

Japan Tips

Living & Working in Nagoya, Japan



Compiled
by NIS Staff
2008

Getting Here • Transportation • Expenses • Furnishings • Climate/Clothing • Things to Do and See • Notes



Welcome to Nagoya International School!

To help you in your decision process, or if you have already made a decision to come to NIS, you have picked a beautiful country, rich in culture and history.

Situated in what was once an agricultural village of Moriyama, Nagoya International School is located within the city limits of Nagoya. Surrounded by traditional homes, rice paddies, a few small factories and farms, NIS staff and students enjoy the greenery and mountain views of central Japan. At the same time, our unique location allows us to be at the heart of one of Japan's major cities and ports within an hour. Kosoji, the nearest train station, is approximately 10 minutes by car from our campus, and allows for easy access to downtown Nagoya and other railway connections.

Nagoya abounds in varieties of events and activities to suit all tastes. To make your arrival and settling-in period easier, we have compiled some information that should give you a taste of what to expect. It certainly is not a complete list by any means, since each individual has specific preferences, but it is meant to help prepare you for the transition to living and teaching in Japan.

This document has evolved over the years, starting with a collection of e-mails from teachers working at NIS at the time, and compiled by volunteers to assist new teachers in their relocation. It has been a valuable resource for those of us new since then. At the same time, we

recognize that based on the contributions, these "Japan Tips" do represent an American-centric viewpoint. Those of you who may be coming from Europe, for instance, will find that certain references to prices, or sizes of ovens and washing machines, will not necessarily represent a change from your past experiences.

Getting Here

❖ Getting Here & Living Here

Keeping in mind that your shipping allowance is between \$1,100-\$2,000 (personal and professional materials combined), there are many ways to move your belongings to Japan. Here are some suggestions. (If you aren't from the US, please accept our apologies for the absence of other nations' rates):

(a) Surface Mail: (takes 6-8 weeks); no customs hassles; costs anywhere from \$1.50 -\$5.00 a pound (for shipping from the US); check for box dimensions and weight limitations. Professional materials can be shipped at a less expensive rate if there is nothing else in the box. Mark contents "Books" and/or "Printed Matter".

(b) Sea Freight: (can take several months); good for heavier, oversized items; cubic measure generally determines cost if weight isn't high enough. Shipping instructions should be from your door to the school ("door-to-door"). Sometimes boxes get crushed or damaged. Allied Van Lines has lots of experience shipping to Asia - and a reputation for excellent handling.

(c) Air Freight: depending on the company used, they may pick up your shipment from your door; over 500 pounds costs about \$1.50 a pound; delivery in about 1 week. One shipping company that has been helpful in the US is *Air Freight Forwarding* out of Boston. They have offices all over the world; (call 1-800-555-1212). Ship door-to-door. Since Delta Airlines flies cargo directly into Nagoya International Airport, some teachers have opted

for this convenient, though costly, option. There are an increasing number of other airlines with direct flights to Nagoya, including Northwest and United Airlines.

(d) Excess Baggage: Most airlines will permit several bags beyond the 2 bag limit and the cost is about \$80-90 **per bag**. If you are a good packer, you can get your 70 pounds stuffed into each extra bag and get quite a few things into Japan for just over \$1.00 a pound. Please keep in mind, however, that closet space is at a premium in Japan, and storage of extra suitcases might be a problem. You might wish to use boxes that are strong and well taped and strapped. Beyond three bags it is recommended that you contact the airline well in advance. If you choose to bring your own bicycle, most airlines will allow you to bring it at little or no cost, as long as your other bag doesn't exceed 70 lbs. No matter how you ship your belongings, you will be paying the shipping costs up front. Be sure to save your original receipts for all shipping costs so you can be reimbursed by the business office soon after your arrival.

❖ Arriving By Air

Be sure to make the time and date of your arrival known to the NIS office. An NIS representative will pick you up. When coming from east of the international dateline, be sure to inform the school of your actual departure date as well as your arrival date and which airline you are on. All overseas-hired staff should book your flight to Japan by contacting the headmaster's secretary.



Transportation

❖ Modes of Transportation

It will be important for you to find out where your apartment is located in proximity to the school. This may determine your transportation needs.

A bicycle is a popular mode of transportation despite the lack of sidewalk and road space. Scooters and mopeds are fairly inexpensive but are vulnerable to the interesting driving conditions found in Japan. They require international driving permits.

A car, albeit the most expensive mode, protects you from the elements as well as provides you an easy means of independent mobility. Most teachers own cars. Be prepared to rely on others, your feet, or a bicycle for at least a month after your arrival, as car purchasing takes time. Driving in Japan is on the left side of the road, a fact that newcomers adjust to quickly.

Should you choose to purchase a car, the following is an example of the costs involved for purchasing a compact used car generally about 5+ years old. **Purchase price:** yen 120,000-350,000; car size greatly affects the purchase price. Good quality, used cars, can generally be purchased

at prices far cheaper than in the US.) **Insurance:** yen 60,000 a year. **“Shaken”** (inspection of cars over 2 years old): about yen 100,000 every two years. **Gasoline:** a full tank costs about yen 6,000; many people make that last a month, while others fill up every week or two.

Just a reminder, bring your International Driver's Permit (available from AAA in the United States), and a current driver's license from your home country. Be sure your license will not expire during the year, or your insurance will be invalid, in case of an accident. You will need to obtain a Japanese license within your first year here. The school will assist you in this process.

❖ Public Transportation

Subways and trains are a very popular mode of travel in Japan. If you are fortunate to live near a train station (Jinryo, Kasugai, Kozoji, and others) then you can easily get around Nagoya and its environs. The train will take you to certain key stations in order to take the subway which is the most popular mode of travel in Nagoya (or Tokyo for that matter.) These key stations are Ozone and Chikusa. Once you get off at Ozone or Chikusa you transfer to the subway system or train lines, which are served by several “lines” all converging at Sakae, the heart of Nagoya.

The “main drag” going through Sakae is Hirokoji Dori. You can walk for hours all around seeing fantastic sights and shopping areas. Other than Sakae, other subway stations that are very popular are Fushimi, Kanayama, Shinsakae Machi, Imaike, Osu Kannon, and Hisaya-Odori. Various companies will offer you wallet-sized cards/maps fully explaining these routes. Never leave home without these cards! They will be invaluable.

The average train fare is 300-400 yen and the subway fare is 200-230. The system is clean and runs on time, but stops at midnight. If you plan on going to restaurants or pubs in downtown Nagoya, you will have to make arrangements for transportation between midnight and 5:00 am as the trains and subways do not run during these hours. Japan has a ZERO tolerance policy for drinking so alternate transportation is a must if you plan on enjoying the nightlife available. Buses are plentiful in many areas but with NIS being on the corner of the city, it is not well served. Buses are, however, useful for getting to various parts of the city and some of the major train stations.



Expenses

❖ Household Expenses

The school will provide you with your settling-in allowance in cash upon arrival. The school will also provide you with a cash advance, if needed. The first payday will be August 20.

There is a phone provided in each apartment, and some staff purchase their own personal phone/fax units with an additional portable phone for use in other rooms.

❖ Utilities

Estimated monthly utility bills for a small, two bedroom apartment with two occupants:

- **Water:** 4,000 yen per month
- **Telephone:** 4,000 yen per month (basic fee); local, long-distance calls, and internet service are extra.
- **Gas:** 3,000 yen per month (gas stove and water heater). Gas home heaters are available and would raise the monthly cost in the winter by about 6,000 yen.
- **Electricity:** 7,500-10,000 yen per month (large refrigerator, washing machine, AC, heat, lights). Because of the cold winter, and the hot summer months, electric heat and air conditioning costs might be higher. Gas or kerosene heaters are cheaper alternatives than the electric units installed in most homes.

❖ Food

A family of two can expect to spend about 8,000-10,000 yen per week on food and another 3,000 yen on various household items, especially during the first few months. Here are examples of the prices of some items at the local supermarket:

- 1 liter orange juice: 150-250 yen
- 1 liter apple juice: 150-200 yen
- 1 liter milk: 150-190 yen
- 10 eggs: 130-170 yen
- 250 grams butter: 258 yen
- 1 small tub margarine: 238 yen
- 10 slices bread: 180 yen
- 1 small box cereal: 298 yen
- 20 tea bags: 198 yen
- 1 head iceberg lettuce: 100-300 yen
- 30 string beans: 250 yen
- 15 cherry tomatoes: 200-400 yen
- 6 bananas: 150 yen
- 4 large apples: 500-700 yen
- 1 dozen tangerines: 500-700 yen
- canned soft drink: 110 yen
- 1 kilo chicken: 400-500 yen

❖ Miscellaneous Expenses/Tips

- Taxi from the school to Kozoji train station: 1,200 yen (approx. 10 minutes; the closest station to NIS)
- Train fare from Kozoji to downtown Nagoya: 400 yen
- Shinkansen to Tokyo: 20,000 yen (round-trip, bullet train)
- Dinner at a local, inexpensive restaurant: 900 yen

- Meal at noodle shop: 500 yen
- Coffee at a coffee shop or restaurant: 300-500 yen
- Medium Supreme pizza at Pizza Hut: 2,200 yen
- Burger, french fries & drink at McDonald's: 520-600 yen
- Sushi (conveyor belt-style - a must!): 800-2,000 yen
- Child care: 800 yen/hour - 100,000 yen/month (Rate is per child. This is the current general rate for children below the age of three who need all-day care while parents teach.)
- Membership in the local health club is a benefit partially funded by the school. Teachers are responsible for paying about 1200 yen a month for membership dues (includes aerobics, weight machines, treadmill/bike machines, and a swimming pool).
- Good grocery stores near the school or train station are Jusco, Apita at Sun Marche, A-Coop and Co-op at Kozoji station, and Seibu.
- Bank machines are usually found at the shopping areas. They are only open during specific hours.
- You will need to get a seal or hanko for signing official documents when in Japan. It will cost about 3,500-5,000 yen. (The school will help you with this process.)
- For hardware and kitchen goods nothing beats Anto which is not too far from the school.
- Once you have signed your contract, we recommend that you start learning Japanese at home. There are numerous places that offer Japanese here, though being immersed in an English speaking environment during the day will limit your opportunities to practice Japanese.
- Very few people on the street or in stores speak English, but the Japanese are very friendly and patient with "gaijin" (foreigners) so do not be shy asking questions or directions even if the conversation may be entirely in sign language.
- Bring lots of roomy t-shirts for the warm months and sport shirts for the cooler months. Warm socks for winter are also strongly recommended.



Furnishings

❖ Household Items

Before you consider bringing any appliances with you, make sure that they will work with Japanese electrical systems. In order to work in Japan, your appliance needs to be able to run on 100 volts at 50/60 Hz. While electric sockets are the same size and dimensions as standard household American plugs, they are only two-prong so any three-prong plugs will require an adapter. Before you decide to buy an appliance in Japan rather than bring it from home, keep in mind that all built-in LCD menus will

be in Japanese, not English. You may be able to plug it in but to actually use it may require an interpreter.

In general, leave your TV and large stereo systems at home; although new electronic equipment (Walkman, cameras, TV's, etc.) is relatively expensive to buy in Japan (even though many Japanese products are sold so affordably in your home country). Local secondhand shops often sell TV's, VCR's, and home stereos at a fraction of the new price. Used electronics are also available from teachers and the greater international community. Many Japanese televisions have built-in multilingual audio systems, a feature you will need to hear English language TV shows and movies.

One exception to the above would be DVD players. As you may know, most commercial DVD's are made to work only in one specific region. Japan and North America are in two different DVD regions. This means that a Japanese DVD player is unable to play American DVD's and visa versa. If you wish to play both Japanese and American DVD's you have three possible solutions: 1) consider getting a region free DVD player with English language menus; 2) buy a new region free one in Japan for 8,000-10,000 yen and learn the Japanese menu; or 3) bring your American DVD player with you and purchase a Japanese one when you get here.

Another exception is your computer. If you have a new, fast, IBM or Mac already set up the way you like it, you might consider including it in your shipment for use at your home. English language PC's can be purchased in Japan but tend to be more expensive. The NIS campus is fully networked with fast, fiber-optic connections to the Internet and ubiquitous WiFi. Most teachers have at least one computer in their classroom.

A desk or night lamp, and a clock will come in handy and may cost you more here. Electric clocks run fine here. Many clocks sold in Japan are windup, or battery operated. Some people bring answering machines from home, others purchase phone/fax units here. It's up to you.

A full-sized ironing board is something you might consider bringing along if you do much ironing. The local ones are small, table top models and cost more than a full size board in the US. Larger ones are hard to find. A hair dryer, if you use one, should come from home. The school will provide a bedsheet and towel for your use upon arrival; however, beyond that towels and bedding are not provided by the school so you need to bring them with you. Be sure to find out bed sizes before purchasing. Unless you are certain that your bed follows the dimensions of your sheets, you would be wise to purchase only flat sheets. The beds in Japan do not conform to traditional western sizes, so buy the larger sized sheets.

If you have any decorations that symbolize home to you, bring them along! You'll feel better than you would looking at bare walls - just remember though; it costs to ship things BACK home. Also keep in mind that framing is expensive here. Some landlords prefer you don't put holes in the walls. If you're a seamstress, fabric is plentiful,

however most stores do not stock Western patterns written in English.

❖ Kitchen Supplies

When you first arrive at your apartment, you will be supplied with a starter kit of kitchen supplies that will include all the basics. You may want to include your favorite cooking utensils in your shipment. There are dishes available here in many price ranges. Good quality pottery is very reasonably priced. The school is located just minutes from one of Japan's pottery centers, and nearby to two others. There are two pottery fairs in the early fall. You should save your shipment space for less fragile items. For example, stainless steel eating utensils are quite pricey in Japan. Set your priorities for your shipment. What you don't send you can acquire quite easily. Sometimes the price you pay might even out with what you would have paid in shipping.

Pots and pans are also items which you may choose to include in your shipment. The Japanese stores have a wonderful variety of kitchenware, but they can be expensive. Most Japanese ovens are microwave/convection ovens and can bake only one loaf of bread at a time. An 11"x12" pan takes up the whole oven! So remember, think small when it comes to baking. Muffin cups are useful if you plan to make cupcakes or muffins very often.

Your favorite cooking gadgets and utensils (measuring cups and spoons among other things) are generally lightweight and worth the shipping expense to send them here. You'll feel more at home with them and won't have to waste time and money trying to replace them here. (Note: Japanese measuring devices are metric.)

A hand mixer and blender are very handy and are expensive to purchase here. A US microwave will work but not as well because the cycles here are 50 instead of 60. With space at a premium, the local models are more suited to the available space in your kitchen, too. Throw in bottles of your favorite spices and herbal teas. (A note of caution here: Be sure to package food items separately from your other things in the event that Japanese customs finds any sort of insect contamination - you don't want to have all your clothing fumigated!)

Small, plastic storage containers (similar to Tupperware and Rubbermaid) can be found at very good prices. Finding them may take a little time, but it's worth the wait. Canisters and other large storage items, though available, are much more expensive, and essential for keeping 'critters' and humidity out of flour, sugar, etc. Ship large containers if you think they'll be a help. Ultimately, you can get whatever you need here.

❖ Furnishings

The school supplies the following items for apartments: (these are not necessarily new)

Kitchen:

- stove
- microwave/convection oven
- refrigerator
- kitchen table and 4 chairs
- buffet hutch/dish storage
- starter set of pots/pans, cooking utensils, silverware, plates and cups/glasses

Living room:

- sofa
- 2 chairs
- coffee table
- book case
- desk and chair

Bedroom:

- single bed or futon (double for couples)
- dresser
- sheer curtains for windows

Appliances:

- washing machine
- 1 air conditioning/heating unit
- vacuum cleaner
- telephone

Married couples/families will receive additional kitchen ware/utensils, kitchen chairs, beds/futons, dressers and desks as needed.

Residents are responsible for reasonable and prudent care of the apartments as well as the furnishings in the apartments. In the case of campus housing, residents are responsible for the upkeep of yards around their homes. Major repairs/work within the apartment and replacement of school furnishings will be provided by the school, if necessary, at the discretion of the headmaster. Additional or extra furnishings are not provided by the school and repair/work not reasonably justified as necessary will be at the residents' expense. Exceptions will be made at the headmaster's discretion.

Residents will be expected to leave the apartments and all furnishings in acceptable condition before termination of employment at NIS. Any unexplained/unreasonable damage will be at the residents' expense. Apartments must be left clean (this includes refrigerators and ovens). Unwanted personal items must not be left in the apartments. It is the residents' responsibility to dispose of these items, not the school's.

❖ Familiar Products

Once you arrive here there are a few possibilities for obtaining familiar food products. Just be aware that it can take several weeks for things to arrive once they are ordered:

1.) Foreign Buyers Club (FBC): FBC operates out of Kobe and offers just about anything you could imagine

to eat as well as cleaning supplies, health products and the like. Bring bar codes from favorite products and they will try to obtain them for you even if they're not listed in their catalog. This can be an opportunity to get goods far cheaper than on the local market. These are generally American products that would cost you quite a bit to ship from home. Bulk purchases make this possible but through teacher sharing it is possible to get smaller quantities.

2.) Costco: Cheese, hot dogs, natural foods and wines are also available in bulk lots, through different sources such as Costco, which features on-line orders.

3.) Kinoshita: This is a Japanese store that sells powdered sugar, cocoa, soups, peanut butter and other items of interest. Items are ordered through the sponsoring teacher and are delivered to the school in about a week. The cost is lower than the local market and higher than the FBC but allows you to buy in smaller quantities.

❖ Toiletries

You can get a wide range of drugstore items here, (once you can recognize them - television advertising helps), however, you'll pay an inflated price for them, especially if they're imported. If you don't have a particular preference for shampoos, powders, cosmetics, colognes, skin creams, etc., you will find that the additional shipping cost is not worth the expense. Many products which you would purchase in a health or natural products store back home are not readily available here. Definitely bring those along, if you prefer them. Prescriptions should be filled at home. Some medications (for example, birth control pills and Ritalin) are not legal in Japan and a year's supply should be brought in your bags. If they are mailed into Japan, they will be stopped at the port and you may not be able to get them. If you suffer from allergies or asthma, you may want to bring anything you think you will need. Be discreet when bringing them in. Reasonably priced vitamins are not found here and should be purchased in the US or through the local Foreign Buyers Club. Generally, milk is not fortified with Vitamin D (although some is) and so you may want to bring your own supplement. Consider bringing fluoride tablets for children - tap water is NOT fluoridated. However, check with your doctor on the use of fluoride tablets for children. Some doctors do not recommend them.



Climate & Clothing

❖ Climate and Clothing Tips

SUMMER

When you arrive in August it will be VERY hot and humid. Be prepared to sweat A LOT! You will need to have a good supply of loose, cool summer clothing for

sports, everyday activities and work. Don't forget to pack a few handkerchiefs – every smart Japanese person and gaijin (foreigner) keeps one handy to wipe a sweaty brow or neck.

Once school begins, shorts and jeans are not acceptable teaching attire. Certainly there are exceptions (field trips or special projects), but they should not become a habit. Consider bringing clothes with the school colors, green and white. In addition, don't forget to bring something with which to create a Halloween costume. Western sizes are difficult to find unless you are very thin and short. Great shopping awaits you in Seoul, Korea, only an hour flying time from Nagoya. You will find all sizes and quality of goods at prices cheaper than in your home country.

AUTUMN

The weather turns cooler (thankfully) about mid-September. The autumn is cool, and very pleasant. Be prepared for rain; typhoon season can run from mid-August through mid-October. Nagoya doesn't get as much rain as other areas of Japan, but it doesn't hurt to be prepared. Umbrellas are readily available here and inexpensive. It's rude to carry an umbrella with you all dripping wet into a store or home, so there are umbrella holders by the entrances of all buildings. Buy or bring one with a hooked handle to prevent it from falling through the holes in the umbrella stands. Raincoats should be purchased in your home country.

WINTER

The spectacular autumn foliage disappears at the end of November, then the winter chill settles in. Central heating is not one of the many foreign comforts which the Japanese have adopted. Homes are often uninsulated and drafty by Western standards. The school supplies an air conditioning / heat pump unit. The heat pump unit does not work well during the coldest months. We recommend that you purchase an economical kerosene heater once you arrive. If you need more humidity in the air, humidifiers are available here at reasonable prices.

For the cooler winter months, you might be more comfortable with long underwear and layers of clothing so you can regulate your body temperature. The classrooms are heated but the hallways are not, and your journey to and from school might be more pleasant if you aren't shivering. Be sure to bring along a lot of your favorite sweaters and possibly an electric blanket. Definitely add a down or Hollowfill comforter to your shipment. You will be glad you did all through the cold months of January and February. Warm socks and slippers are always an essential item and should be plentiful. Since outdoor shoes are NOT worn in the home, bring one or two pairs of slip-on shoes. You will be in and out of them frequently.

For outside, a down jacket or heavy winter coat is a necessity. Your average (i.e., northeast coast, USA) winter apparel and footwear will be fine. We wear "outdoor"

shoes in school. Lined boots for school might really be comfy, though not essential. Nagoya does not get much snow – about once or twice a year. However, the Japanese Alps are only two hours away.

❖ Sports, equipment, shoes, etc.

If you are interested in any sports, be sure to bring along your equipment. You'll be able to do the things you enjoy without having to spend your first few months trying to locate things. Japanese sports clubs expect members to have "inside" shoes which are not worn for outside activities, so an extra new pair of your favorite athletic shoes is a requirement for those who wish to use the club. Swimming caps are required in pools at health clubs. You may bring one or plan on getting one here. A good pair of walking shoes might be a good investment, especially for the period of time before you decide about buying a car. A day pack, for hiking and carrying purchases, is always useful.

In general, when packing for Japan, just remember the sizes and discount prices you are used to in the US are not always available here. For example, most women's shoe sizes larger than 8, and men's larger than 9 1/2 or 10, are generally not available. You might be better off if you do your shopping before you leave.

Things to Do & See

Nagoya is centrally located in Japan, making it a perfect jumping off point for exploring the culture and history of the country. Japan is a very safe country, and staff members regularly travel all over Japan. Nagoya itself is the home of the famous Shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa. The Tokugawa Art Museum is a treasure trove of art and history (with some English signage) and a fabulous Japanese Garden; while Nagoya Castle, one-time home of the Tokugawa family, has become the symbol of Nagoya. The famous Atsuta Shrine is home of the sacred sword, one of the three national relics. For those who prefer more modern outings, Toyota is located nearby. Toyota provides very interesting tours of their factories (in English). The Port of Nagoya includes a first class Aquarium. Japan Visitor (japanvisitor.com) has an extensive list of other things to see in the area.

Nagoya is also the jumping off point for many excursions. Nagano prefecture, a skiing mecca and host of the 1998 Winter Olympics, is a couple of hours away by car; and Kamikochi, the Alps of Japan, is a great weekend trip for beautiful countryside. Shirakawa-village, an old Gassho style town is well worth the drive and "hotels" there are right in the old, traditional homes.

Hiking abounds in this wonderful area with some trails available literally outside your door (depending, of course, on where your door is). Maps, trails, and information about them are generally available in English.

Mountain biking is popular here and even an outdoor climbing wall has been found.

If you prefer to experience some of the traditional crafts of Japan, look no further. Ikebana, the art of flower arranging; shibori, Japanese art of tie-dyeing in Arimatsu; ceramics, our nearby town Seto is internationally famous for its pottery; Noh theatre as well as a variety of other traditional Japanese dance and performing arts (“Nishikawa-ryu Odori”, “Kabuki”, etc.) are all available.

❖ Shopping

Stores of all kinds abound in our area. You will have many choices of grocery stores, home centers and Mom and Pop stores, often within walking distance of your home. Downtown Nagoya sports department and electronic stores with almost anything you might want or need, although the directions on most electronics will probably be in Japanese (not to fear, our fabulous Japanese staff will help you out). Downtown Nagoya has stores both above and below ground, making shopping comfortable in any weather. Maruzen, a Japanese bookstore, has a fairly good selection of English books. In downtown Nagoya, amidst the large department stores, you’ll find an international food store and an international bookstore.

Shopping for food can be a bit of an adventure. The grocery stores are stocked with those items common to the Japanese diet and while most packages have easy to identify pictures on them, others require a bit of guesswork. There are a number of international stores available with familiar foods from around the world, health food stores as well as stores that sell wholesale or in bulk.



❖ Housing

The size of faculty housing varies according to the number of family members, and availability. Though it is difficult to tell you exactly what to expect, if you are prepared for your housing to be quite small, you will be pleasantly surprised if it’s a bit bigger than you expected. Storage is always at a premium. The school has been upgrading the housing, and recent new hires all report great satisfaction with their housing. There are no guarantees for size but they will probably be 50-60 square meters for singles and larger for couples, and couples with children.

Japanese often measure their rooms in terms of numbers of tatami mats. These measurements will give you a general idea of room sizes. Take a moment to measure out how big a tatami mat (90 cm x 180 cm) is, then, if you are told you have a 6 or 8 tatami mat room, you will have a better idea of the space involved.

❖ Furniture & Household items

Many of the departing teachers are selling things they have gathered during their time here. Perhaps you have already been contacted by some of them with their lists. You are not obligated to purchase anything, but most of us agree that the time and energy that was saved by having these pre-purchased items waiting for us upon our arrival was worth every cent. Those of us who had to do the footwork to locate, purchase and transport shelves, TVs, VCRs, etc., either went without for several weeks or had to find some kind soul who was willing to give up the time to help us shop. At the beginning of the school year, in a new country (where we were/are basic illiterates) precious time was given up for shopping, rather than settling in. The choice is yours. The school takes no responsibility for these transactions.

Generally, people are pretty fair when they price things. Items in poor shape are often listed as “gomi”. In Japanese, “gomi” literally means “trash”, but it has become a buzzword around the school referring to good, used stuff (a la Salvation Army, Goodwill, etc). There are two Japanese “gomi” stores in our area. Since the local people often discard things that we find completely serviceable, bargains can be found there.

❖ Gifts & Celebrations

In the past, teachers have enjoyed having secret pals for Christmas or Valentine’s Day. Small, inexpensive items from your present country or your home can fill in extra spaces in a suitcase and be fun to give in thanks for the help you receive from parents, students and other staff members.

Wrapping paper, ribbons, decorative gift bags, etc. can make gift-giving easier (available inexpensively at the many 100 yen shops). Generally elementary teachers give gifts to their room mothers and other helpers and if you have something special on hand it can make a very meaningful gift.

Halloween is a big affair here at NIS. There is a carnival and many dress up in costumes. If you have things to bring that can make an interesting and unusual costume, throw them into your shipment.

**What have we forgotten? Probably volumes. But, if we put everything in this booklet it would leave nothing for you to write to us about. Making a checklist of things YOU think you should bring, and then running it by someone here, might help you eliminate things that are easy to get here and adding too much to your shipment.*