



Etiquette Tips

Meeting and Greeting

Greeting people when you meet is the base level of politeness in Japanese society. Your manner of doing this speaks volumes about who you are as a person. Always greet people loudly and proudly, and many will be impressed by your manners.

"Ohayo Gozaimasu" is most often said to others before 10:00 A.M. or when you first show up at work. If you come into work later in the day, it is still appropriate to greet others with this phrase.

"Konnichiwa" is in most cases used after 10:00 A.M. and before 5:00 P.M., but can be used into the early part of the evening if you want to appear casual.

"Konbanwa" is most often said after 5:00 P.M., but may be greeted with "Konnichiwa", so don't be surprised if that happens to you!

In the case that you have already greeted someone and you see them in the hall or something, just give them a "Domo, domo!" That will be much more natural than repeating the other greetings over again.

When you are leaving before others, it is best to say, "Osakini shitsurei shimasu!" And, if someone else is parting before you, "Otsukaresama deshita!" is the proper thing to say to them.

Visiting Someone's Home

It is an honor to get to visit someone's home. If you want to make a good impression, bring a wrapped (or at least bagged) gift. It can be any type local specialty food or liquor or even an everyday thing if it is famous in your area. When you present it, just simply say, "Tsumaranai mono desu." meaning that your gift is not worthy of their hospitality.

Use the slippers provided by your host at the entrance and wear these unless entering a tatami room (at which time you take them off) or when going to the bathroom (at which time you switch up for the pair in there). Also, be very careful not to drag anything across tatami as they can be very easily damaged and are very expensive.

While visiting, relax. Your host wants you to have a good time in their home. As long as you don't make a mess or burn the place down, your visit will be a success!

Where to Sit?

In meetings and at parties, there may or may not be a seating chart. Just follow directions. The only time there will be trouble is if you sit down and refuse to move. If in doubt, just say, "Doko?"

Dress Code

The way teachers, students and staff dress at school should be readily apparent. If you want to fit in, it would be best to match the atmosphere. Of course, if you are told what to wear, it is best to follow that advice.

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O-miyage

When you meet someone for the first time, join an organization, go on a trip or out on business, it is customary to give a little something to everybody that comes from your hometown or from where you went. This can be candy, a keychain, or stationary. Whatever it is, people will appreciate it. There are many ways of presenting o-miyage to your coworkers. Just watch and see what others do and if in doubt, ask somebody knowledgeable. This is a nice thing to do and will make you look good, but no one will think less of you if you don't give them anything.

HOW BIG IS MY WHAT?!

Japanese people will inevitably be curious about you and will ask questions (whether drunk or sober) that would be considered fighting words in our own country. Just take it with a casual attitude and make up an answer off the cuff. "How many girlfriends do I have? Oh, about 50."

Questions are easily dodged, but inappropriate touching sometimes comes from out of nowhere. If someone be it teacher or student makes you uncomfortable, firmly tell them "NO!" That is the one English word all Japanese should be able to understand.

Let It All Hang Out!

If you don't come from a culture where people bathe together, you are in for a real treat. Japanese baths are some of the most relaxing things there is. But, the purpose of them is just that, TO RELAX. It is essential that you shower and shampoo before you get into the bath. In some places, a towel for scrubbing will be provided. If you see others in the bathhouse draping this over their bits and pieces, you would be well advised to do the same.



The Secret Art of Japanese Toilets



Japanese toilets can be very confusing to the uninitiated. Squat toilets can be the most baffling contraption you have ever faced in your life. The trick is to face into the plumbing, pull your pants down below your knees and get as close to the action as possible. Also keep in mind that in most public restrooms, paper is not provided, so take advantage of all those people handing you tissues on the street.

Recommended Links:

<http://www.japan-guide.com/forum/quedisplay.html>- Q&A forum; excellent for questions or just reading
<http://www.japanesepod101.com>- specifically designed for Japanese learning via podcast; has over 50 podcast lessons specific to Japanese culture (and etiquette) plus a very good message board for questions.

<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e622.html>

Helplines: CLAIR JETLINE 03-3591-5489; AJET Peer Support Group 0120-437-725

In Print: *Etiquette Guide to Japan* by Boye de Mente from Tuttle Publishers. (1351 yen from Amazon.co.jp)