

Live your Ikigai Starter Kit

**YOUR CHECKLISTS FROM PLANNING
TO LANDING IN JAPAN**



Konnichiwa, fellow Japanophile!

So you're planning on moving to Japan– Omedetou! Imagine waking up to cherry blossoms outside your window, savoring the freshest sushi whenever your tummy wishes, and discovering a culture where innovation meets tradition, all while building the life that will make your 80-year-old self proud.

Your fresh start doesn't require fluency from day one; it requires courage, preparation, and the willingness to embrace life's most rewarding adventures. I created this Moving Guide (the one I wish I had a decade ago) so you can take it one step at a time, without guesswork and overwhelm, as you turn your dream into reality in the Land of the Rising Sun.

ABOUT ME

I'm Jenie, a Filipina creative based just outside of Paris! As a true-blue Japanophile who had only visited Japan once in 2013, I found a teaching job and moved to Tokyo in early 2014 despite having almost zero Japanese skills, and **lived the dream in Japan for almost three years!** Read my [Female Network](#) piece from 2018 and more articles about my time in Japan [here](#),

I'm a seasoned creative professional with over 15 years of advertising and marketing experience in Manila, Singapore, Tokyo, and Paris.

A driven nomad with a third-world passport, I have shown grit and courage by relocating alone twice and. I've been living abroad for over 15 years. I was already a travel bug even before [Instagram](#) and TikTok!

Turning point: I experienced burnout from my corporate job at 41 and pivoted by creating the **[Ikigai and Beyond Program](#)**, a passion project aligned with my new *ikigai*: to empower and inspire professionals like YOU **to embrace new experiences that make you feel alive and chase dreams that can transform your life!**





Things to do before the Leap

PRE-ARRIVAL LISTS & PREPARATIONS

Please Note: This guide is designed to help you navigate your move, but rules and requirements can change. Before making any major decisions, always double-check the latest information on official government and embassy websites to ensure you have the most current details.

WORKING IN JAPAN

RELOCATION TO-DO LIST

1. Legal & Immigration

Pre-Arrival

- ☐ **Valid passport** (with at least 6-12 months before expiry)
 - Renew if necessary - some processes require significant passport validity
- ☐ **Identify appropriate visa type**
 - Engineer/Specialist in Humanities/International Services, Highly Skilled Professional, Working Holiday, etc
- ☐ **Confirm visa eligibility requirements**
 - Education qualifications, job offer, work experience requirements
- ☐ **Secure job offer from sponsoring employer**
Required for most work visas - employer must be registered to hire foreign workers
- ☐ **Collect necessary visa documents**
 - COE, degree certificate, employment contract, passport photos, application form
- ☐ **Submit visa application to Japanese embassy/consulate***
 - Book appointment in advance - processing can take 1-4 weeks
 - *In many cases, the company will apply for you and you'll need to send them the documents.*
- ☐ **Receive Certificate of Eligibility (COE) or visa approval**
 - Your employer applies for COE on your behalf - essential for visa application
- ☐ **Research Japanese labor laws and employee rights**
 - Working hours limits, overtime pay, paid leave, workplace safety regulations

Upon Arrival

- ☐ **Understand Japan's residency registration process**
 - Register at the City Hall or Ward Office within 14 days of arrival to get your residence card

2. Financial Preparation

Pre-Arrival

- ☐ **Save sufficient funds for relocation**
 - Recommended: ¥500,000–¥1,000,000 minimum for initial setup costs. Use the Ikigai Fund Builder to compute your total required savings.
- ☐ **Budget for initial costs**
 - Flights, apartment deposits (4-8 months rent), first month's rent, setup costs
- ☐ **Research average salary for your field in Japan**
 - Use sites like JobsDB, Glassdoor Japan, or government salary surveys
- ☐ **Assess cost of living by city**
 - Tokyo is most expensive, consider Osaka, Nagoya, or Fukuoka for lower costs
- ☐ **Plan for international money transfers**
 - Research Wise, Remitly, or traditional bank transfers for moving money
- ☐ **Inform home country tax authority**
 - Avoid double taxation - research tax treaties between your country and Japan

Post-Arrival

- ☐ **Open a Japanese bank account**
Consider foreigner-friendly banks: MUFG, Mizuho, Sumitomo, Rakuten, SBI
- ☐ **Set up tax and social insurance registrations**
Register for My Number, a 12-digit identification number used in Japan for social insurance, taxation, and disaster response.



WORKING IN JAPAN

RELOCATION TO-DO LIST

3. Professional Readiness

Pre-Arrival

- ☐ **Update CV/resume to Japanese format**
 - Create rirekisho (履歴書) and shokumukeirekisho (職務経歴書) if applicable
- ☐ **Translate key documents to Japanese**
 - Use certified translation services for diplomas, certificates, transcripts
- ☐ **Join industry-relevant recruitment platforms**
 - Daijob, CareerCross, LinkedIn Japan, Bizreach, Robert Half Japan, etc. Refer to your Ikigai Blueprint for more sites.
- ☐ **Develop job search strategy for Japan's hiring culture**
 - Understand nemawashi (consensus building), long hiring processes, formality
- ☐ **Understand Japanese work culture**
 - Hierarchy (senpai/kohai), etiquette, potential for long hours, group harmony
- ☐ **Build Japanese language proficiency**
 - JLPT N4 or better recommended - even basic conversational skills help significantly
- ☐ **Prepare for Japanese-style interviews**
 - Group interviews, high formality, behavioral questions, multiple rounds depending on the company & industry

4. Logistical Planning

Pre-Arrival

- ☐ **Find temporary or permanent housing**
 - Use GaijinPot, Suumo, Sakura House, or employer housing assistance
- ☐ **Understand rental requirements**
 - Key money (reikin), deposit (shikikin), guarantor system, real estate fees
- ☐ **Book initial accommodation if needed**
 - Short-term rental, serviced apartment, or business hotel for first few weeks
- ☐ **Plan shipping or downsizing of belongings**
 - Research international shipping companies or consider buying new items in Japan
- ☐ **Schedule flights and airport transportation**
 - Book flights and research train/bus options from airport to accommodation. Book a luggage delivery service like Yamato Transport too or check with your airline
- ☐ **Arrange International Driving Permit (if needed)**
 - Valid for 1 year: remember to apply in your home country before departure

Post-Arrival

- ☐ **Arrange health insurance**
 - Enroll for National Health Insurance (NHI) or company-provided insurance (mandatory)
- ☐ **Set up Japanese phone number/mobile plan**
 - Research SoftBank, DoCoMo, AU, or pocket WiFi rental for initial period



WORKING IN JAPAN

RELOCATION TO-DO LIST

5. Cultural & Language Preparedness[^]

Pre-Arrival

- ☐ **Enroll in online Japanese language classes or have a self-study plan**
Apps: Duolingo, Genki, Anki, Preply, Lingoda, Italki
- ☐ **Learn basic survival Japanese and hiragana and katakana scripts**
Transport, shopping, greetings, ordering food, asking for help
- ☐ **Study Japanese customs and etiquette**
Bowing, business card exchange (meishi), removing shoes, gift-giving (omiyage)
- ☐ **Understand Japanese work culture and communication**
Honne/tatemae (true feelings vs. public facade), indirect communication, reading the air (kuuki wo yomu)

Post-Arrival

- ☐ **Connect with local or expat communities**
Meetup groups, Internations, Facebook expat groups, HelloTalk language exchange etc.

[^] Refer to the Japanese Culture 101 section of the full Moving Guide.

6. Healthcare & Important Documents

Pre-Arrival

- ☐ **Get comprehensive health checkup and vaccinations**
Some employers require health certificates. Ensure routine vaccinations are up to date
- ☐ **Bring prescription medications with proper documentation**
Some medications are restricted. Get doctor's letter and research import regulations
- ☐ **Gather all original documents and certified copies**
Birth certificate, marriage certificate, education diplomas, transcripts
- ☐ **Get apostille stamps for official documents**
Required for legal recognition in Japan - contact your country's foreign ministry
- ☐ **Make digital copies and store in cloud**
Backup all important documents in Google Drive or similar service

7. Technology and Daily Life

Post-Arrival

- ☐ **Check device compatibility**
Ensure your personal gadgets, phones, and laptops work with Japanese networks and voltage (100V). Bring a universal travel adaptor too.
- ☐ **Download essential apps**
Google Translate (Lens/camera feature), Google Maps, Hyperdia (trains), GoTaxi, PayPay, Amazon Japan, Tabelog (restaurants), UberEats, Suica card (iPhone Apple Wallet), Line



STUDYING IN JAPAN

RELOCATION TO-DO LIST

Pre-Arrival

Academic & Visa Process

- ☐ **Choose and apply to Japanese institution**
Choose a language school, university, etc. or apply via an agency
- ☐ **Submit required application documents**
Transcripts, statement of purpose, etc.
- ☐ **Take language proficiency tests** if required
Check the exam dates for JLPT, TOEFL, IELTS
- ☐ **Receive Letter of Admission/Acceptance from school**
School or agency applies for Certificate of Eligibility (COE) on your behalf
- ☐ **Receive COE from school or agency**
This typically takes 1-3 months
- ☐ **Apply for student visa at Japanese embassy/consulate** with:
 - Passport
 - Visa application form
 - Photos
 - Certificate of Eligibility (COE)
- ☐ **Obtain student visa**
Understand visa conditions (study requirements, work limitations)

Financial Preparation

- ☐ **Provide proof of funds** for visa application
Include bank statements/sponsor documentation
- ☐ **Pay tuition fees or required deposits**
- ☐ **Budget for initial costs**
Housing deposits, daily expenses, insurance, emergency funds
- ☐ **Consider applying for scholarships**
MEXT, JASSO, institution-based scholarships
- ☐ **Plan for international money transfers**
Research Wise, Remitly, or traditional bank transfers for moving money

Housing & Accommodation

- ☐ **Secure housing** (dormitory, share house, or apartment)
Book temporary accommodation if needed for first few days
- ☐ **Prepare funds for initial housing costs**
Apartments required key money, deposits, guarantor fees
- ☐ **Plan shipping or downsizing of belongings**
Research international shipping companies or consider buying new items in Japan

Travel & Documentation

- ☐ **Schedule flights and purchase travel insurance**
Book flights and research train/bus options from airport to accommodation. Look into luggage delivery service like Yamato Transport too or check with your airline
- ☐ **Prepare essential documents folder:**
 - Passport with valid student visa
 - Certificate of Eligibility (COE)
 - Letter of Admission/Acceptance
 - Academic transcripts and certificates
 - Health records (if required by school)
 - Financial documents (bank statements, scholarship letters, etc)
 - Passport photos (bring extras)



STUDYING IN JAPAN

RELOCATION TO-DO LIST

Post-Arrival

Immediate Priorities (First 3 Days)

- **Upon arrival, complete immigration procedures at airport**
Receive residence card (at major airports) or get passport stamped for later issuance.
- **Fill out work permit form** and give it to the immigration officer
If you're planning to do part-time work while studying
- **Locate essential services in your neighborhood**
Find convenience stores, supermarkets, post office, hospital and get basic necessities
- **Set up mobile phone service**
Get a SIM card or sign up for a contract. Temporarily you can rent a pocket WiFi too
- **Check device compatibility**
Ensure your personal gadgets, phones, and laptops work with Japanese networks and voltage (100V). Use a universal travel adaptor too.

Legal Requirements (Within 14 Days)

- **Register your residence at local city hall (ward office)**
 - Bring passport and residence card
 - Complete alien registration
 - Enroll in National Health Insurance (NHI)
- **Receive "My Number" notification** (social security number) by mail
Apply for your My Number card as soon as you can

Essential Life Setup (First 2 Weeks)

- **Complete enrollment procedures at your institution**
 - Attend school orientation sessions
 - Get student ID card and access to school facilities
- **Open Japanese bank account**
Bring your residence card and make sure you have a Japanese mobile number
- **Get transportation IC card for trains/buses**
Pasmo or Suica (Apple Wallet). Learn local transportation routes
- **Download essential apps**
Google Translate and Maps, Navitime, Line, Hyperdia, GoTaxi, Uber Eats, PayPay, etc.

Integration & Support (First Month)

- **Join student groups or international communities***
Connect with international student services at your school or university. Check Meetup groups, Internations, Facebook expat groups, etc.
- **Learn Japanese customs and etiquette^**
Bowing, business card exchange (meishi), removing shoes, gift-giving (omiyage)
- **Locate nearest embassy or consulate of your home country**
Watch out for events and join activities to reduce homesickness

* Refer to *Networking Tips of the full Moving Guide*. Visit jeniegabriel.com/ikigaiandbeyond

^ Refer to *Japanese Culture 101 of the full Moving Guide*



PACKING CHECKLIST

Documents & Legal Essentials

- ☐ Passport (valid for entire stay)
- ☐ Visa documents and Certificate of Eligibility
- ☐ Birth certificate (certified copies)
- ☐ Marriage certificate (if applicable)
- ☐ Educational diplomas and transcripts (certified copies)
- ☐ Professional licenses/certifications
- ☐ Medical records and prescription history
- ☐ International driver's license
- ☐ Bank statements and financial records
- ☐ Insurance documents
- ☐ Multiple passport photos (3.5cm x 4.5cm for Japanese documents)
- ☐ Copies of all documents stored separately

Electronics & Technology

- ☐ Unlocked smartphone compatible with Japanese networks
- ☐ Laptop/computer with international power adapter
- ☐ Universal power adapter and voltage converter
- ☐ Phone chargers and cables
- ☐ External hard drives/USB drives
- ☐ Camera and accessories
- ☐ Headphones/earbuds

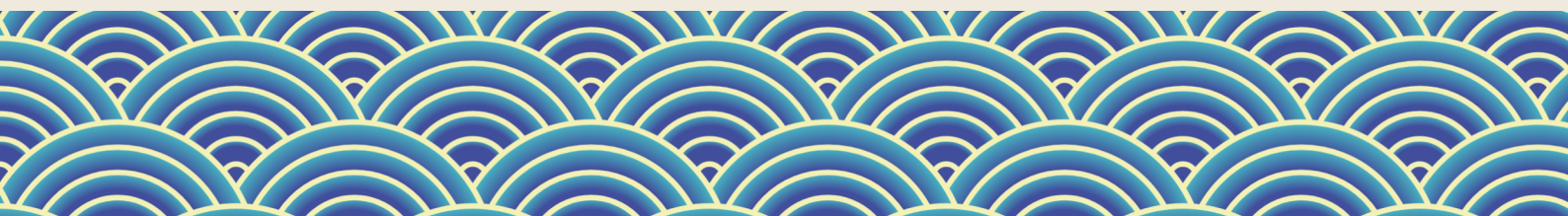
Clothing Considerations

Bring if you're larger than average Japanese sizes:

- ☐ Shoes (especially if size US 11+/EU 44+ for men, US 9+/EU 40+ for women)
- ☐ Bras and undergarments (especially larger cup sizes)
- ☐ Business suits and formal wear
- ☐ Winter coats and outerwear
- ☐ Jeans and pants (if you need length 32"+ or larger waist sizes)

General Clothing

- ☐ Professional work attire
- ☐ Casual everyday clothes for all seasons
- ☐ Sleepwear and loungewear
- ☐ Socks and underwear (1-2 weeks supply)
- ☐ Swimwear
- ☐ Exercise/gym clothes



PACKING CHECKLIST

Personal Care & Health

- ☐ Prescription medications (3-month supply minimum)
- ☐ Contact lenses and solution (if you wear them)
- ☐ Specialty skincare products
- ☐ Deodorant (Japanese options are often milder)
- ☐ Feminine hygiene products (tampons with applicators are less common)
- ☐ Toothbrush and dental care items
- ☐ Vitamins and supplements you regularly use
- ☐ First aid kit basics

Kitchen & Food Items

- ☐ Favorite spices and seasonings not available in Japan
- ☐ Specialty baking ingredients (vanilla extract, baking soda)
- ☐ Tea or coffee you can't live without
- ☐ Non-perishable comfort foods
- ☐ Measuring cups (if you prefer imperial measurements)

Books & Entertainment

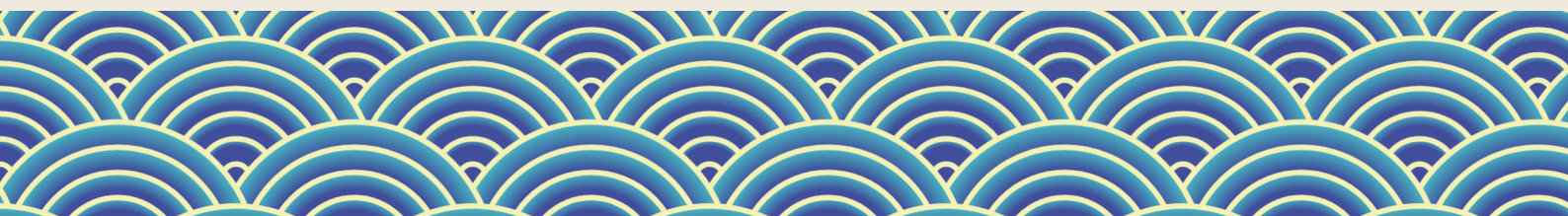
- ☐ Physical books in your language (English books can be expensive)
- ☐ E-reader loaded with content
- ☐ Hobby supplies that might be expensive in Japan
- ☐ Musical instruments (if you play)

Miscellaneous Essentials

- ☐ Quality bedding (Japanese beds can be firmer)
- ☐ Towels (Japanese towels tend to be smaller and thinner)
- ☐ Umbrella (though you can buy excellent ones in Japan)
- ☐ Backpack or day bag
- ☐ Gifts from your home country for new colleagues/neighbors
- ☐ Cash in your home currency for initial exchange

What NOT to Pack (Easily Available in Japan)

- Basic toiletries (shampoo, soap, etc.)
- Most electronics (different voltage/plugs anyway)
- Heavy furniture and appliances
- Cleaning supplies
- Basic clothing in standard Japanese sizes
- School/office supplies



PACKING CHECKLIST

Size-Specific Considerations

If you're taller than 175cm (5'9"):

- ☐ Extra pants and long-sleeve shirts
- ☐ Longer bed sheets and blankets

If you wear larger shoe sizes:

- ☐ Multiple pairs of comfortable shoes
- ☐ Athletic shoes for different activities
- ☐ Dress shoes for work

If you have larger body type:

- ☐ Sufficient clothing in your size
- ☐ Comfortable undergarments
- ☐ Workout clothes that fit well

Climate Considerations by Season

Summer (Hot & Humid):

- ☐ Lightweight, breathable fabrics (like Airism)
- ☐ Moisture-wicking undergarments
- ☐ Sun hat and sunglasses

Winter (Cold, esp. in northern regions):

- ☐ Warm layers and thermal wear (HeatTech is cheaper in Japan)
- ☐ Heavy coat or down jacket
- ☐ Warm accessories (gloves, scarves, hats)

Rainy Season:

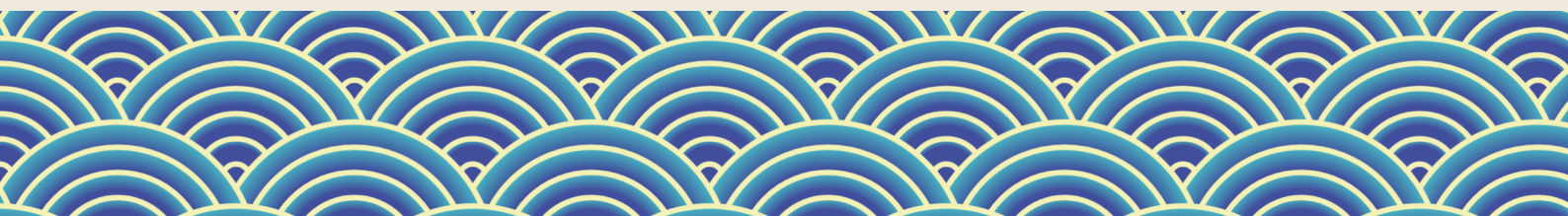
- ☐ Waterproof jacket
- ☐ Quick-dry clothing

Shipping vs. Carrying Tips

- Carry on plane: Documents, medications, electronics, 1-2 weeks of clothes
- Ship separately: Books, non-essential clothes, bulky items, specialty foods
- Buy in Japan: Basic furniture, heavy appliances, kitchen appliances, everyday toiletries

Final Reminders

- Check current customs regulations for restricted items
- Consider seasonal timing for clothing needs.
- Focus on items that are either expensive, unavailable, or specifically important to you in Japan like certain medicines or personal products.
- Weight limits: Most airlines allow 23kg (50 lbs) per checked bag, so prioritize items that are difficult to find or expensive in Japan.



FOR GAIJINS IN JAPAN

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

Critical Deadlines

Residence registration: Within 14 days of arrival

Health insurance enrollment: Within 14 days of arrival

Visa extension or renewal: Apply at least 3 months before current visa expires.

You can renew online or at the Immigration Center. Take note of the steps and average processing times.

Emergency Contacts

Police: 110

Fire/Ambulance: 119

Police Consultation in English: 03-3503-8484

Tokyo Gas, Gas Leak Emergency: 03-6735-8899

Tokyo Multilingual Call Center: 0120-805-261

Research and write down the contact numbers of the following:

School international office: _____

Local immigration office: _____

Your country's embassy/consulate: _____

Key Documents to Always Carry

Residence card (required by law)

My Number card

Employee ID (for employees)

Student ID (for students)

Foreigner Support

Hello Work (Tokyo)

Japanese classes by volunteers

Foreign Residents Support Center (FRESC)

Phone number: 0570-011000

Tokyo English LifeLine (TELL)

Phone number: 03-5774-0992



USEFUL JAPANESE PHRASES

こんにちは **Konnichi wa** (Hello/Good afternoon)

おはようございます **Ohayou gozaimasu** (Good morning)

よろしくお願いします **Yoroshiku onegaishimasu**
It's nice to meet you (Lit. Please take care of me)

こちらこそ **Kochira koso**
It's nice to meet you, too (Lit. Same here)

はじめまして **Hajimemashite**
How do you do? (Said at first meetings)

お元気ですか? **O genki desu ka?**
How are you?

元気です **Genki desu**
I'm fine

ごめんなさい **Gomen nasai**
I'm sorry

ありがとうございます **Arigatou gozaimasu**
Thank you

どういたしまして **Dou itashimashite**
You're welcome

さようなら **Sayounara**
Goodbye

英語ができますか? **Eigo ga dekimasu ka?**
Can you speak English?

はい **Hai**
Yes

いいえ **Iie**
No



USEFUL JAPANESE PHRASES

いただきます **Itadakimasu**
I'm going to eat! (Said prior to a meal)

ごちそうさまでした **Gochisousama deshita**
Thank you for the meal (Said after a meal)

だめ **Dame**
Bad/No

大丈夫 **Daijoubu**
It's OK/I'm OK

～～どこですか？ ～～**doko desu ka?** -
Where is ～～? (Ex. **Toire wa doko desu ka?** - Where is the toilet?)

これはいくらですか？ **Kore wa ikura desu ka?**
How much is this?

これは何ですか？ **Kore wa nan desu ka?**
What is this?

これをお願いします **Kore o kudasai**
This one please (I'll take this)

今何時ですか？ **Ima nan ji desu ka?**
What time is it now?

すみません **Sumimasen**
Excuse me/I'm sorry

～がありますか？ ～**ga arimasu ka?**
Do you have ～(item)?

どこからきましたか？ **Doko kara kimashita ka?**
Where are you from?



USEFUL JAPANESE PHRASES

お国は何ですか？ **O-kuni wa nan desu ka?**

What is your country?

(country)からきました (country) **kara kimashita**

I am from (country)

名前は何か **Namae wa nan desu ka?**

What is your name?

私は(name)です **Watashi wa (name) desu**

My name is (name)

何が好きですか？ **Nani ga suki desu ka?**

What do you like?

(Item)が好きです (Item) **ga suki desu**

I like (item)

何歳ですか？ **Nan sai desu ka?**

How old are you?

(age)歳です (age) **sai desu**

I am (age)

誕生日はいつですか？ **Tanjoubi wa itsu desu ka?**

When is your birthday?

(month)月(day)日です (month)**gatsu** (day)**nichi desu**

It's on (month)(day)

おつかれさまです **Otsukaresama desu**

Thank you for your hard work (Said at the end of the day)



JAPANESE LEARNING RESOURCES



MOBILE APPS

Italki, [Anki](#) (flashcards), [Jpdb](#) (advanced dictionary), Preply, [Memrise](#), Lingodeer, Busuu, [Imiwa](#), Marugoto, Drops, Duolingo, Renshuu, [Yomiwa](#)



ONLINE SITES / CHANNELS

[Irasshai](#), [Comprehensible Japanese](#), [Nihongonomori](#), [Refold](#), Tangorin (dictionary), [Nihongo con Teppei](#) (podcast), [Japanese in Anime & Manga](#), JTalkOnline



BOOKS/ WORKBOOKS

[Genki](#), Minna No Nihongo, Learn Japanese from Zero, [Living Japanese](#), An Integrated Approach to Intermediate Japanese, Remembering the Kanji 1, [Kodansha's Furigana Japanese Dictionary](#).



LANGUAGE EXCHANGE COMMUNITIES

Italki, [HelloTalk](#), My Language Exchange, [Tandem](#), LangCorrect, [English-Japanese Language Exchange](#) (Discord), SewaYou, HiNative