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Chapter 8: Business Travel

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Business Customs

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An understanding of Japanese business and social practices is useful, if not required, in establishing and maintaining successful business relationships in Japan. Indifference to local business practices can indicate a lack of commitment on the part of the exporter, and may lead to misunderstandings and bad feelings, which could result in the loss of business opportunities. One should not assume that because meetings and correspondence are carried out in English that Western social and business norms apply.

Japanese society is complex, structured, hierarchical and group-oriented. It places strong emphasis on maintaining harmony and avoiding direct confrontation. Japanese religious practice tends to be socially oriented and selective rather than a matter of deep personal commitment; ethics tend to be situational. In building relationships (which often precede a first-time sale or an agreement) one should emphasize trust, confidence, loyalty and commitment for the long term.

Group decision-making is important in Japan and has been generally described as a “bottom up” exercise rather than “top down.” Family businesses founded since WWII and smaller second-tier firms are exceptions to this rule. However, even in the large family firms, where decisions are made at the top, the process is usually managed so that company members have a sense of participation. This type of group decision-making tends to be slower. Recognizing that it takes a longer time to cultivate business relationships in Japan than in the United States, American business executives should not expect to make a deal in just a few days. Consistent follow-up is vital. Likewise, American business people should recognize the importance of working with the staff level of their Japanese counterparts and not exclusively with the executive level.

Gift giving is expected on many business occasions in Japan. Regional U.S. gifts or company-logo gifts are appropriate. Quality is important, but the gift does not have to be expensive. The packaging of the gift is as important as the gift itself and should be done professionally. In Japan, sets of four are considered unlucky (the number four is pronounced the same as the word for death). Gifts that can be shared among a group are appropriate.

Business travelers to Japan should make sure to bring a large supply of business cards (with their title) when they come to Japan; printing bilingual cards is a nice touch. Business cards are exchanged to formalize the introduction process and establish the status of the parties relative to each other. Japanese bow when greeting each other but will expect to shake hands with foreign executives. A slight bow in acknowledgment of a Japanese bow is appreciated. Japanese executives deal on a last name basis in business relationships, and initial business and social contacts are characterized by politeness and formality.

Business travelers visiting a Japanese firm for the first time should be accompanied by an interpreter or bilingual assistant. Many Japanese executives and decision-makers do not speak English, although many of them can greet visitors in English and read English product literature relevant to their business or industry expertise. Generally speaking, Japanese are weaker at hearing and speaking English, and more adept at reading and writing. Thus, the Japanese side in a business meeting generally expects a visitor to bring an interpreter if they are serious about doing business. Although the cost for hiring an interpreter can be very high (USD 400 to USD 900 per day depending on class), bringing along an interpreter shows that a visiting firm is serious about seeking to market their products/services in Japan.

The first visit to a Japanese firm generally serves as a courtesy call to introduce American executives and their company, and also allows the U.S. side to begin to evaluate a target company and its executives as potential business partners. A request to meet only with English speaking staff can mean missing the opportunity to become acquainted with higher-ranking executives.

A written contract, even if less detailed than a contract between two U.S. companies, is essential to meet legal, tax, customs and accounting requirements. Contractual commitments are perceived as representing long-term relationships so the terms and conditions, for example whether to grant exclusive rights, should be considered carefully.

Japan's travel infrastructure is on a par with that of the United States. All business and tourist traveler services are available. For additional information on traveling to Japan, contact the Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO) in New York at: tel: (212) 757-5640; fax: (212) 307-6754, or visit JNTO's website at www.jnto.go.jp/.

U.S. business travelers to Japan seeking appointments with U.S. Embassy Tokyo officials should contact the Commercial Section in advance. The Commercial Section can be reached by fax at +81/3/3589-4235 or by e-mail to tokyo.office.box@mail.doc.gov.

Travel Advisory

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There are no State Department travel advisories for Japan. Japan has long been noted for its low crime and safe streets.

Crimes against U.S. citizens in Japan are rare and usually only involve personal disputes, theft, or vandalism. Crime is at levels well below the U.S. national average. Violent crime is rare, but does exist. Incidents of pick pocketing of foreigners in crowded shopping areas, on trains and at airports have been a sporadic concern. Some

Americans believe that Japanese police procedures appear to be less sensitive and responsive to a victim's concerns than would be the case in the United States, particularly in cases involving domestic violence and sexual assault. Few victim's assistance resources or battered women's shelters exist in major urban areas, and are generally unavailable in rural areas. Investigations of sexual assault crimes are often conducted without women police officers present and typically involve inquiries into the victim's sexual history and previous relationships. Quality of translations can vary significantly, and has proven unsettling to some American victims.

For additional information, please refer to the State Department's "Consular Information Sheet" for Japan at travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1148.html.

Visa Requirements

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A valid U.S. passport is necessary to enter and travel in Japan. By Japanese law, non-residents are required to carry their passports (or their Alien Registration Card if staying longer than 90 days) at all times.

A visa is not required for short-term business visits (up to 90 days). It is not required to have a round-trip ticket, although it is recommended. A work or investor visa may take up to two months to obtain. Immunization and health certificates are not required. Foreigners remaining in Japan longer than 90 days must obtain an Alien Registration Card, available free of charge from the municipal office of the city or ward of residence in Japan.

Upon arrival, going through both immigration and customs checks are essentially a formality for U.S. business travelers as long as passport and air ticket are in order. Starting November 20, 2007, all foreign nationals entering Japan, with the exemption of certain categories listed below, are required to provide fingerprint scans and be photographed at the port of entry. This requirement does not replace any existing visa or passport requirements. Foreign nationals exempt from this new requirement include special permanent residents, persons under 16 years of age, holders of diplomatic or official visas, and persons invited by the head of a national administrative organization.

U.S. travelers on official business must have a diplomatic or official visa specifying the nature of travel as "As Diplomat," "As Official," or "In Transit" to be exempt from biometric collection. All other visa holders, including those with diplomatic and official visas stating "As Temporary Visitor," are subject to this requirement. SOFA personnel are exempt from the new biometrics entry requirements under SOFA Article 9 (2).

Passengers are advised to exchange some U.S. dollars for yen before leaving the airport.

The web address for the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo is: tokyo.usembassy.gov/e/tvisa-main.html

U.S. companies that require travel of foreign businesspersons to the United States should be advised that security options are handled via an interagency process. Sufficient time must be allowed for visa issuance if required. Visa applicants should go to the following links:

State Department Visa Website: <http://travel.state.gov/visa/index.html>
United States Visas.gov: <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

Telecommunications

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Japan has one of the world's most advanced, state-of-the-art telecommunications systems. Almost all Japanese own at least one mobile telephone and use them constantly for text messaging, e-mail, and downloading information from the Internet in addition to making telephone calls. Fiber optic cable, traditional cable, dial-up, and other Internet services, including Internet T-1 lines, are almost ubiquitous in the cities and are only slightly less unavailable in the rural areas. Public phones, some of which accept only pre-paid cards, are still common but are starting to disappear from previous near-saturation levels as nearly all communication goes mobile. To call the United States and Canada from Japan, one must dial 0101 before the ten-digit U.S. telephone number.

CS Japan frequently receives questions from visiting businesspeople about the ability of their phones to work in Japan. Unfortunately, due to differing technologies, the only foreign phones that work in Japan are some 3G models, however the number of compatible phones is increasing. Some phones that have "international roaming" rights, may work, but the calls will be very expensive. To determine if a particular phone is usable in Japan, please contact your service provider prior to visiting Japan. Mobile phones that work in Japan are available for rent at most major airports. The same is true for Blackberries and other hand held devices. DoCoMo, Japan's largest mobile operator, has issued some Blackberries that work in Japan, but these models are for corporate accounts only.

Guide to phones in Japan
<http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2223.html>

DoCoMo press release about Blackberry
<http://www.nttdocomo.com/pr/2006/001271.html>

Transportation

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Japan has excellent, modern highways and roads linking all parts of country. Traffic conditions on expressways and in cities are often very congested, however. Most major intercity highways operate on a toll basis, and tolls are extremely expensive, making passenger railroad service very competitive, especially for the foreign visitor.

Japan boasts the world's densest and most modern passenger railroad system, with fast, frequent services to all parts of the country. Japan's famous *shinkansen* high-speed rails lines link Tokyo with Japan's major business centers at speeds of up to 185 mph. All of Japan's large cities have highly developed subway and commuter train service. Taxi service is available everywhere.

Language

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The national language of Japan is Japanese (*nihongo*) and is spoken and understood all over the country. English is a required subject in Japanese high schools, and it is by far the most widely known foreign language in Japan. International business correspondence and negotiations in Japan are almost always conducted in English. This being said, however, most Japanese, including business executives, have only a very imperfect understanding and command of English, although there are of course exceptions. Japanese business executives often read English much better than they can speak it or understand it when spoken. It is advisable, therefore, to be accompanied by a competent professional interpreter to all business meetings, especially an initial contact where you might be unsure of your counterparts' mastery of English.

Overseas visitors interested in the Japanese language can visit the following web sites: "Some Notes on Japanese Grammar" www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jwb/jgrammar.html "Japanese for the Western Brain" kimallen.sheepdogdesign.net/Japanese/index.html Jim Breen's Japanese Page www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jwb/japanese.html

Health

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Japan poses no medical health risks to the business traveler. While medical care in Japan is good, English-speaking physicians and medical facilities that cater to Americans' expectations are expensive and not very widespread. Japan has a national health insurance system, which is only available to foreigners with long-term visas for Japan. National health insurance does not pay for medical evacuation or medical care outside of Japan. Medical caregivers in Japan require payment in full at the time of treatment or concrete proof of ability to pay before treating a foreigner who is not a member of the national health insurance plan. Most major credit cards are accepted.

For additional information, please refer to the State Department's "Consular Information Sheet" for Japan at travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1148.html.

Local Time, Business Hours, and Holidays

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Time: Japan is 14 hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Standard Time (EST) and 13 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) from April to October. Consequently, 8:00 a.m. EST in New York City corresponds to 10:00 p.m. the same day in Tokyo. 8:00 p.m. EST in New York City corresponds to 10:00 a.m. *the next day* in Tokyo.

Hours: The typical Japanese workweek is Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., although many Japanese office workers put in long hours of overtime. Flex work hours have become popular at some large companies. Interestingly, the overwhelming majority of Japanese take their lunch break promptly at 12:00 noon and return to the office at 1:00 p.m. sharp.

Holidays: When a national holiday falls on a Sunday, the following Monday is a compensatory day. In addition, many Japanese companies and government offices traditionally close during the New Year's holiday season (December 28-January 3), "Golden Week" (April 29-May 5) and the traditional "O-Bon" Festival (usually August 12-15).

In 2008, Japan will observe the following official national holidays:

New Year's Day	January 1 (Tuesday)
Adult's Day	January 14 (Monday)
National Foundation Day	February 11 (Monday)
Vernal Equinox Day	March 20 (Thursday)
Showa Day	April 29 (Tuesday)
Constitution Memorial Day	May 3 (Saturday)
Greenery Day	May 4 (Sunday, to be observed Tuesday, May 6)
Children's Day	May 5 (Monday)
Marine Day	July 21 (Monday)
Respect for the Aged Day	September 15 (Monday)
Autumnal Equinox Day	September 23 (Tuesday)
Health & Sports Day	October 13 (Monday)
National Culture Day	November 3 (Monday)
Labor Thanksgiving Day	November 23 (Sunday, to be observed Monday, Nov. 24)
Emperor's Birthday	December 23 (Tuesday)

Temporary Entry of Materials and Personal Belongings

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There is no restriction for temporary entry of laptop computers and software for personal use. Regarding materials for exhibits, Japan is a member of the International Convention to Facilitate the Importation of Commercial Samples and Advertising Materials under the ATA *carnet* System (www.atacarnet.com/). Use of a *carnet* allows goods such as commercial and exhibition samples, professional equipment, musical instruments and television cameras to be carried or sent temporarily into a foreign country without paying duties or posting bonds. These goods cannot be sold. A *carnet* should be arranged for in advance by contacting a local office of the United States Council for International Business or its helpline at (800) ATA-2900.

Web Resources

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Doing business in Japan:

U.S. Commercial Service Japan: www.buyusa.gov/japan/en/doing.html

Venture Japan: Doing Business in Japan

How to Succeed in the Japanese Market: www.venturejapan.com/index.htm

Consular information & official travel advisories for Japan:

U.S. Department of State: travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1148.html

U.S. visas:

U.S. Department of State: travel.state.gov/visa/index.html

U.S. Embassy Tokyo Consular Section: tokyo.usembassy.gov/e/tvisa-main.html

Japanese customs, etiquette, and culture:

www.japan-guide.com/

www.thejapanfaq.com/

www.planettokyo.com/

Japanese language:

"Some Notes on Japanese Grammar"

www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jwb/jgrammar.html

"Japanese for the Western Brain"

kimallen.sheepdogdesign.net/Japanese/index.html

Jim Breen's Japanese Page

www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jwb/japanese.html

Business infrastructure:

Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO): www.jnto.go.jp/

Health:

U.S. Department of State; Consular Information Sheet for Japan

travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1148.html

Temporary entry of materials under the *carnet* system: www.atacarnet.com/