



# Focus on JAPAN

## School Program

*“Japan is contrast of old and new.... A shrine stands in front of skyscrapers. Japanese people are shy, but very friendly and like to help.... Now I know that they always have two sides, and they show one of them only to their friends.”*

*Horst, participant from Germany*

Japan is made up of four main islands: Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu as well as numerous smaller islands. Although the country's rocky landscape is cluttered with urban sprawl, the Japanese revere natural beauty, and they preserve ancient, graceful gardens, castles and shrines everywhere. The Japanese are dutiful, hardworking, honest and always mannerly. Indeed, their tradition of etiquette is so complex that they expect foreigners to commit gaffes and seldom take offense when it happens. Their respect for duty and tradition helps shape austere flower arrangements and minutely scripted tea ceremonies—as well as the production of top-rated cars and state-of-the-art electronics. A perfect symbol of Japan's East/West synthesis: fast-food restaurants sell pizzas topped with octopus.

### ***AFS & Your Experience***

AFS Japan has been in existence since 1955. More than 1,000 AFS staff and volunteers in 67 chapters across the country work hard to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. During the year, AFS Japan hosts about 230 students from 30 countries.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

### ***Landing in Japan***

#### **Your Program Begins**

After arriving at the New Tokyo International Airport in Narita (about an hour from downtown Tokyo) and collecting your baggage, you and your fellow AFSers will pass through customs and be met by AFS staff and volunteers.

## **Arrival Orientation**

First you will travel from Narita to one of four sites where you will participate in a two-to-three-day orientation. Afterward, you will go to your host community where AFS staff and volunteers will organize various activities and a local orientation.

## ***Living in Japan***

### **Life Style and Family Living**

A Japanese proverb says that the nail that sticks up gets hammered down. This saying illustrates the Japanese concern for blending in and getting along with society at large. Japanese people do not call attention to themselves and are notably polite. They prize teamwork, cooperation, industriousness, loyalty and consensus.

Family is the foundation of Japanese society, bound by a strong sense of position, obligation and responsibility. Early on, Japanese children learn the importance of group awareness and devotion, to forgo personal gain for the benefit of the group as a whole, and to value group harmony. Seniority is respected, and Japanese children are taught to hold their elders in the highest regard. Parents tend to keep a close eye on their children's behavior, and high school students are rarely allowed to go out after the evening meal.

Because the country's major cities are among the most crowded in the world, with an average population density of 335 persons per square kilometer, living space is limited, regardless of family status or income. Even in tight quarters, though, Japanese homes manage to blend ancient customs with contemporary conveniences. Traditionally, their homes are distinguished by floors made of *tatami* (straw mats), and some families sleep on futons, sit on cushions, and eat at low tables. Still, most modern homes have at least one Western-style room with a wooden or carpeted floor. When entering a house, the Japanese remove their shoes in exchange for slippers to avoid getting the floor dirty. Slippers are not worn in rooms with *tatami* floors, however.

Japanese host families, like AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives. Most AFS students are placed in small cities or rural areas.

### **Dress and Appearance**

Japanese youth wear the latest American and European fashions. AFSers should bring casual clothes, jeans, T-shirts and other light, cool items for hot or humid summer wear. Students are encouraged to bring one or two nice outfits (dress shirts and ties for men, dresses for women) for special occasions.

### **Diet and Meals**

The Japanese diet consists largely of rice, noodles, fresh vegetables, fruit, meat (mostly pork and chicken) and seafood. Meals are eaten with chopsticks. Rice and green tea are part of almost every meal. Nowadays, western style dishes are also served. Those who request special foods, prepare separate food for themselves or raid the refrigerator are frowned upon.

No lacto-ovo vegetarians will be accepted for programs in Japan. Although less strict vegetarians will be considered, acceptance to the program will depend on the availability of families willing to host students with dietary restrictions.

It is illegal for people under 20 years of age to drink or smoke in Japan.

### **School Life**

With an adult literacy rate exceeding 99%, Japanese society clearly places a high value on education. Students are expected to study hard and to get good grades in order to enter a prestigious university. Certain courses are compulsory, and students take homework seriously.

The school year consists of three terms (April through July, September through December, January through March), separated by vacations, or two terms (April through September, October through March) depending on schools. The school week runs for five days (or six for some private schools). Weekdays, public school classes begin at 8:00 or 8:30 a.m. and end at 3:00 or 3:30 p.m. Students often travel to school by bicycle, bus or train since they are not allowed to drive cars. At the end of the academic day, all students take part in *souji*, the cleaning of the school. Be aware that you will be expected to pitch in. After *souji*, school is dismissed, and most students go to club activities.

Most AFS placements are in so-called comprehensive schools, either public or private. Some placements are made in technical schools which, in addition to academics, specialize in vocational training. AFS students are generally placed in the first or second year (11th grade). During the first term, exchange students may have a chance to receive Japanese language training and take a modified academic program (e.g., English, physical education, home economics, music and art). Course work will increase in the second term as language skills improve. A certificate of attendance may be obtained upon request if a student attends all classes, completes assignments and passes exams.

Most students are required to wear uniforms. Most schools or AFS chapters will arrange for exchange students to obtain theirs from a uniform bank. Regulations may also determine the color of clothes or shoes or how uniforms are to be worn. Wearing accessories or makeup while at school is prohibited.

Participation in any school-organized trip within Japan is optional. Such trips, which are at the expense of the student, may cost from US\$600 (domestic travel) to US\$1,600 (overseas travel).

### **Teen Life**

School is probably the best place to make friends and meet people. Japanese teenagers devote themselves almost entirely to schoolwork and extracurricular clubs that fall into two general categories: sports (baseball, soccer, judo, kendo, track, tennis, swimming, softball, volleyball, rugby, etc.) and culture (English, broadcasting, calligraphy, science, mathematics, yearbook planning, etc.). Because clubs meet nearly every day for about two hours, it is best to join only one or two. Japanese teens also enjoy going to movies or shopping as a group on weekends.

## **AFS Activities**

In addition to an orientation at your arrival, AFS will provide you with several others. AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) and talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational; bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experience.

AFS volunteers will plan enrichment activities for you during your stay. These can include informal gatherings, picnics and weekend excursions.

## **Travel**

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Japan, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to become immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have opportunities to travel with your host family, community organization, local chapter or AFS Japan. We strongly discourage traveling on your own or with friends.

## **Spending Money**

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do such things as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the expenses are your responsibility. But remember that spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them.

To cover your spending money needs, AFS recommends that approximately US\$1,500 in traveler's checks should be sufficient for an entire year.

## **Safety and Support**

Japan is a safe country with a low crime rate, and you should do well if you follow the normal precautions you would use in your home country.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as a Japanese native. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates either of these rules will be automatically sent home. AFS Japan has additional rules, such as no smoking and no drinking alcohol.

## **Health Precautions**

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Japan (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant your medical expenses are

covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

### **Documents**

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through consulate offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you acquire your visa and will provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

### **Program Prices**

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

## ***Country Information***

### **Culture**

Japanese culture today is extremely diverse. It is a fascinating mixture of old and new, Eastern and Western. At the same time, a rapid process of industrialization over the past century has turned Japan into one of the world's most advanced industrial countries. In Japan, ancient traditions and advanced technologies coexist to create a stimulating environment.

### **Geography and Climate**

Japan is an island nation located off the eastern seaboard of the Asian continent in the Northern Hemisphere. The Japanese archipelago stretches over 3,500 km and is situated between approximately 20° and 45° north latitude. Its surface area totals 380,000 square kilometers, equivalent to 0.3 percent of the global land mass.

Japan is composed of four main islands: Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu, as well as numerous smaller islands. Approximately 73% of the land consists of

mountainous regions. Japan's industrial and agricultural areas are situated in the remaining part of the country. Volcanic and earthquake belts lie across Japan and its coastal waters, and the activities of these belts have combined to create mountains and hot springs, and they often cause earthquakes.

Generally the climate is temperate with hot, humid summers and cold winters. Snowfall is especially heavy in the north and along the Japan Sea coast, but it is light in southern Japan and along the Pacific coast. From August through October, the islands are subject to typhoons. Also, Japan is prone to earthquakes.

### **Population**

The population numbers about 127 million; Tokyo is the capital and has a population of 12 million.

### **Language**

Japanese is the language of Japan.

### **Government**

Japan is a constitutional monarchy. Emperor Akihito is the symbolic chief of state while the Prime Minister heads the government. There is a bicameral legislature—known as the Diet—which is composed of the House of Representatives (*Shugi-In*) and the House of Councilors (*Sangi-In*). The Prime Minister is a member of the Diet, and is elected by the Diet.

### **Religion**

Most Japanese practice a combination of Buddhism and Shinto, but few attend religious services on a regular basis. Life cycle events such as the birth of a baby are often marked by visits to a Shinto shrine, while funerals are usually conducted by a Buddhist priest. With a few exceptions, most Japanese holidays are secular.

## ***Launching Your AFS Experience***

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key Japanese words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To familiarize yourself further with life in Japan, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Japan and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Japan. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living as a Japanese. If you do not know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Japan will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information: "Konnichiwa," "Tips for Your Safety in Japan" and "Listen & Practice."

Japanese people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

### Curiously Japanese

- ✦ The world's oldest novel—The Tale of Genji—was written in Japan in the eleventh century.
- ✦ Japanese cooks honor their retired knives with a burial ceremony. They come together periodically and carry the oldest knives to a shrine to say good-bye.
- ✦ The Japanese love corn, sesame seeds and mayonnaise on pizza.
- ✦ The islands of Japan are actually the exposed tops of huge undersea ridges. These ridges rise up out of the Pacific Ocean
- ✦ Japan has more earthquakes than any other country in the world.

### How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student age (upon arrival)	16Y to 18Y, 6 mos.	
Country data	Size	380,000 km <sup>2</sup> 146,000 mi <sup>2</sup>
	Population	127,214,500
	Official language	Japanese
	Government	Constitutional monarchy
Currency	Yen	
Useful websites	<a href="http://www.jinjapan.org/kidsweb/">http://www.jinjapan.org/kidsweb/</a> <a href="http://home.att.ne.jp/delta/hiroakabuchi/">http://home.att.ne.jp/delta/hiroakabuchi/</a> <a href="http://www.amphi.com/~psteffen/fmf/">http://www.amphi.com/~psteffen/fmf/</a> <a href="http://www.jinjapan.org/">http://www.jinjapan.org/</a>	
AFS Japan website	<a href="http://www.afs.or.jp/">http://www.afs.or.jp/</a>	

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>