

JAPANESE CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

1. GENERAL GUIDANCE.

This section is designed to provide information on various social situations that the exercise participants are likely to encounter and to educate and guide them in relationships with the Japanese. This is intended as a guide only and its application must be tempered to the circumstances and use of common sense.

- a. As Americans in Japan, we are not expected to act exactly as the Japanese. Accordingly, it is neither necessary nor appropriate to emulate each and every custom and mannerism of your hosts.
- b. The good manners and etiquette of our American culture can serve us well in Japan. Proper behavior in accordance with contemporary American standards, together with a touch of modesty, is perfectly appropriate in Japanese business and social settings.

2. GREETINGS

- a. In Japan, while the handshake greeting is common between Japanese and Americans, saluting and bowing are common and highly respected practices within the respective military and civilian sectors. Japanese military personnel render the hand salute on all occasions when greeting another military service member counterpart, regardless of rank. As in the U.S. Armed services, it is customary for Japanese enlisted personnel to salute officers, but unlike the U.S. military, Japanese enlisted members also render salutes to each other. Therefore, it is appropriate for U.S. military members to greet their Japanese military counterparts of all ranks with a proper military hand salute. As in the U.S. Army saluting is usually restricted to out-of-doors.
- a. Bowing within the military ranks is commonly practiced in addition to the hand salute to extend courtesy and respect from subordinate to superior. Although bowing by Americans to the Japanese is not absolutely required, it is highly recommended as a gesture of goodwill and respect. If sincerely executed, the American will be held in high esteem. As Americans, we are not expected to bow as deeply from the waist as would a Japanese. We should execute our bow by lowering our head and shoulders slightly forward in a sincere manner. This gesture may be rendered as many times as required during a meeting, and is appropriate within both the Japanese military and civilian communities. Bowing is proper both indoors and outdoors.

3. MEISHI

- a. Business cards or "Meishi" are a universal part of Japanese business, governmental, and military interactions. Business cards are commonly exchanged during introductions. The giving of a business card is a serious gesture in Japan; it is a type of commitment, for it automatically opens the door to direct contact at any time. U.S. officers, senior noncommissioned officers, and staff-level U.S. civilian employees are encouraged to use business cards.
- b. When receiving a Meishi, take a few moments to examine the card. Take note of the person's name, duty position, and any special qualifications indicated on the card. Because the Meishi symbolically represents the person who gave it to you, do not write on it, fold it, etc., in the presence of its owner. Treating the Meishi with disregard implies a lack of respect for the person from whom you received it.
- c. Normally, both parties exchange Meishi. When you present your card, present it with the Japanese translation side, if you have bilingual cards. If your Meishi are only in English, present the card so that the other person can read it.

4. GIFTS

- a. Gifts are exchanged between U.S. Armed Forces members and their Japanese hosts on both official and personal occasions such as welcome or sayonara parties. Gifts may range in price and simplicity according to one's economic status. Gift giving is an established Japanese tradition and accordingly is a very sensitive issue. For example, to refuse a gift under normal circumstances could be construed by the Japanese as offensive.
- b. In some instances, acceptance of a gift from a Japanese by a service member could range from being illegal to being completely harmless such as in the case of the acceptance of a non-duty-related gift of nominal cost from a personal Japanese friend. Any gift that you receive and are in doubt as to its legality should be reported to your Commander for advice concerning the gifts disposition.
- c. Also, remember if we accept a gift from our Japanese hosts, we should find a suitable way of reciprocating. Commonly used gifts are American chocolates/candies, unit patches, tie pins or coins, and/or other inexpensive memorabilia such as items that are unique or representative of the United States or your hometown. The gifts should be simply wrapped. It is not the Japanese custom to open a gift in front of the person who gave it; however, they are usually familiar with American customs and will probably open the gift while you are there.

5. SOCIAL OCCASIONS

- a. Parties are frequently used in Japan, not only to relax, but also to do business. Attending them is usually a good step towards improving the relationship. These parties normally include snacks, singing (Karaoke); and drinks, although there is no obligation to drink alcohol. Concerning Karaoke, it is expected that you give it a try. No one is expected to be good at it, but only to relax and try his or her best. To assist in your debut, there is usually a small selection of songs in English from which to choose.
- b. Mingle freely and make acquaintance with as many of the Japanese as possible. Enjoy the refreshments, but remember modesty is the rule. Overindulgence or unusual behavior will leave a lasting, poor impression with our Japanese hosts. Conversation should be light and friendly.
 - A common conversational topic at these affairs is the use of "Hashi" or "Chopsticks" by foreign guests. Usually the Japanese will admire and compliment you on how skillful you are in their use. As a matter of courtesy we should be aware of certain basic rules of etiquette in the use of chopsticks; never pass food from chopsticks to chopsticks because this is a ceremonial gesture during cremation services; never stand chopsticks straight up in a rice bowl because this gesture is used for food offerings to the dead; and never spear food with chopsticks, as this is impolite. Use of the chopsticks, even with obvious difficulty, is perfectly acceptable for Americans and will favorably impress our Japanese friends.
- c. Depending on the occasion and whether it is a group or individual function, either party may pay. Official governmental and military group counterpart functions are usually paid for entirely by the American or Japanese agency extending the invitation. On an individual basis, it is usually best to agree to "Dutch treat". This method is realistic, relieves the burden of expense on both parties, and eliminates the possibilities of future obligation.
- d. If time and money allow, there are often second and third parties, particularly if the first party was an official function. There is no obligation to continue attending subsequent

parties; however, expect your reasons for leaving to be questioned. Your counterpart may be worried that you are not having a good time.

6. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

- a. Most Japanese can speak some English as English is taught quite extensively in Japan beginning with junior high school through college or university. However, their English-speaking ability is more limited than their reading and writing skills.
- b. It should be remembered that no matter how well our Japanese counterparts and friends may speak English, it is their second language and we must not assume that their comprehension and response levels are the same as an American English speaker. We should speak slowly and clearly, and avoid using baby talk, excessive slang, and "pidgin English". Misunderstandings could create many problems. When in doubt or when it becomes apparent that what is being said may not be understood, it is best to request the assistance of an interpreter or translator, especially during business discussions. Most Japanese not only enjoy speaking English with Americans, but enthusiastically welcome every opportunity to practice.
- c. Remember, it is best to use short, concise phrases in well-structured, simple sentences to obtain the best results. Take advantage of the opportunities to learn and use new Japanese skills; it will enhance your performance and interest, both professionally and personally.

7. USING THE OFURO

- a. The ofuro is a public bathing area. It includes a dressing area, hot tub, and a bathing area with showers and faucets. Males and females have different ofuros.
- b. For many Americans, using the ofuro is a new experience, which rapidly becomes popular during the exercise. To use the ofuro, there are several points to remember:
 - First, never wear your street footwear (boots, shoes, sandals, etc.) into the dressing area. As you enter the ofuro, there will be shelves on which to place your footwear. The high usage of the ofuro makes removal of footgear necessary to prevent the floors from becoming dirty and muddy.
 - Once inside, remove your clothes and place them in the bins provided. (There is no security, so secure your valuables prior to going to the ofuro).
 - After you have undressed, proceed to the bath area with your washcloth, pan (there usually are plastic wash pans available in the ofuro) and soap. NOTE: When moving around the ofuro, it is customary to cover yourself with your washcloth. Wash yourself before getting into the hot tub - do not treat the hot tub as if it were a hot bath. The hot tub is only for soaking the body after it is clean, not cleaning it. This is necessary since the hot tub water is only changed about once a week and would become unusable if you entered it prior to washing.
- c. There is absolutely no soap allowed in the hot tub. Also, it is not customary to submerge your head in the tub or pour water over your head while in the tub - and absolutely no swimming in the tub. Prior to leaving the bathing area, make sure it is clean. The Japanese are very meticulous about these common-sense rules.