

Living Arrangements

From CNFJ Housing Office

Make the *Yokosuka Housing Welcome Center* one of your first stops after arriving in Japan. Come in to pick up application forms for housing or, if you mailed applications in advance, confirm the housing office received them and your name is on the housing list. We would like to be able to offer on base Military Family Housing when you arrive, but in most categories the wait can be pretty long. Please click [here](#) to view the projected waiting periods for military family housing.

The housing market in Yokosuka is tight and prices are high due to the growth of demand for housing in the nearby Tokyo/Yokohama housing market. The Navy provides housing allowances and a Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) to help.

A key factor in your satisfaction with living in Japan is the expectations you bring. Don't expect to find an American-style home with a two-car garage and a large yard. This is a different country, with a different history, culture, customs and economy. Housing is different here.

Another critical factor in your ability to settle in here is the Navy's sponsorship program. A good sponsor makes the difference between a smooth transition into Japan and a painful ordeal. Write your new command and request a sponsor. Make contact with that person early in planning your move. A sponsor's firsthand knowledge will help you plan what to bring or store.

American newcomers are often shocked by their first look at available rental houses. Expect to see small houses averaging 830 square feet or less for a two-bedroom unit. They are built with unfamiliar materials like tatami (straw mat) floors, and with unfamiliar appliances, or no appliance at all (we provide stoves, washers and refrigerators). Older homes may have all tatami floors. Newer homes have only one or two tatami rooms; the rest are carpet or hardwood. Some homes have no tatami. Insulation is minimal. There are also apartment complexes you may choose.

The standard bedroom size is six tatami, about nine feet by eleven feet. A "large master bedroom" is eight tatami, or eleven by eleven. Houses have narrow halls and narrower staircases (one meter wide). Doors are narrower and lower, about six feet from floor to top. King size mattresses will not fit in the upstairs of every building. You can find housing where large beds and other large furniture will fit; however it may take some searching. Dining rooms are often just one end of a living room. The Welcome Center provides Japanese washing machines, American refrigerators and gas ranges for use while you are off base. We can also provide temporary furniture on a loan basis (not

to exceed ninety days) until your furniture arrives. Closets in bedrooms seldom have bars to hang clothes. Some are divided into upper and lower selections with no place to hang long dresses or coats. You may be able to install a temporary bar in the closet. You may want to bring a freestanding wardrobe or clothes rack or buy them here, but again remember, storage inside the house or outside may be limited or non-existent. There is usually no attic or basement and no garage. There may be a simple overhang under which to park the car. Yards are often small or non-existent. Bring only the minimum necessary furniture and ask your sponsor for advice.

Few houses have central heat or central air conditioning. Be prepared to buy portable heaters (natural gas, propane, kerosene, or electric), and you may want to buy small 110-volt window-type air conditioners (usually available in the Navy Exchange). Few houses are wired for a 220-volt window unit, and most have limited electrical capacity. Running two air conditioners at the same time may be electrically impossible.

For comparison, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force authorizes its admirals smaller quarters than we authorize for an American enlisted family. Buildable land is scarce in the Tokyo/Yokohama area. Demand for housing is fueled by combining the nation's capital, commercial and financial center, and major port into one metropolitan area. Many building materials and fuels are imported and expensive. These are major reasons Japanese houses are smaller than American homes. To help you adjust to living off base, the **Fleet and Family Support Center** offers several outstanding programs. A program called "Your Japanese Home" gives vital information on making a home in a Japanese house. Use of these excellent services will make your life off-base much happier and more comfortable.

On your first visit, the Welcome Center staff will enter your name and requirements in our Community Housing Service (CHS) system. CHS is an off-base housing referral system, which will help you find a home. We will need to see your airline ticket or other evidence of your port call date to determine your control date for the off-base housing service waiting list. Bilingual Welcome Center staff members will escort you for one full day of house hunting shortly after you arrive; to interpret for you and teach you to house hunt on your own. We also have a limited number of approved rental listings for you to select from. We cannot find a home for you, but we can help you find a home for yourself. The fastest, best way for you to find housing in the local community is to visit local agents yourself. List your needs with them; talk to your sponsor and others in your command that may be leaving Japan soon. The Welcome Center office provides a translated list of common questions that will enable the Japanese real estate agents to understand what you need. We also provide lists and maps showing the most commonly used real estate agents. There are over 400

agents in the area. Our list includes only about 60, so improve your chances by going to agents not on our list, as well as those who are. We will provide addresses written in English or Japanese to enable taxi drivers to take you either to house or to agents. Many agents are near train stations, and are easily spotted since they post floor plans in their front window for properties they rent or sell. Sponsors, shipmates, or earlier arrivals that have cars can also help.

Before you come into the Welcome Center for your first visit, have an idea of what maximum monthly rent you are able to pay. Disbursing can provide information on your allowances. The decision whether to stay within your allowances or spend additional money out of your COLA or base pay is yours. As in many major U.S. cities, you may have to pay more than your housing allowance to get a house that is acceptable to you. As part of your housing allowance, you will be receiving a monthly utility allowance and you'll also get a cost of living allowance that varies by pay grade and number of family members. Disbursing will also explain the "Miscellaneous Housing Allowance" (MIHA) and "Move-in" allowances that will help you meet the high cost of getting settled in Yokosuka. Keep in mind that as the yen/dollar exchange rate changes, your rent in dollars will rise and fall. Housing allowances for Japan are reviewed and adjusted regularly to compensate for exchange rate fluctuations, but there may be a time lag between the rate change and the compensation in the allowance.

Rental and utility payments must be paid promptly, and in yen, regardless of TAD, leave deployment or emergencies. Failure to pay can result in legal hold, loss of security clearance, and charges under the UCMJ or Federal laws.

On your first visit, we will need to know the number of bedrooms you will need and whether you will need a parking space or not. Many people commute by bike, train, or bus. This information, along with your maximum rent ceiling, will allow us to help match you with houses available through agents in the local market. Keep in mind also that any room can be used as a bedroom except the kitchen and bath. You may have to adapt the house to your needs.

Move-in costs for the Yokosuka area are running the equivalent of four months rent. They are broken down as first month's rent, security deposit, agent's fee and landlord's bonus. The Navy reimburses directly for the agent's fee and landlord's bonus, and you can draw advance pay to cover the first month's rent and security deposit. For some cases, the owner may demand an additional month's rent as a bonus or as an extra security deposit. If justified, the Welcome Center can approve the extra bonus to be reimbursed by the Navy. An extra security deposit is not reimbursable. For comparison, housing in the tighter Tokyo/Yokohama market can run six to fourteen months advance rent to move in, and rents are much higher than in the

Yokosuka area. If you need a telephone, the initial cost of an account is over \$500.00. If you buy a "used number" from a private party, there may be long distance charges incurred by the previous owner on your bill. Be sure you know what you are buying, and from whom. You can sell the telephone number to a broker or a private party when you leave Japan or move on base.

The CHS is designed to help match your needs to available houses, arrange government furnished transportation to view the house, and usually meet the agent. We offer a one-day interpreter escort service, and after that we have bilingual question/answer sheets to help. If you have a communication problem, call the Welcome Center from the agent's office and we will interpret by telephone within our available manpower.

Once your needs are entered in the CHS system, start house hunting on your own. Check the lists posted at the Navy Lodge, or in our office to see if your name appears. Names will be listed in priority order based on the arrival date of family members in Japan. When your name appears, call us to make an appointment to see the house listings we have. Be sure we have a correct telephone number or room number so we can reach you to confirm or cancel the appointment. We will provide transportation and an interpreter for up to one full day to see houses or meet agents. If you wish, you can arrange your own transportation.

The CHS will show you up to three houses that meet your needs within 45 minutes normal commute to Yokosuka. After seeing each house, you have 24 hours to accept or decline. If you accept, we will arrange to prepare a lease agreement for you. If you decline the offered interpreter service, you will be dropped from the CHS system and are on your own to locate a house. We cannot find a house for you, but we will help you to find a house for yourself; interpret whenever possible, and help with paper work for your lease and housing allowances. Your own efforts to get out on your own or with your sponsor may pay off faster than the CHS interpreter service. You will also have a much better idea of what's available in the market when your turn comes for the CHS Interpreter Service. You will know if you are looking at a good value compared to the rest of the market.

If you have made a bona fide effort on your own to find a house, and if the CHS referral system is not able to meet your realistic needs within the time allowed for TLA, we will consider recommending an extension of TLA on a case by case basis. If your expectations are unrealistic (for ex: a big four bedroom house in a nice neighborhood for less than 130,000, or with two parking places and a yard for pets, within walking distance of the base). If you haven't been searching on your own, it would be difficult for us to support an extension of TLA. Given

the current market and reasonable expectations, you will probably find a house within the time allowed.

If you brought a pet, here is what you need to know. Agents or landlords may not advertise that pets are acceptable, and are concerned about potential damage to the house. It may take longer to find a home that will accept your pet, but be honest. Tell the agent you have a pet, show a picture if you have one. If you can convince the agent that yours is a special animal, like one of the family, and not wild or destructive, you may have a chance. You may wait until after you have seen the house to tell the agent you have a pet, but be sure he knows before you attempt to execute a lease. Offer a clause in the lease that says you will pay to repair any and all damage done by your pet or offer an extra security deposit. This issue is ultimately between you and the landlord or agent. We cannot force them to accept pets, nor can we promise you a house that accepts pets. If you try to keep your pet a secret, and the agent or landlord objects, you may be evicted later without return of your security deposit. The government may not fluid your move in costs at a second off base residence. Your neighbors are likely to be friends of the landlord's, so sneaking a pet into your quarters won't work. It also gives a bad impression of Americans in general and makes it harder for us to find rental properties in the future.

We inspect all units prior to putting them into the CHS system. If you are shown a unit that is unsafe or unsanitary, let us know when you return from your viewing and we will re-inspect it. If we confirm the unit is unsuitable for an American family, we will not count it as a "decline". We will remove it from the system until it is fixed. If you see a house on your own that you don't want, but that may be suitable for another American family, bring the agent's card and the house address to us and we will try to get that unit into our system for another American family.

To reduce your time spent in the Welcome Center lobby, we have changed to an appointment system for counseling. You do not need an appointment for your first visit, or to come in and check/change your CHS information. The appointment will match you with counselors who will explain the on and off base waiting lists to you and ensure that your requirements are accurately listed on your application.

We have a new CHS program that we are continually seeking to improve, and new employees who are trying their best to take care of your needs in the shortest possible time. We appreciate your patience and understanding. We are dedicated to continuous improvement of our system. If you see something that is wrong, does not make sense, or causes unnecessary problems for you as a customer, LET US KNOW. If we can fix it immediately, we will. If it improves the process for those who come after you it will still be worthwhile. If you have been

entered in the CHS system and your name does not appear on the posted house visit list after two weeks, stop by the Welcome Center and let us check your requirements.

We hope your tour in this wonderful country will be rewarding and fulfilling. If we can be of service in any way, please contact us. Keep the time difference in mind if you call from the Continental U.S.. When it is noon in Japan, it is 7 p.m. Pacific, 8 p.m. Mountain, 9 p.m. Central, and 10 p.m. Eastern Standard Time in the U.S.

YOKOSUKA WELCOME CENTER
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YOKOSUKA, JAPAN
PSC 473 BOX13
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You may contact us anytime during normal working hours at DSN 243-8846 or Commercial 011-81-3117

On-base Living Options:

- * High-rise towers with 2 and 3 bedroom apartments (no dogs)
- * Townhouses with 3 and 4 bedrooms

You must qualify by rank or number in family. It can take up to a year to move into a townhouse, it depends on availability, so check with the Housing Office. For lots of information including projected waiting times and unit floor plans, see (http://housing.cnfj.navy.mil/on_base_housing.htm).

Off-base Living Options:

- * Individual houses
- * Japanese mansions (apartments)

Whether you and your family choose to live on base or off base, both offer different opportunities and both are enjoyable living experiences. There are many people in your department who can answer questions you may have about either living arrangement. Just call someone on the list of contacts! For an explanation about dealing with rental agents, up-front costs, and many other details, see (http://housing.cnfj.navy.mil/off_base_housing.htm).



- Typical Japanese houses



--Pictures of off-base houses.

Initial Steps to Finding Off-base Housing:

1. Begin by looking through the binders full of listings for houses or apartments that are available. They are located in the Housing Office and are separated by neighborhood. There is a binder listing rentals that accept pets.

2. If you find some housing listings you'd like to see in person, the housing office will call the agent to arrange a meeting. They will make three appointments at a time for you.

3. Find a rental agent through your sponsor or the Housing Office. Many people recommend using multiple agents so that you can see many different places. This is because it doesn't work like a U.S. real estate agent, who will show you all that is available —on the

market. *In Japan, each agent will only show you his or her own rental properties!*

While looking for an off-base home, the Housing Welcome Center recommends registering and placing your children in day care at the Hourly Child Development Center or with a Certified Family Home Care Provider (refer to the Childcare in Japan section)

Things to Determine Before Talking with a Rental Agent:

1. Know the amount of your Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA), which is based on rank/rate.

2. Do you want a Japanese-style or Western-style house? (Do you want an American oven or refrigerator in your house, tatami rooms, etc.?)

3. How many bedrooms would work for your family?

4. How close do you want to be to base? (Many physicians must be within 20 minutes of the hospital when on duty. See the —Online Maps of Japan|| section for a means of viewing alternative travel routes from a specific house to base and to measure distance.)

5. What transportation will you use to get to base? Do you want to be close to a train station? Will you be getting 2 cars - because you will then need 2 parking spaces. Will school bus transportation be available? (Before signing a lease, consult the DODDS Student Transportation Office at 243-9564/9566 to find the nearest school bus stop. You will have to visit their office and bring a copy of the —Rental Unit Floorplan & Map that you will receive from your rental agent. To find the office driving past the Fleet Movie Theatre on the right side-start looking on the left side of the road for a 12 hour parking garage. The student transportation office is located in the bldg. beside the parking garage. It is located on the second floor and you will take the steps outside the bldg. Look for the sign on the bldg. Note: Not all homes have space to park two vehicles. In fact it is better not to buy any large vehicles until you see what your parking area will be like – it may be tiny! Many people use the train, a scooter, or bicycle as a second form of transportation

6. Do you have a dog or cat? This is somewhat limiting. Only townhouses on base allow dogs, and many houses off base do not allow pets. But with a little time and luck, you should be able to find an off-base house that allows pets and even one with a small fenced yard. With negotiation, some landlords will agree to accept pets.