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Local Community

Living in any foreign country can be a wonderful and exciting experience. It can, at the same time, be overwhelming and stressful. You may find yourself torn between the desire to fit in to Japanese culture and the need for an environment more like home.

Fortunately, the international community in Kobe is diverse. There is a good chance that you'll find others from your home country and you will find most people are more than happy to help newcomers. Whether it's finding a cooking ingredient from home or a recommendation for neighborhood dry cleaners, CHIC remembers what it was like during those first few weeks and are willing to answer questions, give directions and help out.

Everyone has their own way of adapting, to soften the inevitable culture shock. Some study the language, others get involved in community service. Many seek out others from their own country. Whatever your choice, there is a community here ready to support you.

Friendship organizations

For a small city, it is surprising the number of organizations and annual activities that have been established to provide a support system for the foreign community.

Community House and Information Centre (CHIC)

Known as CHIC, we are an independent, non-profit organization and the publisher of this book. Founded in 1977, CHIC was established to provide support and assistance to the non-Japanese community of Kobe. Becoming involved in CHIC is a comfortable way to get established in Kobe, meet people from many different countries, learn about Kobe and Japan and feel connected to the community. CHIC maintains a help desk with free

translation and research services, so the volunteers can look up almost any information for you. We also offer many different classes to provide education and social opportunities, whether it's a Japanese cultural class such as ikebana (flower arranging) or cooking food from an exotic location. A program is released twice a year with classes and outings. Sign up for the email bulletin, which includes updates on different activities around Kansai as well as upcoming CHIC events. Tel: 078-857-6540. Email: kobechic@gol.com
www.chickobe.com

Kobe International Community Center (KICC)

Set up by the Kobe government, the aim of this center is to assist the foreign community by offering an information service, classes and a variety of activities. There is a library, reading room, computers and English-speaking assistants. KICC offers some free legal assistance on certain days of the week. Call and ask for more information. Tel: 078-291-8441, Fax: 078-291-0691. Email: kia@kobe-sc.tao.go.jp
www.kobe-sc.tao.go.jp/kia

Hyogo International Association (HIA)

Set up by Hyogo Prefecture, HIA is dedicated to assisting foreign residents of the prefecture. Its goal is to advance international exchange and to encourage residents to participate in various activities aimed at fostering good community relations. There is a library and multimedia library, and various classes are offered. Tel: 078-230-3060. www.hyogo-ip.or.jp/en/

Goodwill Guides

A group of volunteers, many with overseas living experience, the Kobe Systematized

Goodwill Guides offers assistance to anyone who needs help communicating in Japanese. Their services include: assisting with city and Ward offices and official documents, finding housing and preparing leases, giving tours of Kobe, translating letters and documents, and interpreting for sports events, international conferences and exhibitions. The Goodwill Guides can provide these services in English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Hakko, Taiwanese, French, German and Spanish. There is also a Goodwill Guide available at KICC Monday-Friday, 13:00-16:00 and Saturday, 10:00-16:00. Tel/Fax: 078-785-2898.

www.asahi-net.or.jp/~ei5y-kbys/kobesggc/index.htm

International House Osaka

This government-sponsored entity has its own building and hotel in Tennoji, in Osaka, and sponsors various exchange activities of interest to expatriates. There is also an information center here. Tel: 06-6773-8989. Fax: 06-6773-8420.

www.ih-osaka.or.jp/english

Osaka YWCA

Operating out of Senri in Osaka, Bridges started as an annual orientation program for newcomers to the Osaka area and has grown to include monthly orientations for English speakers. Tel: 06-6872-0527; Fax: 06-6872-0503.

<http://osaka.ywca.or.jp/english/index.html>

Business/professional organizations

No matter your industry, there's likely to be a local group dedicated to it, as well as a chamber of commerce or trade

promotion organization for virtually any country. Rather than reproduce them all, we recommend you check the directory (See Directory-Organizations-Business). Your home country industry peak body or local embassy may also have some recommendations.

An organization perhaps not on the embassies' lists is Foreign Executive Women (FEW). FEW welcomes all foreign women, whether currently employed, previously employed or seeking employment, to provide an opportunity for networking, information exchange and friendship. Activities include a monthly meeting with dinner and speaker at the Hilton hotel in Osaka.

Email: fewkns@gol.com

www.fewkansai.com

Social groups

Many of the international organizations listed previously have a social aspect but there are others still that offer more recreational opportunities.

James Yama Shioya Country Club

In western Kobe, this private club offers restaurant facilities to the public, social activities, outdoor swimming and tennis. Tel: 078-751-3211.

Kobe Club

Historic private club in Kitano offering outdoor swimming, squash, exercise classes, bar/restaurant facilities and a full social calendar. Tel: 078-241-2588. E-mail: kobeclub@office.email.ne.jp
<http://kobeclub.org>

Kobe Regatta & Athletic Club

A sports-oriented private club with a busy social



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calendar. Located in downtown Kobe, it offers tennis, field sports and indoor sports, along with a restaurant and bar. Tel: 078-231-2271; Fax: 078-221-5702. Email: info@krac.org

Kobe Women's Club

Has a long history providing social opportunities for women of various nationalities. Monthly speakers and field trips make a busy annual calendar of events. Tel: 078-453-6271. Email: kobewomensclub@yahoo.com

Japan-American Women of the Kansai (JAWK)

Encourages friendship between women of Japan and America and contributes to the welfare and scholarship needs in the community. Membership is now open women of all nationalities. Offers various events and field trips. Tel: 078-803-3009.

Language & culture studies

One way to feel more comfortable within the community is to learn some Japanese. Learning katakana and hiragana, the Japanese alphabets, along with a few kanji, will help immensely when it comes to reading product labels and menus, buying train tickets and other daily activities. It will certainly take dedication and time to achieve the proficiency necessary to conduct your daily activities, but is worth the effort. Being able to communicate even a little bit can only help to make living in Japan a more enjoyable experience.

There are many companies and organizations in the Kansai region offering language and culture studies. A number of them are listed in the Directory at the back of this book. (See Directory-Education-Language Schools). Also check Kansai Scene for new offerings and private tutors.

The Hyogo government maintains a list of Japanese classes in Hyogo, organized by local government area. www.hyogo-ip.or.jp/livingguide/index.html

Some of the more commonly-used providers include:

- **Hyogo International Association** – offers weekly and intensive summer courses. www.hyogo-ip.or.jp/hnvn/en_index.htm
- **Kobe YMCA** – offers full-time, weekly and intensive summer courses. <http://kbym.jp/japanese/us-index.html>
- **Kobe YWCA** – offers a free summer intensive Japanese course. Tel: 078-231-6201 www.kobe.ywca.or.jp/top/english
- **MACC** – a private service geared towards business people but also offering lessons for children. www.macc.co.jp



Ikebana classes at CHIC

If you prefer self-directed study, good beginner-level resources are available from the NHK World website. www.nhk.or.jp/lesson/english/index.html

There are also numerous workbooks and study materials for sale in major bookstores. Junkudo in Sannomiya Center Gai and Metro Shoten in Mikage Classe each have an extensive range.

Another way to get to know your new home is to study the arts and culture of Japan, such as calligraphy or ikebana, the art of flower arranging. Most of the international organizations and social groups will offer at least a few cultural exchange classes in English.

Ikebana International's Kobe Chapter hosts ikebana exhibitions and events throughout the year. This is a cultural organization and will appeal to those with an interest in Japanese floral art. Tel: 078-431-8258, 0797-32-8760. www.ikebanaHQ.org

The competing Ohara Ikebana School also has a chapter and museum in Kobe, with English lessons sometimes offered through CHIC. www.oharyu.or.jp/english/index_e.html

Religious associations

For many families, finding a place to worship is an essential part of becoming established in a new community. Kobe offers a wide range of choices. See Directory-Organizations-Religious Associations.

Charitable & volunteer opportunities

Volunteering to work with a charitable organization is an excellent way to meet new people, learn more about Japan and Japanese culture, and make a contribution to your community.



Kobe Union Church

Animal Refuge Kansai (ARK)

This non-profit animal welfare organization needs volunteers to care for the animals (dog walking, cat cuddling, grooming, etc.) and help with office work and other chores.

Catholic Shakai Katsudo Kobe Center

Its original function was to support earthquake victims. It now helps three groups: the homeless, the elderly and disabled, and foreigners. It also offers Japanese-language classes to foreigners. Tel: 078-341-5512. Fax: 078-341-5695.

Kobe no Ie (Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church)

It has a special support program for the homeless, especially those suffering from alcohol dependency. Tel: 06-6632-1310. Fax: 06-6647-6576.

Kobe Union Church

Sponsors a Habitat for Humanity chapter, works with the homeless in Kobe and Osaka,



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and has many opportunities for volunteering within the church and its church school program. Tel: 078-871-6844.

Smile Kids Japan

Comprised of a group of non-Japanese from the JET program who visit orphanages all over Japan and play with the children. There are groups everywhere, and one in Kobe. Holds regular toy drives.

www.smilekidsjapan.org

Takatori Community Center (Takatori Catholic Church)

This volunteer group consists of eight NGO's and aims to support foreigners. It also supports the victims of the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Tel/Fax: 078-731-8300.

www.tcc117.org

Some cultural observations

There is no way to convey to you the depth of the Japanese culture in just a few short words. But before you dive into Japan, you will have to rid yourself of the many preconceived notions you may have about your new environment.

Though much of Japanese culture stems

from ancient times, it still includes a wide variety of influences. A Japanese birth is often celebrated at a Shinto shrine. The same baby may grow up and get married in a Christian church, and eventually be memorialized in a Buddhist ceremony at their funeral.

Honne and tatemae are one of the most basic cultural concepts. Though hard to define exactly in English, honne represents a person's real intentions and tatemae is the socially acceptable principles of the majority. It means that while a Japanese person, when in public or with a group, may behave or express opinions in one way, in private that same person may behave differently — even totally opposite.

Group consciousness and conformity are the norm in Japan. In general, for most of their lives people live under tremendous social pressure to fulfill obligations and act within the expectations of their positions and age. Even seemingly simple acts such as deciding on a restaurant can require much discussion in order for the group to reach consensus. Sitting down at a more formal dinner can require much thought and planning as to the seating arrangements, with hierarchy an important consideration. You may notice that although there are several choices on the menu, it is not unusual for all the Japanese women in a group to order the same meal. While shopping, several, if not all, will buy the same bargain item. Even at informal gatherings, food will be divided evenly among all the participants, bypassing the Western option of choice. In these situations, individuality is seen as judgmental; that the other person and their choice were not acceptable in some way.

Japanese are generally subtle, non-confrontational, diligent and persevering. They are also usually extremely helpful, and it is not unusual for a Japanese person to physically lead you to the destination you have just inquired about. Public displays of emotion are not part of



Obon

the culture, although public drunkenness is the exception. Public drunkenness is an accepted way to release stress after work.

Parents in particular should be aware that there is a greater acceptance of nudity in Japan than in some other countries. Some *manga* (comics) contain sexual content, and even some magazines and tabloid newspapers may also contain graphic drawings and photos. You may find movies and TV shows on during the day or early evening that aren't suitable for children. In the movie rental shops, it is not uncommon to find adult movies in the newly released sections.

Within a few months you will be adding your own impressions to the list. The point is, Japan is probably unlike any other country you know, so enjoy it for what it is. Don't try to change it, and learn to laugh off the inevitable small and large frustrations.

Fitting in

Countless books have been written on Japanese culture but there are some things we wish we'd known as new residents.

Honorifics with personal names

The Japanese language is considered an "honorific" language, meaning that different sentence structures and words are used depending on the social relations between the conversing parties. In fact, two people can be saying the exact same thing, but using completely different words! That's partly why the Japanese are so quick to exchange business cards. These cards, printed with the name of the company and the person's title, lets the exchangers quickly establish their relative positions.

Why not study Japanese for daily life?

- 💡 Let's choose your class **at your own pace!**
NIHONGO **Basic** Class --- **5** times a week or **Twice** a week
NIHONGO **Intermediate** Class --- **4** times a week

- 💡 Enjoy **athletic facilities** at Kobe YMCA Wellness Center, too!



KOBE YMCA LANGUAGE CENTER

🌐 <http://kbym.jp/japanese>

✉ japanese@kobeymca.or.jp

☎ 078-241-7204 📠 078-241-3619

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You have likely already heard people calling each other by their family name followed by *san*. This is one of the many honorifics that are used when addressing someone. *San* (or the even more polite *sama*) is always used when addressing a superior, an older person, a customer, or a visitor to your home. Never address these people as *anata* (you) or use their given names, as this places you in an inappropriately higher social position.

Business colleagues are often addressed by their family name followed by their business title, such as *buchou*, *kachou*, or *shachou*. Doctors, teachers, and professors are addressed as *sensei* (teacher). Children, close friends and colleagues at the same corporate level can be addressed by *chan* (girls or boys) or *kun* (boys only).

Entertaining & visiting

Before visiting a Japanese friend's home, call.

They will likely suggest meeting in a coffee shop or other nearby public place. Japanese don't do much entertaining at home and may be embarrassed to find you standing at their door. You, in turn, may be embarrassed when you realize that you will not be invited in. This tradition is slowly changing, however, as Japanese homes become larger and more westernized.

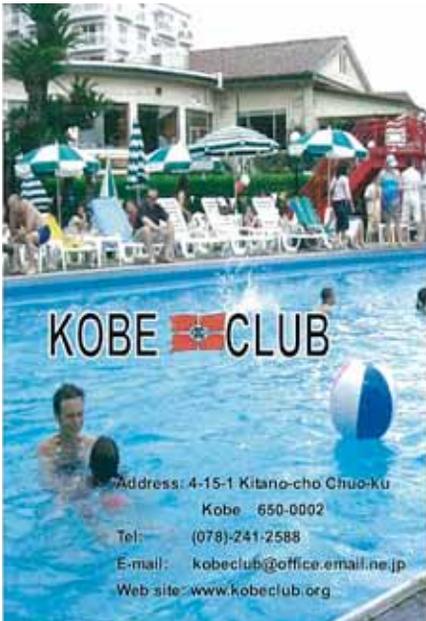
If you are invited to a friend's or co-worker's home, bring a formal gift of flowers, cakes, cookies, wine or whiskey, or toys or snacks (*okashi*) for the children, to show that you are aware of the honor of the invitation. Gifts need not be quite so formal for subsequent visits, but always bring something.

Never bring a sick friend potted plants or flowers with roots in soil. It is a symbol of a long illness (putting down roots in the sickbed). Acceptable gifts include cut flowers, books and magazines. Fruit, cookies and other sweets are also welcome, but not for the reason you may be thinking these items will be given to nurses and doctors as gifts, and to visitors to eat during their visits! It is an extension of the hospitality the patient would offer at home so don't expect the patient to personally eat your gift of food or drink. But be assured that it will be appreciated.

Be prepared to offer food and drink to guests no matter what the hour. Acceptable foods include cakes, light meals, and snacks; drinks can include coffee, tea, sodas, or even beer or whisky. It is impolite to refuse such offers, though it is not necessary to eat or drink it all.

The kitchen is generally off-limits to all but family members. A guest is not expected to help out in the kitchen. You may make the offer, but insisting will only embarrass them.

Even though the food may be already served, guests do not begin eating until the host or hostess has indicated that they should



help themselves. When invited to do so the first time, make a slight bow and say thank you but then wait for a second invitation. Before starting to eat, say “*Itadakimasu*” and make a slight bow. After finishing, say “*Gochiso-sama deshita*” with a slight bow.

Food in bowls, such as rice, miso soup, even ramen, can be picked up and raised to the mouth for eating. Slurping and making noise while eating soba, udon, miso soup, etc., is more than OK, it is a sign of appreciation. “*Itadakimasu!*”

The host, possibly the entire family, generally accompanies the guest to the *genkan* (entrance). The guest may also be accompanied to their car, taxi or even to the train station.

Ofuro (bath)

You likely already know that the Japanese wash with soap before entering the bath and use the tub only to soak up the warmth and relax hot-tub style. So be sure to rinse the soap off before entering the bath. And since everyone uses the same water, you shouldn't pull the plug if others are to follow you.

Traditionally the first bath is generally taken by the head of the house, followed by the rest of the family. Usually guests are offered the first bath.

It is common for the father or mother to share a bath with their children. It is less common but still acceptable for a close relative, usually a grandfather or grandmother, to bathe the children.

Public baths (*onsen*)

Many towns, hotels and resorts make their *onsen* their main attraction, and, indeed, these can be quite spectacular and worthy of a visit. Be aware that most public baths ban anyone with a tattoo, as they are associated with the *yakuza* (gangsters), even young fashionable men and women with smaller tattoos. If

you have one, covering it up with a stick-on plaster is acceptable.

Most necessary items are provided, such as soap, towels, shampoo and hairdryers, and at some upmarket *onsen*, you may be given some pajama-like *jimbei* to wear while relaxing in its other facilities. Once inside the bath and undressed, it is common for men and women modestly hold their wash towel in front of themselves when moving about.

If staying at a Japanese inn, a *ryokan*, in an *onsen* town you will normally find that a simple, cotton *yukata* robe has been placed in your room. This garment started out as a bath-robe but it is casual attire. You can wear your *yukata* not only to the bath but also elsewhere around the *ryokan* at night and when strolling around the neighborhood. It is typically available in three sizes, S, M and L, and is worn in almost the same manner by men and women with the right side inside. The *obi* belt goes around the man's waist or just below the woman's bust.

Formal events

If you are asked to attend the funeral (*ooshiki*) of a Japanese colleague or neighbor, it's a good idea to ask someone who will also be attending to assist you. There are many funeral styles in Japan, and each style has its own rules of etiquette. In general, black formal wear is expected, although a dark suit is acceptable. Offerings of money are the rule and the amount depends upon the nature of your personal or business relationship with the deceased. Be sure to use a Japanese funeral envelope with black and white strings. Ask a Japanese friend for help.

Japanese weddings can be as complicated as Japanese funerals, and the same advice applies to both situations: ask a Japanese friend for help. Many couples these days opt to have a public “Christian” (i.e., church

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or chapel) ceremony and a private (close relatives only) Japanese shinto ceremony, plus a formal reception. Black formal wear and a white tie are traditional attire, but business suits are acceptable. Gifts of money are highly appreciated to help the couple start their new life together (and also to help pay for the incredibly expensive reception). Be sure to use the Japanese wedding envelope with the gold and silver strings. When you leave the reception, you will be given an attractive bag containing a thank-you gift from the couple.

Gift-giving

The Japanese customarily give gifts to parents, relatives, work acquaintances, and others to whom they feel a sense of obligation in the summer and toward the year's end. The gifts given in July are referred to as *ochūgen*, while those given around December are referred to as *oseibo*. Department stores set up special sections around those two times of the year where people can purchase such gifts. The department stores can also arrange for the delivery. The custom of

exchanging gifts arose from strong community ties, and it was customary to give useful items. Items of food, alcohol, and sweets are popular choices, as are detergent and soap.

Giving money on special occasions is a time-honored custom in Japan. These gifts of money are always offered in an elaborately decorated envelope bound by different colored strings. Never offer money without an envelope. And never use any but the appropriate envelope for the occasion.

When buying an envelope to put your donation inside, ask for *shugi bukerō* at the stationery store or convenience shop. When the shopkeeper asks you what kind you need, use the information below to reply:

- **Oiwai** - Happy occasions like school entrance and other celebrations. Red and white strings or gold and silver strings.
- **Omimai** - Get well. Red and white strings.
- **Kekkon Shiki (weddings)** - Brightly colored Red/Pink decorated envelopes, if attending from the brides side and blue/green colored decorated envelopes, if attending from the grooms side.
- **Ososhiki (funerals)** - Black and white strings or yellow and white.
- **Hoji (memorial service)** - Several years after a person's death, the family holds a memorial service. Yellow and white strings
- **Otoshi Dama (New Year's gift for children)** - Any festive or brightly colored envelope different from those mentioned above.



Celebrating shichi-go-san

Contributing to a multicultural Hyogo

HYOGO INTERNATIONAL PLAZA

The Hyogo International Plaza provides a place for people of all nationalities to interact and exchange culture and information. A variety of free services are offered for all Hyogo residents:

Multi-Language Resource Center (Library)

- Over 20,000 books in English, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and more
- Extensive collection of Lonely Planet and other travel guides
- A wide range of Japanese language and culture textbooks
- Japanese and foreign educational and cultural DVDs and CDs
- Foreign newspapers and magazines

Japanese Language Courses

- Japanese Language Courses for foreign residents of Hyogo
May to early March (3 terms), once or twice a week, 18:30-20:30
- Intensive Summer Japanese Language Courses for foreign residents of Hyogo
Late July to early August (3 weeks) 9:00-12:00

Visitors' Center

- Providing living and tourism information to Hyogo residents

International Gallery

- Multipurpose exhibition hall and event space for rental

NGO/NPO Support

User cards provided for NGOs and NPOs working in the fields of international relations or support for foreign residents in Hyogo Prefecture.

Apply for a user card to rent out library resources and enjoy these benefits:

- Free use of meeting rooms, workspace, and more
- International Gallery rental available at half-rate
- Use of Hyogo International Mailing List (over 140 organizations registered)

HIA

Hyogo International Association

Managed by the Hyogo International Association

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