



# **VFA-115 Enlisted Guide:** **Moving to Japan**

Updated July 2011



## **Pre-Move**

### **ESTABLISHING CONTACT**

As soon as you receive your orders the clock starts ticking. This is when you should schedule your move. An important piece of information you will find in many sections of this guide is this:

**WARNING!!!** Excessive baggage is no longer covered by PCS orders. AMC Flights **WILL CHARGE YOU \$150-200.00** and it is **NOT CLAIMABLE!** Only carry what you will immediately need and do not exceed 2 checked bags and a carry on (per person). Utilize your express shipment for soon-use items and put everything else into your main pack-out!

If you are married or bringing a dependent to Japan, you must get started with the Dependent Entry Approval. More on this below. You should be receiving a Welcome Aboard package, either by email or postal mail, or both. Listed in this information is the name of your sponsor. It is imperative that you communicate all needs, questions and concerns to your sponsor. They can best help you when you reach out to them. Ensure that you have good contact information for each stop you will make up to actual traveling overseas. Check out the VFA-115 Web site. It has some good info along with useful Points of Contact.

VFA-115 ASDO Office Phone Commercial from the States: 011-81-467-63-4906

Calling a cell phone Commercially: Country code is "01181". If the phone you are calling in Japan is 08012345678, drop the first "0" and add the country code: 011818012345678.

Mailing Address: VFA-115  
Unit 25396  
FPO AP 96601-6228  
United States

<https://www.cnmc.navy.mil/Atsuqi/CVW-5/VFA-115/ContactUs/index.htm>

<https://www.cnmc.navy.mil/Atsuqi/index.htm>

[https://www.cnmc.navy.mil/navycni/groups/public/documents/document/cnmc\\_a136856.pdf](https://www.cnmc.navy.mil/navycni/groups/public/documents/document/cnmc_a136856.pdf)

## **ORDERS**

### **You can't do anything until you have orders.**

Throughout the entire process, your PSD rep should help with questions and guide you through the transition. Get to know them well and stop by at least weekly to provide updates on your progress. Read your orders in their entirety. There are helpful Web sites listed on them, time lines to consider and other pertinent information. We highly suggest that you get a passport before arriving. If you need emergency leave from some of the smaller countries that we visit, it is much less painful if you have this document.

## **SPONSOR**

Get in touch with your sponsor early. They will make all the difference in explaining how things work and easing your transition. Here's what to expect from your sponsor:

1. Assist in getting you housing/BEQ reservations
2. Help get a PO Box / Mailing address set up before you arrive (Requires Special POA and you can only get a PO Box if you have Dependent Entry Approval)
3. Signing you up for the mandatory driving class, (DSN: 264-264-2983). You must have a valid stateside driver's license to get a SOFA license in Japan.
4. Signing you up for the AOB/ICR orientation brief that is 5 days long (mandatory prior to getting your permanent driver's license).
5. Help with the Child Development Center (AKA Daycare) for your kids while you are in classes (DSN 264-3524).
6. Make sure you have transportation from the Airport:
  - A. Narita shuttle runs pick up in Narita at the East wing, 1<sup>st</sup> floor of terminal 2 at the USO/Military travel counter (almost at the end of the wing.) It departs Narita at 1800 Local and arrives at Atsugi around 2130.
  - B. Yokota shuttle. This is for the AMC flights out of Seattle. Bus must be scheduled from Atsugi, so contact your sponsor if you are arriving there.
  - C. Haneda. No shuttle. If you arrive in Haneda we need to check out a duty vehicle and pick you up. Please let us know any changes to your flight date, time and/or location of arrival.

Also, ask them to send you a copy of the "Atsugi Insider". It's a great resource and full of useful info for both pre and post arrival.

## **DEPENDENT ENTRY APPROVAL (DEA)**

If you have a wife or kids who will accompany you in Japan, you must have a Dependent Entry Approval message to get them into the country. You need this for customs and for multiple places on base. In order to get the DEA you need to do the following:

1. Get No-Cost military dependent passports (not tourist passports)

- a. If your dependents are moving within 2 months you must have a "letter to expedite" in order to get the Passport in time. PSD at your detaching command will facilitate this.
2. Get Dependent Military IDs (Not required for kids under 10 years of age, but helpful.)
3. Get the overseas screening complete. This is easier said than done. Here's the process:
  - a. Get all of your dependents' medical and dental records
  - b. Get all of your dependents' shot records
  - c. Get all of your dependents' school physical screening records
  - d. Before dragging the family into medical, have your corpsman at the overseas screening desk audit their records and tell you what needs to be done.
  - e. After meeting with your corpsman, make the required appointments with:
    - i. Dental
    - ii. Vaccinations
    - iii. The overseas screening Medical Officer. (The person who signs off on the bottom line.)
  - f. Bring all your dependents to Dental
  - g. Get all the required vaccinations.
  - h. Finish up any other medically required items
  - i. Go back and meet with the overseas screening for your final screening.
4. Compile all the paperwork that Medical / Dental / PSD etc. gives you, take a copy of your orders and go to your "detaching" command's admin/personnel shop.
5. Ask them to update your oversea suitability in the PERS computer system.
6. W/in 24-36 hours PERS should send a Dependent Entry Approval message

Throughout the entire process, your PSD rep should be helping you and making sure you don't miss a step. Use him as a resource and ask questions to make sure you've got your ducks in a row before wasting time driving around.

### **RECOMMENDED THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE STATES**

1. If you have "old stuff" and want new items, this is a perfect time to upgrade. TVs, grills, or other large household items are easy to purchase here in Japan. So donate or sell your old stuff, take the tax write off and get new stuff after getting settled.
2. Before canceling the cell phone you've had for years, get a Vonage box and have your "old" phone number transferred to a Vonage account. Once you get Internet access your Vonage number will be essentially free (minus the Vonage monthly fee) for your friends and family in the states to call you just like making a local call. Also contact your Cell Phone provider as many companies offer a Military Deployment "suspension" program. This also holds true for auto insurance. Get it suspended so that when you DO return to the states they won't price gouge you for not having 12 months proof of insurance stateside.
3. Call your Credit Card Company and let them know you're moving to Japan. If you don't, it's likely your credit card will be suspended for "suspicious overseas activity" multiple times. Also it's important to know that for "out-in-town purchases" there is a 1% foreign credit charge. This is normally waived for deployed military, so talk with your credit card Co.

4. Make sure your stateside driver's license will not expire while you are in Japan. Consider going to AAA to get an international driver's license. If you have one, upon arriving you can rent a car for on-base driving right away. Stateside licenses, for the most part, can be renewed online with the state government's Web sites, but they are all different. Check with them to see if this is an option for you.

5. Reserve a room at the Navy Lodge, if traveling with dependents, NAF Atsugi (DSN 264-6880/6881/6883). Ensure they know this will be an extended stay until you move into housing. Your sponsor should be able to help you with this.

6. Storing your car in the US. You are entitled to store one car on the government dime while in Japan. They have places all over the United States. Realize if you choose to store your car at a family member or friend's house and not one of the government places, the Navy won't pay to route you through that location to pick up your car when your tour in Japan ends. If you use the government system they will either PCS you to the location where your car is being held or transport your car to the nearest facility to your next duty station in the states.

7. Your first big purchase will likely be a car. The dealers do accept American currency. (It is obviously based on the current exchange rate though.) Ensure you have quick access to the money required to purchase a vehicle. If you already have an account with NFCU or Community Bank you are fine (both are on base). Vehicle prices are discussed later. Most will also accept a credit card but will charge you a 5% transaction fee, so cash/Yen is the only smart option.

### **HOW TO MOVE YOUR STUFF, WHAT TO BRING & WHAT TO DO BEFORE PACKING:**

The Movers: There are three separate moves.

1. Household goods move (HHG) (Big stuff, furniture items etc)
2. Express shipment move. The Express Shipment is 1000lbs plus 200lb (JFTR states 2000lbs) of professional gear good for uniforms, clothes, bedding, pots, pans, dishes, utensils, etc. Highly recommend a bike in this shipment also. If you live on base everything is within biking distance. More often than not, many families only purchase one vehicle and rely on a bike to get to and from work.
3. "Non-Temporary" Storage. AKA long-term storage for stuff you don't bring.

**WARNING!!!** Excessive baggage is no longer covered by PCS orders. AMC Flights **WILL CHARGE YOU \$150-200.00** and it is **NOT CLAIMABLE!** Only carry what you will immediately need and do not exceed 2 bags and a carry on. Utilize your express shipment for soon-use items and put everything else into your main pack-out!

To get the ball rolling you'll need to go to [WWW.MOVE.MIL](http://WWW.MOVE.MIL). Follow the steps and magically someone will call to confirm and movers will show up at your door. Things to keep in mind: it takes 6-8 WEEKS for both the express move (don't let the name fool you) and HHG move to reach Japan. When deciding on your move dates, be sure to build in enough lead-time so your things are already here when you get a house. If you get a house before your stuff arrives, you can get temporary furniture (AKA stick furniture) in the interim. Don't be surprised if your Express Shipment arrives after your HHG or if your HHG arrives earlier than advertised.

**WARNING!!!** Excessive baggage is no longer covered by PCS orders. AMC Flights WILL CHARGE YOU \$150-200.00 and it is NOT CLAIMABLE! Only carry what you will immediately need. Utilize your express shipment for soon-use items and put everything else into your main pack-out! (yes, we just repeated this for the third time!)

**What to Bring:** If you live in a 3000 sq ft house in the U.S., you'll be downsizing. Check the housing Web site for floor plans, (<http://www.housing.navy.mil/onestop/hqd/?bid=3>) but in general, your on-base house will be no larger than 1400 sq ft. So bring about 1/2 your stuff. King-size bed will fit in master bedrooms but there won't be much room left over. Measure your stuff and see how it fits. Floor coverings are either hardwood, carpet in the renovated townhouses or linoleum. Bring area rugs to cover the floors. Houses have all the appliances you have in the states and include a washer and dryer but do not include microwaves. Storage is an issue. If you have a lot of "big" toys, you might not have a place to keep them. The NEX also offers storage units.

Self Help keeps a supply of donated HAZMAT (house cleaners, paint, etc.). These items are free. It is worth the visit before purchasing new materials. They also stock lawn mowers, weed eaters, rakes, steam cleaners, vacuums, and much more.

The "Second Fiddle," a second-hand store located next to NFCU, is also another great place to find items needed to get you by until your HHG shipment arrives. Don't buy small items like phone cords or computer cords at the NEX until you have checked if they have it first. It is a non-profit, enlisted wife run facility and most items are only \$1!

Below is a list of documents that you should hand carry on the airplane:

**RECOMMENDED DOCS TO HAND-CARRY**

\$200-300 USD Cash (You may want to convert \$50-100 into Japanese YEN prior to leaving the states, ALL AIRPORTS GIVE LESS THAN GOING EXCHANGE RATES!)  
Passports  
Marriage/Birth Certificates  
Current PCS Orders  
Shipment Papers  
Tax Records  
Homeowner Documents  
Social Security Cards  
Children's School Records  
Medical Records/Shot Records

Credit Card Information

Insurance Policies  
Wills/Legal Documents/Divorce Decree  
State Driver's License\*  
(Make sure it is good for your entire tour)(Most states allow for on-line renewal)  
Vehicle Title/Registration  
Bank Statements/Account Info  
SF-50s, Personnel Actions  
Employment/Resume Info  
Leave & Earning Statements (MyPay)

**FLYING INTO JAPAN:**

If you are traveling with pets, be very careful about your flight plans. Most PSD personnel and travel offices are not smart on the pet restrictions and travel times. As a rule of thumb they will not allow pets on flights that are longer than 12 hours. Outside air temperature restrictions and kennel size restrictions can also be an issue. Recommend talking to airlines directly to make sure they are good to go.

There is only one Narita shuttle that goes to Atsugi and it leaves at 1800. Realize if you are landing much earlier you are going to have to hang out at the airport until the shuttle leaves. PCS rules don't allow you to hire a driver and van to pick you up from Narita unless you have a pet that you are transporting back because pets are not allowed on the Narita

Shuttle. Only your active duty sponsor is allowed to reserve a seat to and from Atsugi on the shuttle to meet you at the airport.

If you fly the armed forces flight plan on a long 30+ hours from your starting point in the states to Yokota, be prepared for several stop-overs and delays. It will test your patience and bag of tricks to take care of your kids. Plan on a two-hour drive to Atsugi once you get to Japan.

Expect to live in the Navy Lodge with dependent(s). You will live in the BEQ if you are a bachelor or if you are unaccompanied. When your dependent(s) arrive you will relocate to the Navy Lodge. If you have children you will have adjoining rooms. Rooms have a kitchenette, cable and Internet.

## **We're (I'm) Here!!! – Now What?**

Welcome to Japan!! Whether or not you arrive on a commercial carrier at Narita International Airport or via a freedom flight in Yokota, assuming the squadron is in town, your sponsor should be there to meet you, or at least set up ground transportation to get you from the airport to the Navy Lodge or BEQ. Your sponsor or the transportation agent should have a sign with your name on it. They should be waiting for you as you clear customs. (If they are not meeting you at the airport, an agent will be at the DOD counter in Terminal 1. If you land in Terminal 2 you need to catch a shuttle bus to Terminal 1.) Narita has a military help desk and Yokota is an Air force base, so if anything doesn't go as planned you will have DoD folks there to help and both Narita and Yokota have a military shuttle bus that will take you right to Navy Lodging.

After arriving on base, plan on not getting any good sleep for a few days. Jet lag is a real issue, and it will take a few days, if not a week, to fully acclimate. Best way to work through the jet lag is to just "power through". Stay awake when the sun is up and go to sleep 2-3 hours after sunset. PT will ease this pain. Get on a workout schedule and stick with it. The base has 3 facilities that are very nicely maintained, as well as in indoor and outdoor pool!

After you get your first night's sleep, you're going to want to start the check-in process. Just like the "pre-move" period, after you arrive in Atsugi, **patience is important**. Nothing happens quickly or without the correct paperwork done in the correct order. Most of the civilians on base are Japanese nationals. They are very polite and try to be helpful but they are also FANATICAL about proper paperwork. If your paperwork isn't in order you WILL NOT get things done. Also, TARDINESS is not tolerated. If you show up late to a required class, don't plan on being allowed to attend. Being late to a class might cost you an extra week of pain...

As for the rest of the check-in process, honestly it's even worse than in the U.S. Everything takes about 2-3 times as long as you'd expect. There are lots of stupid places to check in, forms to fill out, stamps to get, etc., before you can do anything. If the service member isn't going to be around and the spouse is going to work through the check-in process, he or she MUST have a GENERAL POWER OF ATTORNEY to get anything done (Special POA's if you want to get specific). Bring the POA, copies of your sponsor's orders, and your dependent entry approval to everything you do without your sponsor. With that said, it's easier for Officers in uniform to take care of the check-in. It's unfortunate but spouses don't get as much "traction" as an Officer, so keep that in mind.

OK, you're here, let's get started....

### **THINGS TO KNOW RIGHT OFF THE BAT**

If you haven't already heard, Atsugi is a "Fishbowl". You will live, work, eat and play in close proximity to a very small group of people. Just be aware that like it or not privacy is somewhat curtailed and everyone usually knows everyone else's business.

### **CHECK IN WITH YOUR SQUADRON AND PSD**

This is simple and pretty straightforward. Check in with your gaining command and PSD. Get your orders stamped and begin the paperwork for your travel claim and Temporary Lodging Assistance payments (TLA). Admin and PSD will give you a check-in sheet that'll guide you through the rest of the process.

### **CHECK IN WITH TRICARE AND MEDICAL**

If you have dependents, you'll need to start with Tricare. Get your wife and kids updated with Tricare. Tricare is located in the building behind the branch medical clinic. Next, take your medical / dental records to the branch clinic and check in. If you have dependents, make sure to bring all of their records, too. All hands must check in with Tricare, even if you do NOT have dependents.

### **DRIVERS LICENSE CLASS**

Get the **drivers class done ASAP** after getting here. It's held every Wednesday. After that, you can get a temporary 30-day "on-base" driver's license so you can buy a car and not have to walk everywhere or beg for rides. There is a base shuttle bus that picks up at BEQ 1290 and goes completely around the flight line. It is a great deal, but if you rely on this, you are schedule bound.

### **BUYING A CAR**

You'll need the following before you can purchase a vehicle.

1. A valid US Mil / DOD Civilian dependent ID card
2. A valid US state driver's license
3. A US Forces Japan (temp or permanent) driver's license
4. PCS orders

Once you've got all the above requirements met, you can buy a car. Cars are relatively cheap and folks leaving are required to get rid of their cars before they check out. Talk with your squadron mates about what's best for you. Cars can be purchased from \$500 - \$4000 (for a nice low-mile van or sedan). Wellchom's is the car dealer a lot of people use. John is the owner, speaks perfect English and has two lots. One is on base and one is just off base by the front gate. He has a good reputation for selling decent cars, and he handles a lot of the paperwork with the local city government. His cars are probably a few hundred bucks more than other lots around, but it's worth the extra money not having to deal with Atsugi city hall.

Buying is the easy part...registering it on base is not easy or fun. But here's how you do it.

1. Find a car you like and buy it. You will need to put down a small deposit for the dealer to hold the vehicle.
2. The dealer should give you a copy of the title
3. Go to City Hall to get a temp plant
4. Take your title copy and go to the insurance office and buy insurance. You must buy 3 months minimum liability insurance.
5. Go to the VRO with your insurance and title copy. Get a Temp Pass and LTO paperwork
6. Go back to the dealer with the temp tags & temp base pass. Pay for the car and receive the title.
7. Bring the car on base and get it inspected at the autoport
8. Go back to VRO and have a "runner" go out in town to handle LTO
  - a. Register out in town
  - b. Get a permanent plate
  - c. Pay road tax
  - d. Pay weight tax
9. Runner will now return the temp plates back to city hall.
10. Go back to VRO with all your paperwork (orders, title, inspection, proof of insurance, JCI paperwork, registration, insurance and temp pass) and get your on base sticker.

Note: If you use Wellchom's most of the back-and-forth paperwork drill is done for you. But of course you'll pay a little extra for the convenience.

### **AOB / ICR (Area Orientation brief / Intercultural Relations).**

This is a required class for all service members, spouses, and anyone who wants off-base driving privileges. The class lasts Mon-Fri. It has some great information, esp. for first timers to Japan. You need an AOB/ICR completion certificate to get your permanent SOFA driver's license. Again, don't forget to carry your current, valid, stateside license with you to Japan. There's no way out of it...The Japanese are fanatical about attendance and take roll two or three times each day.

### **SCHOOLS**

The military offers one free ticket per year, round trip, for dependents to attend college stateside. This ticket only originates from Japan, thus the dependent must travel with you during your PCS move to take advantage of this perk. Consult the Admin department for further details.

**<https://www.cnic.navy.mil/Atsugi/CommunitySupport/Education/index.htm>**

Shirley Lanham Elementary School (<http://www.lanham-es.pac.dodea.edu/>) receives high marks. The middle & high school are mixed bags, some good, some bad. The elementary school is on base and within walking distance from the Navy Lodge. School starts at 0800. Camp Zama Middle / High School (<http://www.zama-hs.pac.dodea.edu/>) is on Camp Zama (30 minutes north by bus). The school bus picks up around 0640 from the Lodge if you have kids in middle or high school.

### **HOUSING ON ATSUGI / TLA**

**<https://www.cnic.navy.mil/Atsugi/Departments/Housing/index.htm>**

Phone # - DSN: 264-3237 / commercial from states: 011-81-467-63-3237

The housing office can be frustrating. With that caveat, they have good counselors to help guide you thru the process. Most folks with children want to live on base. Getting "On-base housing" can be a challenge and an exercise in patience. Wait times for units to become available can be significant. Plan on living in the BEQ or Navy Lodge for up to 8 weeks. If you are staying at the Navy Lodge and have children, you are authorized TWO ADJOINING ROOMS. Often the wait isn't that long but be prepared. The Navy Lodge isn't too bad and everyone goes through it... (Navy Lodge DSN 264-6880) While you're staying in the Navy Lodge you'll receive Temporary Lodging Allowance (TLA). It's an allowance that pays for your room(s) and additional expenses. The Admin department will assist you getting the TLA payments. You'll need to bring your Navy Lodge room receipt(s) to the housing office first and get them to stamp it. Once you have the receipt with a housing office stamp, bring it to admin for processing. The money should post to your account in a few days.

Prior to arriving contact Jeff Baulknight (Housing mgr) [Charles.Baulknight@fe.navy.mil] and make sure he knows you're coming. He should be able to assist and assign a counselor to help you before you arrive and your sponsor should be able to help with that as well.

The best way to circumvent the delays is to provide your sponsor with a special Power of Attorney so he can go over to housing with a copy of your orders and get all the paperwork completed so all the paperwork is done by the time you arrive.

### **SHOPPING ON BASE (NEX AND COMMISSARY)**

Both the Exchange and Commissary are pretty good and have ample supplies of things you wish to purchase. With that said, the selection isn't as good as you're accustomed to in the US, some items are hard to find and when they are in stock, they go quickly. A good rule of thumb is that if you want it, pack it in your HHG shipment. But...it's not impossible to find nice things once you get here, it just might take some extra effort.

The commissary is excellent. Food items are exactly what you're used to in the US and the selection is great. Prices are very reasonable when compared to food costs out in town.

Other places to shop are the Camp Zama PX, which is 20 minutes away, and the Yokosuka Naval Base NEX, which is 40 minutes away with Toll roads (\$24 round trip).

### **CELL PHONES**

NO, the Navy will not pay for you to get a cell phone, but you'll find that it is a worthwhile personal expense if you can afford it. Softbank is the on-base cell phone provider and is located inside the NEX food court. Their service is good and the prices here are the same as in the states. Plans are different so ask your sponsor for his recommendation. Additionally, it is illegal to talk on your phone in the car while driving. As for phones, it is highly recommended that you get the latest and greatest Apple iPhone product. The iPhone is less a telephone and more a survival tool. Get it, you'll love it. There are multiple iPhone APPs that are great and will make your time in Japan much easier. Here's a short list of recs:

1. Metro (Japan train schedules and directions)
2. Jibbiggo-Jp (talk to translate English to Japanese and vice/versa)

3. Hyperdia (Train travel)
4. Travel Talk for Japan (cheap English to Japanese translator)
5. iCurrencyPad (quickly computes \$ to Yen and vice/versa)
6. Compass
7. Moving Map with GPS functionality ... You will need this in Japan!
8. Skype so you can make calls on the 3G network and Wifi
9. Textplus (allows you to text stateside cell phone numbers for free)

## **BANKING**

There are two banks on base. A Navy Fed and the Community Bank. Navy Fed's only drawback is that getting Yen from them is expensive. Part of the deal they had to sign to get a branch on base was to be less competitive than the Community Bank when exchanging dollars to Yen. (Non-compete clause). Anyway, except for needing Community bank for Yen, Navy Fed here works just like the states and is the way to go. If you sign up for Navy Fed's active duty checking all of your ATM fees at community bank are refunded.

## **MOVERS IN JAPAN:**

When you finally get a house, plan on the movers being prompt and not wearing shoes in your house. If they say 8am, they will be there at 745am. The movers will unpack all your boxes if you want them to or just part of them that you specify. Beds will be set up and any major furniture. They will take a break at 10am and a quick lunch break and another break in the afternoon, too. One person in the crew should speak English.

Tipping is offensive in Japan. In exchange, Japanese movers love American cookies like Oreos, Coke, and hot tea if the weather is cold. If you are on base, Taco Bell or something like that is appreciated. Just ask. Do not tip.

## **OTHERS**

1. In the lobby of the Base Admin building and the BOQ front desk there are directions to numerous locations around Japan (from Costco to the US Embassy). These are gouge when trying to get around Japan.
2. The Auto Port offers rental vehicles that include toll passes. Cars are \$45 and vans are \$65 per day. Going from Atsugi to Narita costs 3050 Yen (apx \$38.00 US) EACH WAY. Rental cars come with FREE toll tickets, a MWR perk, regardless of your destination, so consider that when you decide to take a trip.
3. AOB/ICR is mandatory for all SOFA members coming to Japan. This class will teach more about what to do once you get here and the exciting things that you are about to encounter. AOB for single Sailors starts at 0730 and requires one of the following uniforms: Khakis, Peanut-butters (NSU) or Whites. The ICR portion starts at 0830 Tuesday-Friday and is for Service members AND Family members alike. Fun for the entire family!

## **SAVED ROUNDS**

Packing up and moving halfway around the world is hard. Your move will go a lot smoother if you plan ahead and have copies of all the required paperwork and any recommended resources. Engage early with the command and your sponsor. We've all been through it, know what it's like, and want to help.