>) enables members to connect with other members, meet new and old friends, organise events, and post jobs opportunities etc. Unlike SSAJ, it includes working professionals, spouses and students.

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## 4. Other information/advice

### 4.1. Learning the language

Most Japanese can read and write English at a fairly legible level, but you will find that many of them are unable to speak the language. Japanese still is the main medium for communication within Japan, and you will find that not knowing the language will greatly limit your opportunities within Japan.

Students without a Japanese language background are highly encouraged to start learning the language as early as possible. A variety of language schools are available, with the more reputable ones being Bunka Language School, Ikoma Language School and the Japanese Cultural Society, Singapore. Please visit their respective sites to obtain more information:

Bunka Language School:

<http://www.bunkalang.com/>

Ikoma Language School:

<http://ikoma.com.sg/>

The Japanese Cultural Society, Singapore:

<http://www.jcss.org.sg/jls.htm>

In order to live comfortably in Japan and converse with relative ease, it is recommended for students to attain a Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) test level of **N2**. However, it should also be noted that passing the highest proficiency level N1 does not guarantee that you will be fluent in the language. University level Japanese exceeds the learning requirements of N1 and you will find yourself still learning new things about the language despite having been in Japan for a decent amount of time.

Getting in touch with the Japanese language through television programmes, Japanese music, anime and manga would give you a good head start. As listening and reading skills improve with time, it is recommended to start early.

### 4.2. Admission process for tertiary education

For students hoping to pursue tertiary education in Japan (universities, technical schools etc.), taking the Examination for Japanese University Admission for International Students (EJU) is

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a must. The EJU is used to evaluate whether or not international students have the prerequisite Japanese language skills and academic grounding before entering a Japanese institute of higher learning.

The EJU is divided into papers for the Science stream and the Arts stream, and all the papers are in Japanese. However, both streams have a common Japanese component which mainly tests your Japanese reading, writing and listening skills. There is also an English version of the EJU, but as many reputable universities do not accept the English EJU, it is highly recommended that you take the Japanese version.

The EJU is usually conducted twice a year, once in June and once in November. Universities usually conduct their primary assessment of a potential student based on their EJU scores, and most universities tend to administer a second round of admission tests or interviews. Applications for universities/technical schools usually begin from mid-October to January. There are of course exceptions to the above norm, therefore it is strongly advisable to find out more about the admission process and criteria for the school you plan to apply to. Please go to [http://www.jasso.go.jp/eju/index\\_e.html](http://www.jasso.go.jp/eju/index_e.html) for more information regarding the EJU.

Contrary to popular belief, achieving a JLPT qualification of N1 or N2 does not provide any tangible benefits when applying for entrance into universities or technical schools. Still, the JLPT is a useful qualification to possess and may help you when applying for part-time work etc.

#### 4.3. Academic schedule

Japan's academic schedule is vastly different from the rest of the world. Japan has two semesters: summer and winter semesters. The academic year starts off with the summer semester, which begins in April and ends sometime in late July or early August. The summer break typically lasts for 2 months, after which the winter semester commences in end September or early October, and lasts till mid to late February. In the middle of the winter semester, there usually is a short 2-week break over the New Year. Spring break begins after the winter semester and ends when the following year's summer semester begins.

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## 4.4. Earthquakes

The recent 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami have raised many concerns among students already studying in Japan and prospective students wishing to study in Japan. It is a reality that Japan is the most seismically active country in the world. 90% of the world's seismic activity occurs along the Pacific Ring of Fire, which Japan happens to be situated along. In fact, Japan experiences over 1,500 earthquakes annually, and the Tokyo Metropolitan area regularly experiences tremors of varying intensities.

Given that Japan faces such a reality, the country is the best prepared in the world when it comes to earthquakes. Japan is a world leader in designing and building earthquake-proof buildings, and there are regular emergency drills conducted by the city/ward offices to educate the general public on the appropriate measures to adopt during an earthquake. Additionally, Japan has a decently robust early warning system, provided by the Japan Meteorological Agency. These warnings are usually issued via the television, radio and mobile phones. It should also be noted that these warnings, while accurate, may only give a few seconds of advance notice.

That said, earthquakes remain hard to predict. Therefore the prospective student must come mentally prepared for the fact that earthquakes are very much a part of living in Japan, and hence learn to act calmly and accordingly in the event of a major earthquake. The Tokyo Metropolitan Governments' bilingual Earthquake Survival Manual is a very useful and comprehensive guide on what to do in the event of an earthquake. It is highly recommended that prospective students read and memorize the contents of the manual, which can be found here: <http://www.seikatubunka.metro.tokyo.jp/index3files/survivalmanual.pdf>.

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