

(Interpreter Training, Session I)

TO: All Interpreters

FROM: Japanese House staff

RE: Some Practical Tips for surviving in the Japanese House (very basic!)

1. The Japanese House must be staffed at all times. Do not leave the house until you have **pegged the door closed**. Please turn around the sign and place it outside the front door, so that people will clearly understand that it is closed.
2. **Everyone must take his/her shoes off before entering the house.** Shoes cannot be worn even on the wooden floors. This rule applies to any kinds of shoes; kids can try on geta (the Japanese style wooden sandals displayed near the entrance door) outside the house, but **never inside**.
3. The alcove in the backroom is called a tokonoma. The family uses it to display beautiful things to look at, such as flower arrangements. **You never walk in it!** (although it does look quite inviting to kids, like a stage!)
4. The windows to the garden need to be closed and locked at all times. In Japan, people would open the windows, sit down on the wooden floor and look outside. In the Museum under the given circumstances, however, the garden is to look at, rather than to play in.
5. Kids love to move the sliding doors (shoji & fusuma) back and forth. It would be helpful if they, or you, could put the sliding doors back to where they were before. (You could say to kids, for example, "Would you move things from one place to another if you were visiting someone's house?", etc.) Please watch to make sure that visitors don't pop holes in the shoji, sliding paper doors. They are a pain to fix!
6. The tiny slippers in the toilet are meant to be worn only in the toilet, and not anywhere else in the house.
7. Two rooms upstairs are not open to the public. (They are used for tea ceremonies often on weekends.) Keep your eye on the closet doors; sometimes people venture to go upstairs very quickly!
8. The handicap access entrance can be used only by those who need it. Keep the blue "closed" sign inside the door at all times to prevent kids from playing with the door.
9. Water facilities in the bathroom and the toilet are not meant to be used by the public.
10. Everyone is welcome to try the futon (the bed on the floor) and the thin sitting pilows. It will be helpful, however, if you could try to keep them in relatively good order and place, and prevent them from flying around in the house.
11. Station yourself in the front room once in a while if not always, so that you can invite the hesitant visitors in, check the shoes situation, direct kids' attention to certain parts of the house (eg. bathroom, toilet, etc.), and set the right tone for people coming in (i.e. ask kids to slow down, make them realize where they are, etc.).
12. **You can close the doors of the house if it gets too crowded** and you cannot control it. Explain to the public why you are closing the house, and ask them to come back in twenty minutes or so. You can also call us for help, either by calling across the hall or by using the secret telephone. The number to call is #241 for us, and #200 for the second floor desk & floor managers.

FOR THE NEXT TWO WEEKS: Try to find the **balance** that is right for you between your job of watching over the house and that of exuding the feeling of fun for the visiting children. You do not want to act like a police in the Japanese House, yet the house can possibly be wrecked without your constant, careful attention.

Don't try to answer questions if you don't know the answers. Suggest they look at the book of photos. There are more resources in the reading room. You can read the blue book when you are relatively free. Staff in the office are there to help you. **So relax, and good luck!!!**

August 29, 1989 (Interpreter Training, Session I)

TO: All Interpreters
FROM: Japanese House Staff
RE: Questions asked most often in the Japanese House, and some possible answers to them.

1. Is this a typical Japanese house? (adults)

No, in many ways No. This house was built about hundred years ago, so it is very old-fashioned in feeling. Most Japanese people today live in small modern apartments or houses, which would have a room or two with tatami mats, and other rooms with wooden or linoleum floors. Their houses today would have much more furniture cluttering the rooms, probably just like your living room. Also, if you go to Japan, especially to a city, it would be hard to find a house as spacious as this Japanese House. People really do live in very small houses in Japan today.

Also, this house used to be a store in Kyoto, selling silk products. That is why there is lattice work at the front of this house. The family would have closed these sliding doors between the front room and the middle room, so that they can use the front room as a business space.

2. Where is the bedroom? Is this the bedroom? (adults & kids)

The rooms in a traditional Japanese house are basically multi-purpose. The middle room could have been the bedroom, but then the family probably slept in the backroom, or upstairs also. You really do not need to have one room specifically as the bedroom because you can spread the futon basically anywhere you want and sleep on it, and when you wake up in the morning you put it away in the closet. That way, you can use the space for some other purpose during the day.

3. Why do we have to take our shoes off? (kids)

The tatami mats are one big reason. If you walked on these tatami mats with your street shoes on, the mats would be ruined in a minute! (Also, taking your shoes off somewhat creates a boundary between in and out of the house.)

4. Why are the ceilings so low? (adults & kids)

Well, I think there are at least two reasons. One reason is that Japanese people are a little bit smaller than most American adults. Another reason is that if you live close to the floor, and sit down on the floor very often, the ceiling does not feel so low above your head.

5. Are the Japanese really short? (adults & kids)

Yes, if you compare the average height of the Japanese to that of Americans. You probably found the kitchen counter quite low, too.

That height is the government standard. But because Japanese people are now growing taller and taller, the government is considering raising the standard for kitchen counters by about four inches.

6. **Is this a Chinese House!!?** (kids)

No. It's a Japanese House.

Whatever.

Well, do you know that China and Japan are different countries? Do you know where they are?.....and so forth....

7. **How do people clean the tatami mats?** (mothers)

You usually vacuum them, or sometimes sweep them. Once a year or so, Japanese people really clean the tatami mats with tightly squeezed wet towels. And people exchange the mats for new ones every five or six years, because they wear out, and also get burned by sunshine.

8. **When do Japanese children start using chopsticks?** (adults&kids)

Most of them are able to use chopsticks by the time they get to kindergarten, so they start trying to use them probably when they are about three or four years old. Before that, young children use spoon and fork, or their hands. It does take them a long time to completely get used to chopsticks, too.

9. **What's this!!? A toilet!!!!?** (adults & kids)

Yes! Do you have something like this at your home!? Do you have any idea how to use it? You don't sit on it; it's too big to sit on, you would probably fall into it if you sat down! Well, you stand on those steps, and..... (on and on)..

About half the families in Japan have a toilet like this in their house, and the other half have the western-style toilet just like yours. If you have some old people in your family, you would probably have the western-style, because it is easier for old people to sit down than to squat.

10. **Are those statues Buddhas?** (adults & kids)

No, they aren't. cf. the book of photos.

11. **What is this?** (adults & kids)

Well, that's what everybody wonders about! In Japan, if you have a guest at your house, you make this tightly squeezed wet towel, put it on this thing made of bamboo, and give it to your guest when you serve tea. The guest can wipe his/her hands with it before he/she starts drinking tea.

June 29, 1989 (Interpreter Training Session II)

Japanese words that might be useful in the Japanese House

- genkan** : Doorway, or entrance, of a house.
- getabako** (gay-tah-ba-ko) : A shelf, or sometimes a closet, where people would put their street shoes in. It is usually placed in genkan.
- tatami** : A particular kind of woven mats that constitute the floors of Japanese houses. Its surface is woven reeds, and the content is chopped, firmly packed straw, (i.e. stalk of rice plant.)
- shoji** (show-jee) : A particular kind of sliding doors, which has one layer of paper pasted onto the wooden structure.
- fusuma** : A particular kind of sliding doors, usually used to divide space between two rooms, with two layers of thick paper fastened onto the wooden frame.
- zabuton** : Thin, square pillows that people sit on when sitting on tatami mats floor.
- futon** : A particular kind of mattress, stuffed with fluffy cotton, that people use as bedding. Both the bottom mattress and the top one are futon.
- oshiire** (oh-she-ee-ray) : Closet, usually with sliding doors.
- tansu** : Drawers, usually to store clothes.
- kamidana** : Shinto shrine.(at the upper corner of the middle room.)
- butsudan** : Buddhist altar. (in the back room.)
- tokonoma** : Alcove. (in the back room.)
- hashi** : Chopsticks.
- mizuya** : Wooden cabinets that contain chinas. (next to the kitchen.)
- ohuro** (oh-hoo-row) : Bathroom, or sometimes the bath tub.
- geta** : Japanese-style wooden sandals that people, particularly men, used to wear often in summertime.
- kimono** :
- yukata** : Summer kimonos, informal.

