

Having Healthy Expectations during your time at the Japanese Language Centre (JLC)

Housing

While you study at JLC you will be housed in an apartment near JLC or in the Sapporo Guest Home for shorter-term students. This apartment will be found for you by the Language, Orientation & Training (LOT) Coordinators, in consultation with you. Please bear in mind that accommodation is generally smaller than many newcomers to Japan are used to.

When you finish your formal full-time study at JLC you will be designated to a church or ministry, in discussion with you, and it is highly likely that you will move house at some time during your first term. Please try to prepare your heart for the changes ahead, and if you have children, you may also want to think about how to help them to adjust to moving around and changing schools.

Communication

OMF's internal 'language of communication' is English. Non-native speakers need to be aware that this may be an extra strain in what is already a stressful time in your life. Please do work at your conversational English particularly, as much as you can before arriving in Japan.

Once you arrive, you may well find that communicating in English is stressful & tiring for you. Please be patient with yourself and other missionaries, and do ask if you don't understand. You may also find that you need more sleep than usual!

However, it is important that you try as much as possible to talk with others in English, so that you are able to join in with the rest of the OMF community. Some OMF members have found this difficult in the past, and so have not been able to receive the support & fellowship of other missionaries, as well as not being able to take an active part in OMF Japan's direction and this is unfortunate.

Back to school!

When you begin attending JLC, it may feel like going back to school! Your days will be largely planned out for you, with a relatively small amount of flexibility. Some students struggle with this and may feel some frustration at what they perceive as being 'treated like a child'. However, this is not our intention, but JLC does have a daily timetable, which you will need to follow during your time studying here.

Also, some students are natural academics and enjoy this period of study, while others struggle with having to study, rather than being able to do outside ministry right away. OMF does encourage you to give your language study as much energy & hard work as you can during your time here, as although it may seem a long time initially, in reality it is all too short!

Study load & classes

The normal class study load for new OMF missionaries in JLC is 3 classes a day of 45 minutes in length, 5 days a week – a total of 15 classes a week. Along with this, students are expected to do at least 15 hours of private study/class preparation. This applies to all OMFers in full time language study regardless of how much Japanese they arrive with. Like many universities, JLC has a set curriculum, but with some flexible elements especially towards the end. The Language Advisor & LOT Coordinators will allocate teaching staff to students, based on needs & availability. Classes are between 9.00am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday. Saturday is your day off.

JLC students may be allowed to reduce the number of class hours per week at JLC in special circumstances only. This is at the discretion and recommendation of the LOT Coordinators, Language Advisor and/or Medical Advisors, and decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. (Special circumstances may include health issues, child care needs and style of learning.) Please also note that child care is not routinely available.

Studying at JLC is your full-time job, and you would be wise to approach it in such a way, and to help your supporters to see it this way too.

Ministry

Your time at JLC is designed to be a concentrated time for language study. This is so that you can build the necessary foundation of good Japanese language & culture, which is essential to effective, long-term ministry in Japan. Therefore, ministry other than language study during your time at JLC will be very limited. If you have previously worked with OMF Japan for shorter periods, it may be helpful to you to realize that your experience during this time at JLC will be very different in focus, than your experience to date. Students are advised not to do more than 6 hours of ministry outside of language study each week, and this must be discussed with the LOT Coordinators in advance. It may be helpful for you to communicate this expectation also to your supporting church(es).

Marathon v/s Sprint!

Japanese language study is hard work and Japanese is a complex language. Think of your time at JLC as being like running a ‘marathon’ rather than running in a ‘sprint’. Pace yourself, you can’t learn it all at once!

All students at JLC find that, even after 2 years of intensive study at JLC, they are still limited in their Japanese ability and they have to ‘live with not knowing’. This is normal and you are unlikely to be any different. Please be careful to examine your expectations, and encourage your supporters & supporting churches to be realistic in their expectations of you. You won’t be preaching in Japanese for a while...!

This principle also applies in the area of getting used to life in Sapporo, at JLC & in OMF as a whole. You have moved across the world to be here. You are in a brand new city. Even if you have been to Sapporo or Japan before, you are now getting used to actually ‘living’ (as opposed to ‘staying’ as a short-term worker) in a whole new culture. You are working in a brand new situation. You are working & relating to a whole new set of people. Please take your time and be patient with yourself & other family members, as necessary. Don’t try to do everything all at once.

Dependence & Independence

Most new OMF missionaries who come to JLC are professional people, who are capable & independently-minded. This probably applies to you too! Some new missionaries may struggle when they come to JLC with feelings of a lack of independence and loss of control. This may be in terms of their studies & life at JLC, or in terms of life outside JLC, or within OMF. When you can't talk very much – or even at all – you will need to depend on the help of others, and most of us don't find that very easy. Also, OMF can be a strange organisation to get used to. In some ways it is your family, in some ways, your 'employer' and in some ways, your 'church'. It can be hard to know how to relate to others in OMF, but we encourage you to open your heart as much as you feel able to, to your OMF teammates, but to recognise that it is a complicated organisation and you will not feel 'at home' all at once.

Family Visits

The OMF International Handbook states that visits to or from family members are not encouraged during the 'initial period of language study'. This statement is rather ambiguous, but OMF Japan requests that *no family visits are made within the first year of your time in Japan*, and strongly recommends that visits are not made during your time of study at JLC. The reasons are listed below.

Firstly, having family visits too soon, or making them yourself, can be emotionally upsetting for some people – both for you & for your family members. Family visits may increase your feelings of homesickness, and may add to your family's sense of being 'abandoned' when you have to part again. This may or may not happen in your case, but please bear this in mind.

Secondly, having family visit you in Japan when you don't know very much language or culture yourself can be extremely tiring. Not only do you have to cope with daily life yourself, you have to help your guests, doing almost everything for them and translating everything. Please bear this in mind. Family visits are counted as holiday time, but are not always very relaxing!

Thirdly, family visits can be disruptive to study time at JLC, which is sometimes unhelpful in the overall pattern of language learning.

- ♦ There are always going to be exceptions to the recommendations above, but JLC students are required to discuss ideas for family visits with the Language, Orientation & Training Coordinators, *before* plans are made & flights are booked. Thank you.

You would be wise to discuss with your family before you leave, if & when they will visit you in Japan. This will probably help you & them to have healthy expectations in this area.

Church visits

In general, OMF very much encourages visits from your home church, your pastor(s) & other friends or supporters. However, once again, we recommend that you don't plan these visits too soon, for the reasons listed above, and ask that you discuss ideas with the LOT Coordinators, *before* plans are made & flights are booked. You would be wise to discuss with your church before you leave, if & when members/pastors will visit you in Japan. This will probably help you & them to have healthy expectations in this area.