



Fulbright Fellow Handbook

Compiled by Fulbright Fellows from 2010-22

Table of Contents

Pre-departure	3	Support	18
Checklist	3	Socializing in Japan	20
Language Study	4	Making Friends	20
Packing	5	Clubs & サークル	20
Arrival	6	Volunteering	21
Arrival Checklist	6	Drinking & Drugs	21
Airport Procedures	7	Dating	21
Cell Phone	7	Holidays	22
Health Insurance	8	Managing Loneliness	22
Banking	8	Research in Japan	24
Credit Cards	9	Daily Schedule	24
Life In Japan	11	Staying Motivated	24
Finances	11	Classes	24
Dorm vs. Apartment	11	Relationship with Your Advisor	25
Furnishing Your Space	12	Working in a Lab	26
Utilities	13	Interviews	27
Internet	14	Fieldwork	27
Trash	14	Networking	27
Food	14	Applying to Graduate School from Japan	28
Vegetarianism in Japan	15	Applying to Graduate School in Japan	29
Medicine	15	Orientation	31
Fitness	16	Personal Responsibilities	31
Bikes	16	Fulbright as a “Limbo Year”	32
Domestic Travel	16	Monthly Reports	32
Train	17	Midyear Conference	33
Plane	17	Relationship with JUSEC	33
Highway Bus	17	Exit Interview	33
Car	18	Credits	34
International Travel	18		

Pre-departure

Checklist

Acquire Visa

Although you will receive instructions from Fulbright, make sure to double check your consulate website for application instructions. It is a good idea to call and talk to the consulate if you have any questions to avoid any issues with your application. Be sure to account for the time it will take for acquiring an official passport photo (e.g. CVS, Walgreens, post office), application preparation, and processing time. For many consulates it is necessary to apply in person.

Create electronic copies of documents

Copies of your Visa, Passport, Fulbright Grant Authorization, and other important documents which can verify your identity and purpose of being in the country will come in handy several times during your grant period. These will likely be requested by your affiliation/universities and by your realtor.

Complete and return the Health Certificate to IIE

Submit your Supplementary Information Sheet and Biodata sheet.

Submit your Japan-bound Travel Plan for Grantee

Check the deadline for this and be sure to submit it in a timely manner

Start looking at housing

While some fellows receive help from their affiliation to find housing, many have found that contacting a real estate agent or finding housing (dorms, share houses, etc.) ahead of arrival can significantly improve the settling-in process. Your advisor may be able to connect you with an international student office or institutional general affairs office in order to assist with this. There are also some foreigner-friendly apartment-search websites (such as <https://realestate.co.jp>) which are accustomed to helping short-stay foreigners find housing. For more details, see: [Dorm vs. Apartment](#)

Plan your cell phone situation

Nothing will make the arrival process easier than having a working cell phone immediately when you land in Japan. Being able to use cellular data is essential for navigation once you arrive. Fortunately, there are many options you can start looking into now. See: [Cell Phone](#)

Pack omiyage for your affiliate

Consider bringing chocolates/cookies/other sweet food sets that could be easily shared by members of your lab (individually wrapped items are best). Photography books or calendars about your state/city or other university or home state memorabilia could also be good options.

Note: It is best to bring nicer omiyage for your professors.

Note: Given that you will meet a variety of individuals throughout the grant, it can be useful to bring a small stock of extra omiyage such as pencils, candies, etc.

Language Study

Targeted Study

Before you arrive in Japan, it would be beneficial to study the phrases that you will frequently hear and use immediately upon disembarking the plane. It is particularly helpful to prepare for specific scenarios such as checking in and out of hotels, ordering food at restaurants, and interacting with convenience store staff. These set phrases are used so often that people may not enunciate them clearly. Therefore, it helps to anticipate what is going to be said. Listening to natural conversations and being able to participate in them is the hardest part of language learning for many Fulbrighters. Even scripted recordings of native speakers can fail to prepare you for the way people naturally speak. Studying by listening to diverse sources of unscripted speech in Japanese, such as YouTube videos, live streams, or reality tv dramas, can significantly improve your comfort with everyday use of the language.

The most important written Japanese to understand before arrival is food kanji. Using Google Maps, you can click on restaurants in Japan and study the menus. Many Japanese restaurants and izakayas offer similar dishes, so understanding these words will enable you to order with confidence every time you go out.

Lastly, preparing a thorough self-introduction would be a great way to boost your confidence as you build a new network of friends and mentors in Japan.

General Study

Studying fundamental Japanese grammar and vocabulary will likely continue to remain important even long after you arrive. These are

suggested resources that Fellows have found helpful in the past:

New JLPT Kanzen Master (完全マスター) series

Target 2000 vocabulary and kanji books

Tobira, Genki

Remembering the Kanji by James Heisig

Some have also found electronic dictionaries and phone apps (e.g. Midori, Imi wa, Yomi wa, ALC, and Norikai Annai for iPhone or Android) very helpful.

Try setting goals that you can reasonably accomplish, such as reading a paper in academic Japanese to learn common phrases and vocab. Alternatively, reading light novels (illustrated novels aimed at young adults, usually located between the literature and manga sections in the bookstore) and other Japanese books (e.g. Murakami Haruki) is another good way to expand your Japanese skills while developing interests that may overlap with your future connections in Japan. On the whole, fellows come from a variety of linguistic and educational backgrounds, so do not be too intimidated if you are concerned that your level is relatively low. However, previous fellows have found that a higher level of Japanese language proficiency substantially improves the ease of forming social connections and making friends. For this reason, focusing on basic conversational skills may be the best use of your time.

Packing

Depending on your physical size, be aware that purchasing shoes and clothing may be difficult for you in Japan. Japanese shoe stores do not usually carry footwear over US size 12 for men or 8 for women, or under U.S. size 5½ for women. Also, since Japanese people always

take off their shoes before entering houses, changing rooms, and some restaurants or attractions, try to bring shoes that will be really easy to take off and put on. For specifics, check online for shoe size conversion. Additionally, keep in mind that the sizing system in U.S. differs from that in Japan. Most sizes in Japan fit snugger than the equivalent size in the U.S.

Here is a list of things you simply will not be able to find in Japan, so it would be a good idea to bring them with you:

- Medicine (see note below)
- Japanese deodorant is notoriously weak, so bring some with you.
- Toothbrushes with a full-sized head/ toothbrushes for sensitive teeth.
- Shoes over U.S. women's size 8 or over men's size 12
- If you have a particular kind of contact solution you like, especially for sensitive eyes, you may want to bring it with you
- Period pads may not be as effective as ones in the US, and tampons are very difficult if not impossible to find in Japan.
- If you have any three-pronged electronics, you will need an adaptor. You can buy these either in Japan or the States.
- A number of foods available in the US are not available in Japan, so if you

have a food that you are particularly set on having, be sure to bring it or confirm whether or not it is available.

A note about toothpaste: Be sure to look for fluoridated toothpaste (it will say フッ化ナトリウム on the label) or you may come back with some cavities.

A note on medicine:

Of course, you will need to bring a supply of any prescription medicine that you will need or want. Japanese stores will not necessarily carry the brands that you are used to, so plan accordingly. However, if you are planning to bring medicine with you, be sure to check what medicines are not allowed through customs into Japan.

Also, it may be difficult to get birth control, depending on where you are living in Japan, as it sometimes requires frequent trips to the doctor to get one's prescription extended month by month. Check with your consulate to see if you will need to fill out any paperwork regarding medications. Please be aware that some medicine prescribed in the U.S. (i.e. pain medication) may be illegal in Japan.

See:

<https://jp.usembassy.gov/services/importing-medications/>

Arrival

Checklist

Arrive at airport

The process of entering Japan for long-term stay is different from some other countries. It may take a moment for the Immigration official to remember what the necessary documents are, since Fulbright Fellows are not commonly encountered. There is no need to panic if several higher ups are called over and you are asked to wait or provide additional information. If you get stuck at immigration for a while, it may be helpful to provide the immigration officials with the contact information of the Fulbright Japan office. Once they are ready to approve your entry into the country, they will create your zairyū card 在留カード and take your fingerprint. Then, you go to claim your baggage and go through Customs. Onboard your flight, you will be given some forms to fill out in advance so you can speed through this step. Be sure to check the train and bus schedules to ensure you will be able to get from the airport to the hotel. Taxis are substantially more expensive than other forms of public transportation. You should plan your route from the airport to the hotel ahead of time. If it is raining on the day of your arrival, it is common for all taxis to be booked, so you may not be able to get a taxi without a prior reservation.

Take the opportunity to purchase an IC Card as soon as you can. These cards can be charged at train stations and convenience stores and can be used to pay for public transportation as well as many other things everywhere in Japan outside of Okinawa.

Check In to Hotel until end of Fulbright Orientation

The Fulbright Orientation process varies year by year, so make sure you're up-to-date with your Fulbright rep.

Get your cell phone working

Having a Japanese cell phone number can make your housing search much easier. If you already have housing, then this step can be postponed until you are ready to open a bank account. See: [Cell Phone](#)

Head to your city

If you're going to be staying in a hotel or such while you're looking for a permanent place to live, it's a good idea to plan for that as soon as possible. One year, the Fulbright Fellows were entering during a holiday weekend, which made it difficult for some to find affordable arrangements.

Acquire housing

A residential address is usually a prerequisite for opening a bank account. If you find temporary housing, you may be able to register with it until you get a permanent address. Check at your local ward/city office. Re-registering your address is inconvenient though, so it's better to find a permanent housing address sooner rather than later. Some Fulbrighters find housing ahead of time through their host professor or staff (in a dormitory or other off-campus arrangement) while others are required to find it on their own once on-site.

Register your address and get health insurance (in 1 go)

If possible, ask a Japanese person to come with you to assist in this process, as it can be difficult to navigate alone. Also, make sure to ask about omitting Pension Service. You do not have to pay into the national pension during your stay here. Expect this process to take about 2-3 hours. You will need to go through this procedure again if you move addresses. See more about [Health Insurance](#)

Get a bank account

There are a lot of considerations to make before opening your bank account because many banks have restrictions on accounts for foreigners who newly arrived in Japan. Our advice can be found in the [Banking](#) section.

Airport Procedures

At customs when entering Japan, you will receive your 在留カード (Zairyū Card) which is an identification card that you will use like your driver's license in the U.S. You are required by law to present your 在留カード to police and immigration officials upon request, but not to anyone else. While banks, telecom companies, and landlords may request it by default, you are not required to use it in these situations and can use any other form of legal, Japan-issued ID, such as a drivers' license or Health ID card (国民健康保険証明書) instead. Once you have alternate ID, it's generally preferable to use it rather than the 在留カード. For instance, some banks refuse to open accounts for foreigners whose cards suggest that they have been in Japan less than six months and some mobile phone shops are reluctant to set up contracts for those holding cards with only a one-year period of stay; other legally valid IDs don't provide this information and thus avoid the issue entirely. Within 14 days of finding a permanent residence, you'll need to take your 在留カード to the local city hall (市役所) or ward office (区役所) and register your address. An official 住民票 (residency record) will be created

for you, and your address will be recorded on the back of your 在留カード. At the same time, you will need to register for 国民健康保険, Japan's national health insurance scheme.

If you later move, or your status of residency changes, you'll need to return to the city hall or ward office to update your 在留カード, 住民票, and other documents.

Cell Phone

It is important to start thinking about cell phone service well before you arrive in Japan. Most U.S. phones are compatible with Japanese providers. All iPhones will work in Japan. Check the willmyphonework website if you are unsure. You cannot sign up for most accounts, including a bank account, without a Japanese phone number.

There are three main cell phone providers in Japan: au, docomo, or SoftBank. On top of that, there are countless subcontractors of these main providers which specialize in discounted plans for different groups, like foreigners! By far, the cheapest and easiest way to get a cell phone setup in Japan with data and a Japanese phone number is by using the phone you

already have and putting a Japanese SIM card in it. There are several no-contract SIM card providers who cater to foreigners such as Mobal, GTN Mobile, Sakura Mobile. Some providers will even ship the SIM card to the U.S. so you can install it and use it immediately after you land in Tokyo. Others have brick-and-mortar stores to pick up your SIM card or allow you to sign up from your hotel room, where they will ship the card within 1-2 days. With Mobal, you can purchase a SIM card in the USA and delay activation until the day you travel to Japan. As of 2021, Mobal provides unlimited data and no contract period, making it extremely convenient.

If you find it impossible to get a SIM card for your current smartphone, the next-best option for getting a Japanese phone number would be purchasing the cheapest prepaid phone from a technology store after you arrive in Japan. Places like Yodobashi Camera or BIC Camera will have many options. Then, to take care of your mobile data needs, there are pocket wifi services which allow you to pay a similar monthly fee to a normal phone plan. These services will provide you with a small puck which runs on battery and uses a cellular connection to provide you with a personal wifi network at all times. This way, you can use your current smartphone almost as if you were in the U.S.

Warning: If you bring your current smartphone to Japan, please cancel your U.S. service or simply remove the U.S. SIM card before you land. If you do not, there is a high probability that your carrier will charge you exorbitant international data fees for each day of service.

This is not an exhaustive list of options. There are many alternative ways to get connected in Japan, including buying an entirely new

Japanese smartphone, but the recommendations above are almost certainly the easiest and most cost-effective.

Health Insurance

In Japan, you are required to be covered by health insurance, which is taken care of by a mixture of the national health insurance plan and private insurance provided by Fulbright. While the Fulbright insurance does cover some costs, you are required to enroll in Japan's national health insurance as well. You can register with zero income, since your grants aren't taxable in Japan, leaving your monthly payments fairly low. In exchange, you are given up to 70% coverage of all medical costs at most clinics in the country. This works best in conjunction with the Fulbright insurance because you can claim the remaining 30% of costs after the fact from your other insurance. During orientation, the Fulbright office will give you all information about the program and the documents you need to fill out to claim, so it works as a nice backup to the national insurance, ensuring that you don't need to pay all costs directly out of pocket while you wait to be reimbursed. However, if you do use the Fulbright health insurance at any point (or even your own American insurance plan) make sure you get receipts for every single thing you want reimbursed, and check with your insurance plan ahead of time about what they might need to make sure claims are able to be processed.

Banking

Before setting up a bank account, it is important to get a Japanese phone number. Please see our guide to [cell phone service](#).

At the start of the Fulbright, you need to open a bank account at a convenient location near your residence. There are a number of banks within Japan that you might pick, all with different procedures for creating an account. If you set up your account in person, you will need to bring your passport, your Zairyū card, and documents validating your affiliation with Fulbright and your Japanese host university. Some banks may require a name stamp (印鑑, inkan), which you may either order online, at a specialty store, or even some Don Quixote locations.

Depending on the institution, there are a variety of restrictions. Some banks will not allow you to open an account until you have spent six months in Japan, for example. Once you have opened an account, there might also be restrictions on the services available to you for a certain amount of time. Verify several times during the application process that you will be able to receive bank transfers from Fulbright. Rules and procedures can vary from branch to branch, so please be aware that you are likely to come across unexpected difficulties.

A bank often recommended to foreigners is the Japan Post Bank (JP Bank). This was previously the nationalized bank system, only privatized in the 1990s, so it is accessible around the country. Most JP Bank locations do not require a personal stamp (inkan) to set up an account, but your results may vary outside of Tokyo. Also, please note that JP Bank does not consider you a resident until you have been in the country for over 6 months. During this non-resident period, they will charge you an international remittance fee (¥7,500 as of 2022) for all bank transfers, even if they are not international transfers. Since many of us pay rent using bank transfers, this is an important consideration.

You should definitely open your bank account in-person rather than using the mail-in form to avoid issues with processing your personal information, such as if your name is longer or otherwise more complex compared to a typical Japanese name. You should also set aside at least three hours of time to the process of setting up your account.

Major post offices also tend to have reliable ATMs that are compatible with foreign cards. Alternatively, 7-Eleven has international ATMs at almost all of its locations, and in the major cities it is not too difficult to find a Citibank branch, which also has ATMs capable of international transfers. It's a good idea to ask about any fees that you might have to pay to use the ATM as you may have to pay a fee to use the ATM after business hours, and an extra fee to use it on the weekends.

A note on bank transfers:

Most banks in the U.S. and Japan will charge high fees and provide a substandard exchange rate for international transfers. We recommend using the service [Wise](#) if you encounter the need to transfer money U.S. dollars to or from your Japanese bank account.

Credit Cards

The majority of websites will allow you to use a foreign credit card as a payment method, but there are occasional exceptions to this rule. Also, JP bank accounts usually will not allow you to make online payments or digital transactions. Furthermore, it is important to be aware of possible foreign transaction fees charged by the U.S. bank.

If you want to avoid using a U.S. credit card, it might be best to apply for a Japanese one

within the first few months of your grant. Applying for a credit card as a foreigner has a reputation for being difficult to impossible, but Fulbright Fellows who have tried have generally succeeded (e.g. ANA, JAL, AEON, and Rakuten cards). Store and airline-issued cards are easier to get than bank-issued cards, and the reward programs they offer can be beneficial. If you make most of your purchases with your ANA card, for instance, you can easily accumulate a free flight or two over the course of your Fulbright year. Similarly, a Rakuten card will quickly net you an all-expenses-paid online shopping spree.

To improve your chances of success, apply using an ID that doesn't immediately identify you as a short-term resident, such as a Japan-issued drivers' license or your 国民健康保険証明書 rather than your 在留カード. Listing a landline rather than mobile phone number is also reportedly helpful. Don't be afraid to ask for help; the employees staffing the credit card

application kiosks in department stores and train stations get a commission for each successful applicant, so they have every incentive to show you how to fill in the forms to your advantage.

If you can't get a Japanese card, there are a handful of American-issued cards with no foreign transaction fees and useful reward schemes that can still help you out in Japan. American Express' Platinum card has no forex fees, provides airport lounge access, and has reward points that transfer to ANA; Chase's Sapphire Preferred card has similar benefits and points that can be used on United or Korean Air.

Separately, there are many consumer benefit cards like WAON cards at AEON grocery stores and shopping malls. These kinds of cards can save you money if used regularly, and require minimal setup. Alternatively, some banks such as Shinsei will issue debit cards that can be useful.

Life In Japan

Finances

Simply put, you will have enough money. The monthly stipend provided by Fulbright is more than generous and will allow you to live comfortably with plenty left over. You should be able to pay rent, buy some good eats, go out on weekends, and take the occasional vacation without putting yourself in the red. That said, it's still important to budget yourself because you will likely have to pay taxes on that generous stipend (taxes will vary by individual circumstances, but be prepared to put aside somewhere between \$1000~\$2000). Fulbright legally cannot provide tax-related advice, so it is best to seek outside professional advice or consultation in the US.

Furthermore, if your research involves many trips, be sure to prepare finances a month or more in advance lest things become tight by the end of the month. Commute by bike, scope out the cheaper grocery stores, and, when you travel, use an agency. You don't have to worry, but it does help to be frugal.

Dorm vs. Apartment

Shortly after you receive information from Fulbright on your university placement, you will be given the opportunity to choose whether you wish to live in a university dormitory or an apartment. Finding housing is solely your responsibility, so it is best to be aggressive in your search. We all started with zero information about the options available to us, but finding people to help you, both in the form of school contacts and realtors, will make this process significantly easier. Both apartments and dorms

have advantages and disadvantages, but remember that you will be in Japan! Nothing will be unbearable, and there are ways to make the best of any situation. If necessary, you can always change plans halfway through.

Dorm rent will be much cheaper than apartment rent, but since Fulbright adjusts housing payments accordingly, it is best to first and foremost seek to accommodate your other living needs. University dorms vary in style, from standard dormitory-style housing (with individual bedrooms and shared common rooms for the entire dorm), to suite-style housing, with 2-4 people sharing a common space. Details vary depending on the location, however you may expect that by choosing a dorm, your room will already come furnished, and you will be living among other students (most likely all foreign, but potentially some Japanese as well) who you can befriend.

The dormitory is likely the best choice for an easy moving-in process. Often you can move in immediately upon arrival. The room is usually already furnished, the utilities and internet will probably already be set up, and it will likely be located close to campus. On the other hand, some dorms do have inconveniences such as strict "no visitor" policies and less privacy.

Living in an apartment can be a rewarding choice in gaining the autonomy needed to pursue a Fulbright project and will also reinforce the fact that you are, in fact, not an exchange student. This will provide you with more freedom to interact with the local community and will certainly accelerate your personal growth. Also, know that many Japanese students live in single-person apartments, too.

The biggest challenge of living in an apartment is the first month of finding housing, signing the contract, and connecting utilities. If you live in a big city, there will be real estate websites which provide information in English and cater to housing foreigners. If you don't have luck with that, many traditional realtors have at least one office with an English-speaking staff member. In any case, it is vitally important to be in contact with a human during your apartment search. Information on apartment hunting websites is often outdated, and many landlords who claim to be foreigner-friendly are not. A human realtor will do a lot of arguing on your behalf and will also provide invaluable help teaching you everything you need to know to start your new life (how to separate trash, how to set up utilities, where you can get cheap furniture).

Another sore spot with apartments is the initial cost. Besides the higher rent, you will likely be required to pay a deposit (敷金, shikikin) which should be refunded to you later on assuming the room is left in good condition, key money (礼金, reikin) which is a non-refundable gift to the building owner to "thank" them for renting you the room, and a commission fee (手数料, tesūyou), roughly equal to 1 month rent, given to the real estate agent. Even if you use a real estate website, they will charge you a commission fee. In addition to these standard fees, be prepared to pay a little bit extra for a cleaning fee and fire/flood insurance. In total, the upfront costs will be about 3-4x your rent. These fees will not be covered by the Fulbright housing stipend.

Besides these costs, be aware that a Japanese guarantor is often requested for leases, but both Fulbright and your University may be able to fulfill this requirement for you. Also, you should not expect anything more than a small, studio

apartment style room, despite the higher monthly rent. Rooms at a private apartment are usually not furnished, so purchasing all electric appliances and furniture (like refrigerators, mattresses, gas stoves, and internet) can be assumed as additional charges. Recent fellows strongly encourage exploring your local recycle-shop or used furniture store, where all of the above can be purchased very cheaply.

Although it may be time consuming, it is a good idea to explore many options because it is possible to find apartments with relatively low up-front costs. For instance, one Fulbrighter was able to find an apartment near her university that required no key money and only a one month deposit.

Some Fulbrighters decide to live in an international share house during their grant period. Share houses are dorm-style living spaces with a shared kitchen and bathrooms. Though you often need to pay the electricity in your own room (which ends up included in the month's rent), all other utilities are included in the rent at a flat rate. There are some limitations as far as accommodating friends, but it's a nice option for those who don't want to go through a lot of hassle. It also forces you to meet with people, Japanese or otherwise, and it can be an additional opportunity to make some friends during your time in Japan. Some share houses have rooms of different sizes, but if you like having a lot of private space, you might opt for an apartment instead.

Furnishing Your Space

Many previous Fulbrighters have preferred finding furnished apartments. In addition to the difficulty of transporting furniture (if moving), disposing of furniture can be a difficult and costly process. However, for those Fellows who

decide to live in an unfurnished apartment, the following lists can be helpful.

A Helpful Move-in Checklist:

- futon/bed
- desk & chair/kotatsu & floor mat or chair
- clothes hangers/clothes rack, laundry basket, equipment for air-drying clothes
- laundry detergent
- slippers for inside the apartment
- cleaning supplies, toilet paper, paper towels, hand soap, dish soap
- drawers to store your clothes in
- kitchenware
- bathroom stuff: body wash, shampoo, bath towel
- trash can

Here are a handful of items that you might find useful when furnishing your apartment. You can easily find them at ¥100 stores, second hand stores, or housing goods stores (i.e., D2, AEON, Daiso).

- mesh drain nets (¥100 store)
- in lieu of a vacuum, you can buy a sticky roller to clean the floor (housing goods store or ¥100 store)
- window insulation and/or electric blanket for the winter cold (AEON)
- drying rack for dishes (¥100 store)
- clothes drying rack (for those who don't use/have the drying/hanging/line on the balcony: second hand store)
- Garbage bags—you will likely need different ones for each kind of garbage (but it depends on your living situation and whether you're required to)! (grocery store)
- Don't buy cookware at the ¥100 store. They break when heated.

A great place to purchase furniture goods is from a chain store called Nitori (ニトリ). It's like the IKEA of Japan. IKEA also exists in Japan too if you want Western stuff, but their store locations are limited and they do not sell any Japanese furniture (i.e., futon, kotatsu, etc). Lastly, several fellows have found 一人暮らし (hitorigurashi) sets on Amazon that are useful after the initial move into your residency.

Utilities

If you are in a dorm, utilities may be covered by your rent, or they may be set, shared, or come bundled in one bulk payment. Otherwise, you will need to make monthly or bimonthly payments for gas, electricity and water to three different companies. Upon move in, you should receive information from your dorm manager or real estate agent regarding activating and paying for utilities. The utilities in an apartment will be turned off when you arrive, so you will need to call each company and give them your information so they can turn your utilities on by move-in time. Consider having a Japanese-speaking friend either call on your behalf, or on standby to help with any misunderstandings. Electricity and water can be turned on remotely, but gas usually has to be turned on via appointment. If you are living in an apartment and are purchasing your own appliances, make sure to check what kind of gas your building uses before you purchase a gas top/stove (ガスコンロ). Buildings in Japan use either propane or natural gas, and gas stoves designed for one type of gas supply are incompatible with the other. It is incredibly dangerous to hook up the wrong type of gas top/stove, so please check this thoroughly as you move into your apartment. More often than not the gas company will automatically send someone over to your apartment to turn on your

gas and that the stove installation has been done correctly, and if they do not, it is highly recommended that you request a specialist to come to your place. You may also have the option to rent a gas meter for your apartment to detect gas leaks for a small additional price, which is highly recommended for the sake of safety. Induction heating (IH) stoves and cookware have become popular in recent years. A single portable IH hot plate for about ¥5,000 can serve most of a single person's cooking needs.

You will likely have many options for paying utility bills. Before leaving Japan, you will need to call the utilities companies to let them know when your utilities should be turned off. Make sure to leave extra time (a month or more) and money to cover final utilities costs, because companies will have to send someone to check the meter one last time.

Internet

Gaining internet access in Japan may require time and effort. Most dorms will provide Internet, but you may not have access until you receive a username and password from your university. Unless you move into an apartment that explicitly states that it has internet, you will be responsible for contacting an internet service provider yourself. Internet prices vary by company and by location, so carefully investigate your options and remember that many companies will not be able to install internet for up to two weeks. Past Fulbrighters report that Jcom installed internet service in only a few days and offered a package deal. Consider asking your real estate agent if they have a company to recommend. While more and more residencies are including internet, it can cost you between ¥2,000 and ¥6,000 per month in cases where it is not provided.

Trash

Trash rules differ from city to city and region to region. In general, expect to separate combustible or burnable garbage (i.e. most of your trash) from PET bottles and noncombustible or non-burnable garbage. The definition of what constitutes non-combustible garbage varies by locale, but you can count on receiving a pamphlet with information about this once you register your address and sign up for National Health Insurance at your local ward office (区役所). Ensure that you carefully read and follow all of the trash disposal information provided by your local Ward. Making a mistake could result in an angry letter in your mailbox.

Food

If you love Japanese food (or eating in general), living in Japan will be a wonderful experience due to the sheer number of delicious restaurants you will find in every nook and cranny of cities all across the country but living in Japan will require some adjustments to your home cooking strategies. For example, most single-person apartments in Japan only have a single electric or gas burner and the lack of familiar ingredients available at the grocery store can also be disorienting. However, it is a good opportunity to be creative! YouTube is a fantastic resource and you can consider creative uses of your rice cooker to make jambalaya, banana bread, monkey bread, and even cake. It is also easy to find 一人暮らし (hitori gurashi/living alone) cookbooks in any library, so that could give you ideas of what kinds of cooking is possible with the cookware and groceries available in Japan.

When you eat out, know in advance how to read the kanji of foods that you are allergic to, how to

ask the staff about particular ingredients, and plan in advance for an emergency. If you cannot read or speak Japanese, it would be extremely beneficial to have a friend write your allergies on a card for you. Then you could show it to the waiters/staff whenever you eat out.

Vegetarianism in Japan

Japan can be notoriously difficult for strict vegetarians, though pescatarians need not worry. If you are committed to remaining vegetarian, learning your options for eating out and cooking on your own are essential. Here are some general things to keep in mind while examining menus in search of meatless options: Learn to read the kanji for various meats (chicken 鶏肉, pork 豚肉, beef 牛肉, fish 魚).

Keep in mind that vegetarianism is rare among Japanese people. You will therefore have to be very clear when explaining exactly what you can and cannot eat.

For Japanese people, fish and sea creatures are often not considered meat. Another common assumption is that chicken—allowed in many religion-related meat restrictive diets—can be eaten by anyone, vegetarian or otherwise. Sometimes you might ask for meat to be left out (*niku nuki onegaishimasu*), and while the beef will be removed, seasoning like bacon bits or even full chicken pieces will remain. On other occasions, meat will be taken out of the main dish, but left in all the side dishes. When it comes to eating out and ordering “*niku nuki*”, you may have to literally specify all meats by name in order to be successful. Some restaurants will not allow alterations to the menu, but most will be as accommodating.

Completely vegetarian restaurants DO exist in Japan! A good website for finding these rare gems is happycow.net. You can search by city,

and it usually gives you a handful of places, reviews, and a map. Most Japanese vegetarian places also serve ‘genmai’, brown/unpolished rice, tend to be not just vegetarian but vegan, and more often than not organic and/or “microbiotic.” In addition, there is something called “*shojin ryori*.” This is the food that Buddhist monks eat. There are specific restaurants that serve ‘*shojin ryori*’ meals and while it is a highly recommended experience, it is usually very expensive—often around 3000 yen at the cheapest. Consider it more of a treat or cultural experience rather than a daily option.

When cooking your own fare, you will find that most of the vegetables you are accustomed to from the United States are also available in Japanese grocery stores, along with an abundance of Japanese favorites like bean sprouts, cucumbers, cabbage, sweet potatoes, eggplants and many varieties of Japanese beans. You are sure to encounter some new types of vegetables, too—like daikon (Japanese radish), gobou (burdock root), renkon (lotus root), nira (garlic chive grass), and many delicious mushrooms with which you might not be familiar. There is plenty of packaged tofu that you can buy and easily add to dishes to up your protein intake, and soy milk (*tounyū*) is available even in convenience stores. If you can cook on your own you can recreate vegetarian versions of almost any Japanese food. Just buy a Japanese cook book, and leave out what you cannot eat or make alterations as necessary! Try inviting friends over to share your creations!

Medicine

If you ever happen to find yourself with a headache, nausea, or even athlete’s foot, you might have a hard time navigating Japan’s over-the-counter remedies. While aspirin, especially the brand Bufferin, can be found just

about anywhere, the selection of “Western” medicines is pretty small so if you have an affinity for some particular OTC remedy from the States, it is advisable that you bring a year’s supply with you to Japan. Alternatively, medicines available in the US are sometimes sold in Japan under a different brand name or a different intended treatment purpose despite having the same ingredients. Speaking with a Japanese pharmacist or searching online before arrival can be helpful when determining this. Also, remember that cold medicine is very rare in Japan.

You can only purchase medicine, even the basic stuff, at special Medicine Stores (くすりや/薬局) and Drugstores (ドラッグストア). The staff is always very helpful and if you explain your symptoms, even with just a word or two out of a dictionary, they’ll show you what they have to offer.

Fitness

Signing up for gym membership is always an option, but most cities have a plethora of beautiful parks that are available for running or biking, and you will see many people out exercising. Walking is also an easy way to stay active, and you’ll find that, without a car like in the US, you’ll end up walking much more than you do at home. You can also consider joining some sort of sports-related club through your university, which can be a great way to both make friends and stay active. There also may be training facilities available at your school, so check and see if that exists. In general, gym memberships can be quite expensive, so ensure that you understand the details of your plan before signing up. Some gyms offer discounted rates if you opt to use the facilities during only certain times of day.

Bikes

Unless you are living in a very hilly city, buying a bike may well be a wise investment. Before you make the decision to purchase a bike, ask your university affiliation contact if they have bikes available to foreign exchange students (they might even have household items from past exchange students as well). If you go to one of the large discount stores (Don Quixote, Lumiere, etc.), expect to pay about ¥7,000 or ¥8,000. However, if you check out used bike shops, you can find some deals as low as ¥3,500. The ideal situation, of course, is to borrow an unused bike for free from a peer tutor, academic adviser, or perhaps a former Fulbrighter. At the end of the year, you may be able to sell your bike to a used bike shop. If you do decide to get a bike, make sure to get it registered. By registering your bike you have a higher chance of recovering your bike if it is stolen or if you are asked to prove the ownership of the bike. Typically when you purchase a bike the store will help you register it there and then. Otherwise you can register your bike at any Koban. Some universities might require that you register the bike with the school as well (this is on top of the police registration, not instead of it). Make sure to read up on the bike laws in your prefecture. In some prefectures it is against the law to ride a bike while using a cell phone, music device, or riding while using an umbrella. It may also be illegal to ride your bike at night without a light. This information can be found at your local Koban.

Note: Please check with your host university and/or cycle shop for “bicycle insurance”.

Domestic Travel

The Fulbright year obviously provides the perfect opportunity to explore Japan. It perhaps goes without saying, but you should not limit

yourself to the “typical” tourist destinations; many Fellows have found that their favorite memories are from travel to places that have never graced the pages of a Lonely Planet guidebook.

The options for domestic travel are numerous. In addition to the age-old “train-or-plane” conundrum, there is a comprehensive network of highway buses that provide an affordable—if not always comfortable—option and an extensive road network that allows access to many destinations outside the reach of public transit.

Lastly, some Fellows have tried homestays while traveling locally via websites such as [Homestay in Japan](#). Airbnb is also alive and well in Japan if you want to experience places that are further from the hotel districts of each city, as well as lower the cost of travel.

Train

The shinkansen may seem like the obvious choice for long-distance train travel between major cities, but the value-minded and/or adventurous may wish to consider other options. Though there were many before, as of now, there is only one overnight train that may help you save on a night of hotel bills: the “Sunrise Seto/Izumo.”

The 青春18きっぷ is another budget train option. During the three yearly school holiday periods, the ticket allows five days of unlimited travel nationwide on local (普通) and rapid (快速) JR trains for just 12,050 JPY. Best of all, the five days can be shared among multiple people in any way: five people for one day, one person for two days and another for three, and so on. While traveling this way means trading lots of transfers and a much longer travel time for an

inexpensive ticket, the 青春18きっぷ can also be a great way to see some incredible small towns that you’d otherwise never stop in.

Regardless of what kind of train you’re using, a route-planning app for your phone will prove invaluable. The most popular is Ekitan 駅探, available for both iOS and Android. Just enter your departure and destination stations and you’ll be given a handful of possible routes sorted by time and price. A great website to use for domestic travel in Japan is [Hyperdia](#); just enter your point of departure and destination, and it will provide you with a list of different options with varying costs.

Plane

Despite the novelty of the shinkansen, flights are usually faster and cheaper when traveling long distances across Japan. Services like Google Flights do an excellent job of finding the exact times and carriers which provide the best deal. Even the low cost carriers provide much nicer service than what you would expect from the overseas equivalent to Spirit airlines, so buying the cheapest ticket and showing up an hour early to buy omiyage before your flight is the way to go.

Highway Bus

Japan has an extensive network of both daytime and nighttime highway buses. These are almost always cheaper than both train and plane fare, but also not nearly as fast or comfortable. Most will stop every 90 minutes or so for bathroom and snack breaks.

Highway bus options include:

- [楽天トラベル](#)
- [京王高速バス](#)
- [高速バスネット](#)

Car

Depending on where you want to go, renting a car may be the only option. Some parts of Hokkaido, Shikoku, and Kyushu, as well as more remote regions of Honshu, are reachable only by road.

For the first 90 days you are in Japan, you can legally drive using the combination of your foreign license and an International Driving Permit. After your international driving permit (attainable for a small fee at your local motorists' association office) expires, though, you'll need to get a Japanese license (外免切替). You will likely have to get a certified translation of your foreign license from the [JAF](#), pay about 6,000 JPY, and pass a short written and practical test. Don't immediately get discouraged if you have to try the road skills test again. Be sure to get an international drivers license if you can before you leave the states so as to avoid these hoops.

Renting a car can actually be a surprisingly affordable option for groups. Highway tolls are likewise pricey, but are reduced significantly if you pay using an ETC card (available from your credit card company) rather than with cash.

Major car rental agencies include:

- [Nippon Rent-A-Car](#)
- [トヨタレンタカー](#)
- [楽天レンタカー](#)

International Travel

Since mid-2012, long-term residents of Japan are no longer required to purchase the reentry permit (再入国許可) for travel outside Japan lasting less than one year. Instead, immigration staff will grant a free, special re-entry

permission (みなし再入国許可) at the port of departure upon presentation of your 在留カード and a completed re-entrant card (再入国出国記録, available at port of departure).

Finally, if you're bored and not sure where you want to go, the Skyscanner apps for iOS and Android allow you to fill in your departure location and travel dates and get a list of international destinations ranked from least expensive to most expensive.

Note: Ensure your visa is multiple entry.

Support

It is not uncommon to feel lonely or displaced sometime during your stay, so try to establish a support network that you can rely on in those times. Meet regularly with your advisor and keep in touch with the other Fulbright Fellows! The Fulbright office personnel are also a source of support if you face issues with your advisor or other official arrangements. Other Fulbright Fellows are often the best people to consult with about resolving any problems you are facing or venting frustrations that come with your new life. They are in the same boat and you may be able to help each other along the way. Even if you live too far away to meet with any regularly, visiting other Fellows will give you a chance to talk about problems that have come up, brainstorm solutions, swap tales of adventures (and misadventures), and explore more of Japan with a guide who knows the area pretty well and can show you some hidden gems in his/her city. Making friends within your Fulbright Fellow cohort will definitely make your time in Japan more valuable and enjoyable!

The amazing thing about finding support in your local community is the chance to make new friends and have real intercultural exchange and

communication. Even given the language barrier and the extremely daunting task of breaking into what seems like an already settled community, never lose the conviction that you will form amazing relationships during your Fulbright experience and be open to every opportunity. Perhaps one of the greatest sources of disappointment for Fulbright fellows is not finding friends immediately or down the paths you were previously accustomed to. Do not search for relationships based on people being nice to you because you are new and you are a foreigner; search for groups to which you can actually contribute or individuals with whom you are required to interact. Genuine relationships are based on shared experiences and time. Put

yourself in as many situations in which you and another person need to depend on each other and interact together, and you will find friends quite readily. For the first few months or until you get settled, you might want to try something new every week, just to see which situations and groups of people click well with your needs.

Also be sure to check out Fulbright ASSIST, a new program designed to support fellows away from their standard support systems.

See:

<https://us.fulbrightonline.org/current-fulbrighters/aspe-assist-24-7-support>

Socializing in Japan

Making Friends

In general, the transition from most American college social environments to living and working (whether in Japan or another country) is difficult for most people. At first, it may feel difficult to make friends who you can really connect with and actually hang out with rather than just the occasional friendly exchange. Because you are a foreigner people will either be overly interested (and may approach you to say hello but exit the conversation quickly) or altogether too intimidated to start a conversation. Just know that in most cases, you have to be the one who “makes the move.” The most obvious places to meet friends are through your classes and clubs/circles. From the personal experience of many Fellows, clubs/circles provide the best environment to actually get to know people from your university because you have opportunities to hang out with people outside of school. If you really want to make Japanese friends it’s helpful to avoid becoming a regular at events or circles targeting exchange/foreign students.

Outside of school, remember you aren’t restricted to people from your own age group. Go to a local café, bookstore, art gallery, whatever, and find a few places you really enjoy with good people. Become a regular. Volunteer. Talk to people. It is a good idea to carry around your business card (meishi) for these occasions. You will be surprised—people will actually call! And if they don’t, call them and remind them of who you are.

On another note, outings sponsored by the JET program occur throughout the year and aren’t

limited to JET people. If you have friends/acquaintances in JET, ask them to give you a heads up with a FB invite or something. You might also think about getting involved with the community through your local cultural center or through classes at the local shrine or temple. Although the attendants are mainly retired people or housewives, it can be a great place to meet new people.

Clubs & サークル

If you are not familiar with how clubs and circles work on university campuses in Japan, they can be both a blessing as well as a source of frustration because actually being able to participate in a club may end up being more difficult than you anticipate. The reasons for this are varied. One issue that you may run into is that university clubs and circles tend to require a very significant commitment in terms of practice hours. The weekly schedule may not fit well with your own academic schedule, especially depending on the demands of your project. Another issue is that sometimes Japanese clubs and circles are restrictive against members who would be able to join for only a short time. As a Fulbright Fellow, you will be entering Japanese academic life at a peculiar point in the year (the beginning of the second semester), which intrinsically places restrictions on the length of time you are able to commit to joining a club on campus. Another difficulty of integrating yourself into the campus community halfway through the year is that it can be difficult to figure out what sorts of clubs and circles exist, since most new member recruitment occurs in early April with the start of the new academic year. However, this does not mean that it is impossible to join a club or circle!

It just means that you have to be proactive about finding and joining. Additionally, keep in mind that you can often join clubs or circles that are not part of your host university. Don't be afraid to send out a few cold emails!

Meetup (Meetup.com) is a good option if you're just looking to shoot the breeze once in a while. Once you register, you'll receive weekly emails about, for example, language exchanges and other get-togethers in your area.

Volunteering

The easiest way to find volunteer activities is to email the organization directly or check through your university's student resource center. You can either participate in a volunteer club at your university (some of these clubs even take short trips to places such as Tohoku or Indonesia) or volunteer directly with a community organization. If you choose to volunteer with an organization in the Japanese community, the following can help guide you through the typical application process.

If your initial contact with the organization must be through email, try writing only in Japanese with no English and have a Japanese friend proofread it. If you must contact them through phone, prepare a manuscript ahead of time and translate the volunteer contract (which you will need to sign) so you understand what you are signing.

Other low-key volunteer options exist that don't require contracts or a set amount of volunteer hours. You will probably have an easier time finding these types of volunteer and non-profit organizations via the internet. Just do a quick Google search and see what comes up! And if you search in English, the search results will probably be English-friendly organizations. Also

visit a local citizen or nonprofit center (公民館、市民センター、NPO センター), which will have helpful staff as well as flyers about local events and organization

Drinking & Drugs

Drinking is a big part of the business and "bonding" culture in Japan, yet there is almost zero peer pressure. If you aren't a big drinker, order an oolong-cha. No big deal. It should also be known that where there is drinking (or even eating for that matter), there will often be people smoking cigarettes. Take precaution as needed.

DRUGS: JUST DON'T GO THERE. (Assume that everything is illegal and only bad things can come of it if you are involved.)

Dating

Beyond the general awareness that dating in a different country and culture will require a lot of open-mindedness and patience, there are specific points to be aware of when starting to date in Japan. You will notice that many of the popular dating apps in the U.S. are also popular in Japan, but the way they are used may be completely different from what you expect. There are also dating apps which are uniquely popular in Japan/East Asia which may be worth investigating, especially for those in the LGBTQ community. Also, it may be worth asking your friends for advice about expectations and norms around dating. It can be fun to learn about the unique customs of Japan and it will also save you and your partner from misunderstandings.

For those who identify with the LGBTQ community, breaking into the dating scene can be a little tricky. Japan's queer communities

aren't very visible, but if you know where to look, they're not that hard to find. A great website to start with is gclick.jp. They have directories of gay-friendly bars, shops, and community centers for every major city in Japan. They also have a list of links to other websites specific to certain communities and locations within Japan. Of course, they are all in Japanese and much of the queer slang used won't show up in a dictionary. Still, with a little bit of digging and a translation plug-in such as [rikaichan](#), you should have no problem locating the hot-spots in your area. Also, the Japan-only social networking site [Mixi](#) has hundreds of groups and forums for every possible LGBTQ situation. Or if the internet isn't your thing, there is a government-sponsored network of gay and lesbian community centers, one in every major city except Sapporo (ZEL - Sendai; AKTA - Tokyo; RISE - Nagoya; DISTA - Osaka; HACO - Fukuoka; NANKR - Okinawa). Although the primary mission of these centers is HIV/AIDS education, they are also very plugged-in to their local communities and thus wonderful resources for getting familiar with what is available in the area.

Holidays

Holidays in Japan are a fantastic time to indulge one of the three "legs" of the "Fulbright tripod"—experiencing Japanese culture. Use holidays as a chance to take a break from your project and go to a temple, check out a museum, or go traveling across the country. The more you broaden your experiences in this country, the more you will come to understand the nuanced complexities that lie beneath the fabric of Japanese culture. Try to go to these places with new Japanese friends, or invite groups of classmates to go explore them with you.

Managing Loneliness

While keeping in touch with people back home is important, it's equally important to strike a balance between your friends and family back in the US and your new life in Japan. Although the emotional support your existing family and friends can provide is important, it's also crucial to build a local support network. The time zone difference makes it rather difficult to rely on the people and support you're used to back home.

The Fulbright year in Japan can be a rollercoaster of emotions. Once you first arrive, it is not unnatural to be filled with excitement and optimism about all the opportunities that lie before you. However, the year will inevitably challenge you in ways you may have never imagined. One of the most difficult feelings the Fulbright Fellow will likely endure is that of loneliness and perhaps complete isolation. These feelings can often coincide with the onset of culture shock, but they can last for a long time after that as well, especially going into the holiday season of Thanksgiving and Christmas and into the cold and short days of winter.

While this sense of isolation can be incredibly stifling, it is critical to recognize these feelings if you do find yourself experiencing them. It is also absolutely critical to realize that you are not alone in your feelings—talking with other Fulbright Fellows will make you very quickly realize that indeed everybody else may be experiencing the exact same emotions. The good thing is that these feelings do not last forever, though, and there is a great amount you can do on your own to help alleviate them. Above all, talk to other people. Being a foreigner in Japan can be very isolating; no matter how long you live here, how well you speak Japanese, or how much you know about Japanese culture, you will always be regarded

as a gaijin. Instances of gaijin consciousness can become very frustrating and make you feel forever detached from the world around you. However, once you accept these frustrations as challenges, you can overcome the isolation and loneliness of living in Japan. Talking to other people will help you realize that you are not as detached as you thought and provides a great support network for making it through the rough patches. Staying busy, accomplishing new things, and trying new experiences are good

ways to combat the feelings of loneliness and gaijin syndrome.

Some final tips:

- Do lots of activities. Creating structure is important, especially at first.
- Don't give yourself too much free time.
- Figure out what makes you happy, and invest in that.
- Creating a schedule or setting goals for each week is a good way to avoid feeling stuck or lonely.

Research in Japan

Daily Schedule

The daily schedule of a Fulbrighter is largely dependent on their unique situation, but remember that in addition to university classes, you also have the option of spending your time with a club/circle at your university or getting involved with the local community! One good place to start looking for ideas is the website of the culture center or local city hall in your area. Sometimes your local temple or shrine will also offer interesting culture classes for cheap, so that's worth checking out as well. Ultimately, you will largely be responsible for constructing your daily and weekly schedules. No matter how you decide to do so, be certain to communicate with your advisor such that you are always on the same page. Getting involved in activities outside of your university is a great way to meet new people and experience the local culture of your neighborhood.

Past fellows strongly encourage embedding yourself in a lab or study place as soon as possible so that you have places where you naturally interact and meet with your Japanese classmates. Furthermore, be sure to utilize the Fulbright budget for tutoring starting as soon as possible lest it go unused and you miss out on the opportunity to benefit from private tutoring in Japanese.

Staying Motivated

Many, and perhaps even most, Fellows have been forced to change their projects in accordance with the equipment, resources, and situation at their site. If you also must do so, DON'T PANIC. If you hit a roadblock, ask your

advisor and peers for advice. Your research proposal should serve as a helpful guide, not as a binding contract. Obviously, if you're drastically changing your project, you should contact the Fulbright Office to explain any major adjustments you might make in your project to them.

One common strategy is to keep a project binder that you update once a week with your progress. If you start realizing that the amount of material you have is less than what you expected, it's a sign that you may need to spend more time or devise different strategies. Some Fellows have also recommended keeping a daily activity log as a means of better managing your time and maximizing your research progress. The monthly reports you are required to send to the Fulbright listserv can also serve as a way of reflecting on your progress and focusing your efforts.

Finally, if you manage to finish your proposed project before the end of your grant, you may want to consider expanding your research's scope or pursuing other related topics of interest.

Classes

As a Fulbright Fellow, you may wish to take language courses in addition to supplementary courses that you choose to enhance your experience. There is a possibility however, that you will find yourself pretty disappointed with the level of Japanese offered for foreign exchange students at your university, or with the manner that these classes are scheduled. If you are not satisfied with the level of Japanese offered at your university, try finding other

opportunities. Remember that Fulbright offers an additional language allowance to students who seek Japanese education outside of the university language system. Firstly, express your concerns with the office in charge of foreign exchange students at your school. One option is to ask if there is an education department, because there might be classes such as Japanese Grammar or the History of Japanese geared for Japanese students studying to teach Japanese to elementary students, junior high students, or foreigners. Since you won't be taking any classes for a grade, it is alright if it is above your level and you struggle a bit. Make this point, because they might be reluctant to place you in the class at first. Otherwise, it is a good idea to look online for language course options in your area, or to contact your advisor and see if he/she has any suggestions.

Auditing non-language university classes can be very rewarding, especially if you find a course that is related to your research. Besides learning from the course material and teaching yourself to get used to academic-level Japanese, they are also a great way to get to know professors. The best first approach to finding course listings is to contact your advisor or speak with a university liaison about which courses are available for auditing. Your status as a *kenkyūsei* or *kenkyūsha* can affect your ability to audit classes as well, so be certain to communicate with your advisor and institution about the implications of your title. You may also pay a visit to the 事務室 or 教務課 of the department and ask for the course offerings in person. Note that departments usually function as separate entities in Japanese universities, so there might not be one giant comprehensive search engine for courses. Also be aware that some universities have stipulations against taking classes outside the department you are affiliated with.

Once you have figured out the logistics of attending classes (this might take some time and certain amounts of floundering), remember that the way a university class is run in Japan differs quite a bit from the way it's done where we are from. Class is usually lecturebased with few opportunities for discussion and questions. There is generally a lot less homework and less time spent preparing for the lecture. The level of Japanese might be intimidating at first, but if you stick to it, it can only get easier!

Relationship with Your Advisor

Everyone's relationship with their advisor is different but do your best to have consistent meetings each week or month (depending on your situation). If you truly have trouble communicating/getting along with your advisor and you feel it is a hindrance to your project, don't hesitate to talk to Fulbright and explore your options. However, even with a busy or aloof advisor, it is best to maintain positive relations. You should try to be as active and consistent as possible in reaching out, attending his/her seminar regularly (if that is part of the relationship), and providing updates on your life and progress changes. You should not, however, tie your progress to your advisor, especially if he/she is consistently unavailable. Some fellows have found that their advisor relationships are quite hands-off and find themselves in a position of overwhelming independence. Others, however, work with their advisors daily. If you find yourself seeking a more hands-on relationship for mentorship and guidance, it can be helpful to seek this kind of relationship with a postdoc, graduate student, or associate professor via introduction by your professor. Be creative in seeking support and

maintaining progress in your project without the top down guidance.

Working in a Lab

On your first day in the lab, the professor will most likely try to switch you from doing your proposed project to another project that is very different. When deciding whether you would like to make the switch or stick with your proposed project, keep two questions in mind: 1) Is this project interesting enough for me to do for one whole year? 2) Will this project give me data? The latter of the two is the more important because if you have no data, you will have nothing to report. If you want to do your proposed project, you should make sure the laboratory you are in has all the tools required to do your project. If not, try to find other labs that allow you to borrow their equipment (note that I specify tools, not reagents) and take a look at the Research Center on-campus for shared laboratory equipment.

While everyone's research schedules are unique and vary based on individual goals, do not hesitate to adjust your schedule to meet your goals. Some fellows opt to work overtime or on weekends, while others decide that a more relaxed research schedule is better suited for them. This largely depends on your research goals and personal endeavors. For example, if you would like to prioritize other things such as community involvement and club activities, try setting a curfew time to leave the laboratory. In addition, try not to bring dinner or eat dinner on-campus. This way, your stomach will make you want to leave the lab around dinner-time to eat at your apartment, thus helping to enforce your curfew time and stop you from working too much.

Interviews

Unless you're working in a lab or doing some sort of historical research, chances are good that you're going to have to conduct interviews for your project. In some cases, your advisor will assist you in setting up interviews or making initial contacts with your interview subjects; however, in other instances you will be left to establish contacts on your own.

Before proceeding, consult with your advisor about how to proceed in a manner that is ethical, considerate, and makes sense in a Japanese cultural context. Bring your business cards to the interview, prepare a manuscript to introduce your research topic, thank the person for taking the time to speak with you, and bring a small omiyage or other gesture of your appreciation in order to ensure that the interview proceeds smoothly. Ask permission to audio or video record the interview if possible and take notes/write down any phrases or words that you don't understand. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification and for help with kanji while transcribing afterwards.

Additionally, memorize words in your field and make sure to have your interview questions written out ahead of time. If you can, think of multiple ways to ask the same thing—sometimes your interviewee may not understand what you're asking, and clarifying is much easier if you've prepared an explanation ahead of time.

Don't worry too much! They are probably interested in helping you out or teaching you what they know (otherwise they wouldn't be there!), so make the most of their time. For the most part, if someone agrees to meet with you, it is an indicator that they are eager to help you and learn about your research.

And remember, don't get discouraged if it takes you a while to start getting interviews. Depending on your topic, finding interviewees may be as easy as going to shrines and talking to the people working there, or may be more difficult if you are in fields such as politics, where connections are vital for getting interview subjects. Be willing to go with the flow and to adapt your project if necessary, for this will improve the chances of your interviews being productive and successful.

Fieldwork

While it may seem daunting at first, fieldwork can be a very fun and rewarding way to gather information and meet people in your community. Here are a few tips to make your fieldwork go smoothly.

- Always bring something to take notes with and it's a good idea to take a camera and a voice recorder.
- Always carry your business cards with you and dress appropriately according to the weather and your activities, making sure to stay hydrated.
- Put aside your preconceived notions before you enter your site. It's fine to be looking for specific things, but take notes even on things that seem irrelevant or that conflict with your hypothesis. You may thank yourself later.
- Don't be afraid to branch out and talk to people – you never know where a new connection will lead. Especially if you're visiting a site that you're going to be spending significant amounts of time at—whether a shrine, a theater, or an art studio—find a mutual contact to introduce you to the person/people in

charge and the regulars. If you lack mutual connections, the only option may be to branch out and introduce yourself. In most cases, people will be pleased and flattered that you're interested in whatever they're working on, and they may even be able to give you more contacts or allow you access to special materials.

Networking

The extent of your networking will vary based on your placement circumstances and on your own initiative, but chances are that networking will be a fairly large part of your Fulbright experience. There is a high chance that your professor or senpai in the lab will introduce you to other graduate students and professors in your field. Or, you may benefit by going with your professors to events and conferences. Setting up these connections takes a lot of time and effort on the part of your mentors, you should take advantage of these opportunities as much as you can. In the case that you are feeling like you are at a dead-end with your project, networking can also be a great opportunity to reorient yourself and to get feedback on your ideas from more people in your field.

There are several tips to keep in mind as you network in Japan. First, it tends to be much easier for you to connect with a professor if you have been introduced to them by someone else (i.e. their grad student or another professor with whom they have worked in the past). However, a lot of professors in Japan are fairly open, so even if you do not have any direct connections to them, just emailing them in Japanese, describing your sincere interest in your shared field of research and explaining why you want to meet with them, will oftentimes elicit a positive

response. If there is someone with whom you really want to discuss your project, first ask your adviser if they might be able to introduce you or know someone who could. If they cannot, take the initiative yourself!

Second, if a professor does agree to meet with you, it is usually good practice to offer to come to a location that is more convenient for them for the meeting, even if this means traveling to Tokyo from Kansai or further away. Professors are very busy people, so you will make a good impression by showing your willingness to come to the professor for the meeting, helping convince them that it is worth their time to meet with you. Moreover, it will be a great chance to break-up your everyday routine by getting to travel. Traveling is certainly not cheap, so it's also okay to ask if the professor might be in your area at any point in the future for an academic conference. Likewise, if you know that you will be going to their city at some point in the future for a conference/a trip with friends, you might want to schedule your meeting for that time. And no matter how far you are traveling to meet with a professor, bring an omiyage with you (this can either be your local meibutsu if you are traveling to another prefecture, or just some nice chocolate/cookies).

Finally, you will be encouraged to have business cards on hand. For those who will be working more in the professional sphere, this might be a good idea, but others will hardly ever encounter anyone who asks for a business card. Keep your cards in a neat and professional looking case that can function as easily accessible storage for your own and others' cards during networking events. You can either make business cards before you leave the US or once you are on the ground in Japan. Although double-sided cards will be more expensive, it is

a good idea to have them in both English and Japanese. Make sure to confirm your affiliation before ordering, and ask Fulbright to email you an image file of their logo and some samples of recommended formats (they tell you about this during orientation, but if you want to get this done beforehand they should be able to send the necessary information to you ahead of time). Exchanging business cards is a ritualistic process and you will convey a lot of respect if you conduct the exchange in a specific way. Check out the instructions of this [video](#).

At receptions, formal dinners, and even dinners with friends, always be aware that there will likely be a toast, and that you should not be drinking before it. One other tip to keep in mind is that while foreigners are often forgiven for almost any innocent mistake, do your best to at least use *-desu / masu* forms with people you don't know or those who are older than you.

Applying to Graduate School from Japan

Applying to graduate school while on a Fulbright requires juggling both Fulbright responsibilities and application procedures. If you are thinking about applying to graduate school this fall, consider taking your standardized tests before you arrive in Japan. Many graduate schools require that your transcripts or transcript waivers be sent by mail, so submit your supplementary materials early to accommodate international mail delays of up to a month. Additionally, many schools will charge extra to process an application fee from abroad, so consider setting up a means of paying application fees with an American credit card or bank account before you leave for Japan.

Some programs may ask you to visit the school for an interview. In that case, be sure to inform them that you are abroad in Japan, in which case they may substitute a Skype interview or offer to reimburse you for some of your travel expenses.

If you plan to take the GRE (or any other standardized test) while in Japan, check the test-provider's website for testing locations. The GRE is currently offered electronically in Tokyo and on paper in several other major cities in Japan.

A number of fellows have found it difficult to balance applying to graduate schools while focusing on getting the most out of their Fulbright experience. With that being said, it is definitely possible to do so. Fulbright alumni or other fellows can be excellent sources of knowledge and experience, so don't hesitate to reach out.

Applying to Graduate School in Japan

If you think you may be interested in attending graduate school in Japan, how fast you move will depend on when you would like to matriculate. From your research you may already know that the Japanese academic year typically begins in April (some schools have an option to enter in September or October, but not all). In many cases, graduate schools will have entrance examinations, often in the summer (July or August) for Japanese students. You will first need to find out if you, an international student, are required to take any exams, and if so, if there is a special international student exam. If there is, it will likely be in February, not in summer. This means that if you already have a good idea of where you would like to attend

and have a professor in mind (or perhaps you meet your advisor at your place of affiliation and discuss continuing there as a grad student), you may be able to apply in the fall, take the exam in winter, and enter in April. Warning: this would mean terminating your Fulbright grant early, probably in March, so this is a path you would have to consider carefully. On the other hand, if you're willing to wait the better part of a year after finishing your Fulbright before attending, or you don't decide to try Japanese grad school until after you've already arrived, you can afford to take your time a bit more. If this is the case, take advantage of your advisor! They will likely have connections in the field (assuming you're interested in continuing the research you're currently doing), and may be able to recommend schools or professors to you. They also may be able to help you through the application process. However, watch out if they are Japanese and educated in Japan through the traditional channels, because not only do many Japanese students proceed straight from undergrad to graduate school in the same school and even the same laboratory, thus utilizing a different, streamlined application process, but even if that's not the case they may have little to no idea of how the process works for non-Japanese students. You will need to do your own research, and don't be afraid to email the admissions offices or international affairs offices of any schools you're interested in if you're confused!

In general, if you arrive in Japan and decide sometime during your grant that you would like to apply for graduate school there, you should try to start doing a little research after the New Year. There are some schools that have very early applications even for admission in April of the following year (around late spring), and if you're interested in one of those it will be important to get the ball rolling fairly early, even

if for other schools you may not have to submit an application until much later. Also, depending on your Japanese level you may want to seek out schools that offer English degrees—there are several, and they tend to be more internationally-minded schools, so the application process may be easier for you if that's the case. All of which is to say, scour their admissions websites, and find out as much information as you can. Unlike in America, where for undergraduate at least the CommonApp makes applying to colleges easy and uniform, applications in Japan vary greatly from school to school, both in terms of timing and requirements, and as an international student you may have to jump through further

hoops (such as providing a certificate of graduation, for which a transcript noting your degree may suffice, or you may be forced to provide a certified copy of your diploma, such as an apostille, which will take a significant amount of time and is therefore important to know if you need or not as early as possible). If you plan to pursue higher education as far as a doctorate, it may be easier to complete your Master's in America and do your Doctorate in Japan, since the requirements (tests, etc.) are less stringent. It all depends on your reason for doing grad school in Japan as opposed to the US, and is a personal decision only you can make.

Fulbright

Orientation

Before getting into the details of the schedule, it's important to keep in mind that orientation is one of the two times during the year that you will be with all of the Fulbright Fellows at the same time. Make the most of it! Consider organizing an outing one night to get to know everyone. Befriending Fulbrighters will give you a reason to travel to their cities and see more of Japan throughout the year.

Make a group chat so you can stay in touch with the other Fulbrighters. Everyone has lots of interesting experiences and knowledge to share throughout their grant periods!

Although the format and schedule of orientation varies from year to year, expect to meet your fellow fulbrighters, learn the details of what this grant entails, and take the opportunity to discuss topics or concerns you have before jumping into your grant.

Personal Responsibilities

The best way to describe your responsibilities as a Fulbright Fellow is to find “balance” between your research, Japanese language study, and interaction with the culture and people as an international ambassador. “Balance” does not mean that all of those things have to occupy an equal amount of your time and effort, and in fact it is completely normal for some months to be more research-heavy, while others are much more culturally oriented. This balance is dynamic, so do not be afraid if your trip takes an unexpected turn and your priorities change. While you should try to work toward

some end goal in your research, unforeseen circumstances might make it so you are unable to complete as much as you originally hoped you would, or they might otherwise change the nature of your project completely. Although such changes might catch you off-guard, remember that this is just the natural flow of research, and do your best to adjust your priorities as you go.

Having just graduated from your undergraduate institution, you may find yourself feeling pressured to produce a masterful thesis-quality piece of writing about the fruits of your research by the end of your grant. It is important to realize, however, that this is not always what results from your project. By the end of the grant year, each Fulbright Fellow's project will vary significantly in terms of what was accomplished, and this is perfectly natural. In the end, the most important thing is how the Fellow utilized their resources to carry out their project to their fullest capability. You are not held accountable for the “success” or “failure” of your project by the Fulbright office. In fact, the Fulbright office specifies that your final project is whatever comes of your research. At the end of the year, you must submit a project paper (or equivalent manifestation of your research throughout the year), but this does not mean the Fulbright office expects a publication-quality piece of writing. In fact, this is far less common than you might think. Furthermore, the final project itself does not need to be strictly an academic paper (although a paper accompanying and describing the project is still necessary). Discuss your options with your Fulbright representative to explore what is feasible and acceptable.

That being said, some Fellows do end up producing a final paper that is worthy of publication. Depending on the area of your research, the process by which you might go about getting your work published may differ significantly. In any case, if you do end up wishing to publish your work, seek assistance from your Fulbright academic advisor first, who may give you advice for heading in the right direction.

Aside from research, Japanese language study, and exploring Japan, you may also find volunteer work and clubs/サークル can be a great way to add more diverse experiences to your lifestyle and to help you achieve the “right” balance. And while it is a good idea to see what other Fellows are doing with their time to get ideas for activities that you might try, don’t worry if you are doing less or more of something, or are not doing something at all. Everyone has their own strengths and interests, so it is natural that each Fellow will craft their own schedule and lifestyle that suits them. Along the way, you will also have to submit to Fulbright your schedule for each new school semester, attend the mid-year conference, write a final research report, and set up a debriefing meeting before you return to the U.S.

Fulbright as a “Limbo Year”

You may hear your Fulbright experience described as a “Limbo Year” several times over the course of your stay in Japan. Having graduated from the academic pressure-cooker that is American undergraduate study, the Fulbright year will likely involve a shift in focus. The goals of the Fulbright program are not only academic. Of course, every Fellow has invested considerable time and energy into crafting a research proposal within their field of study, but Fellows should not necessarily expect their

experience to be overly research-focused. In particular, Fellows pursuing research and study in social science fields are likely going to need to tackle new fields of study; your Japanese advisor’s academic specialty will probably not be the same as your own. Thus, your studies in Japan will not represent a mere continuation of your undergraduate studies thus far.

For those Fellows planning to later continue on in their undergraduate field of study by enrolling in a Master’s or Ph.D. program, this disconnect might seem somewhat strange at first. Still, if your advisor’s specialty does not exactly match your project as originally proposed, take it as an opportunity to get acquainted with a new discipline. This may mean that the focus of your research will shift slightly, or you may have to reframe issues and approach them from a different angle, but rest assured that several, if not all, of your fellow Fellows are making the same sorts of adjustments. In short, if you find yourself moving through unfamiliar territory academically (not to mention socially and culturally), you are not the only one. Part of the advantage of the “Limbo Year” is that it will provide you with the freedom to take the sorts of intellectual detours that focused undergraduate or graduate study might not. Enjoy the ride!

Monthly Reports

They sound intimidating, but the monthly reports and the midyear conference are not too much to worry about. Every month, each Fulbrighter is required to submit a summary (no length requirement) of what they have been up to for the past four weeks, including school, language study, research, and community service. The Fulbright office will provide you with a guideline on the format in which to write about all the interesting people you’ve met, cool

places you've been, and interesting things you've done. In addition to serving as a check-and-balance system, the monthly reports serve as a means for everyone (JUSEC and fellows alike have access) to keep up-to-speed with each other's work. It is advisable to maintain a professional tone in your writing as the reports are also read by scholarship sponsors, etc.

Midyear Conference

The Tokyo midyear conference will be organized for some time in February/March, and is a chance for everyone to see each other again and to talk about how far they have come with their research. This is also a great opportunity to share about your experiences while living in Japan and the difficulties that you have encountered, and to get feedback from other Fellows on how they might have dealt with similar issues. Before the conference date, you will be asked to submit a couple of evaluation surveys, as well as a short summary of where your project stands up to this point. During the conference itself, every fellow gives a short speech about his or her project, after which everyone proceeds to talk about their feelings, to give each other advice on how to proceed forward, and to make personal mid-year resolutions so that you may enjoy a more productive and fulfilling second half of your grant term. As long as you have been doing some research in the lab, and in general putting effort into integrating into life in Japan, you will be fine. After your research report, the Fulbright experience and what you learned from it, as well as how it will affect you as you move forward into whatever comes next for you, whether it's graduate school, a job, or something completely

staff and fellows will also want to hear about your other activities and experiences, so be sure to keep track of any kind of volunteer work or cultural connections that you've accomplished so far as well.

This is also another opportunity to be with the wonderfully supportive, helpful, and wise Fulbright staff! Make sure to take advantage of this! If you have any concerns or issues you wish to talk about, you can arrange ahead of time to meet with the staff after the main conference has concluded.

Relationship with JUSEC

Aside from the monthly reports and midyear conference, it's a good idea to occasionally stay in touch with the fine people at JUSEC. Although they are not able to provide advice about daily life or personal matters, they can help you solve problems with your advisor, come up with some ideas about expanding the scope and methods of your research, and answer any questions about the grant. They're very nice, always willing to help, and have a lot of experience dealing with our problems.

Exit Interview

You will be required to have an exit interview/debriefing at the end of your Fulbright grant, either in person at the Tokyo office or by phone. One of the major purposes of the interview is to reflect on the Fulbright

different. In addition, the Fulbright staff will ask you for any reflections or thoughts on how JUSEC can improve its assistance to Fulbright grantees.

Credits

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