

# Congratulations on your assignment to Okinawa, Japan!

This information is being provided to help give you a head start as you plan your PCS to Okinawa, Japan. It is not intended to be a complete listing of everything you will need and want to know, but hopefully some of your immediate questions/concerns will be answered.

Please read and use the following information to help you come up with a list of questions that your sponsor can answer.



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# OKINAWA

Okinawa is the most southern Japanese prefecture and the main island of the Ryukyu island chain. Okinawa, the principle island of Okinawa Prefecture's 160 or so islands, is often referred to as the "Keystone of the Pacific" because of its strategic location relative to major Far East cities. The island is located about 900 miles from Tokyo, Manila, Seoul, and Hong Kong, and about 1,200 miles west of Guam. Okinawa is 67 miles long and varies from 2-17 miles wide.

## HISTORY

If you like history, you will love Okinawa!

Okinawa was the independent Ryukyu Kingdom until 1879, which has given it a unique culture and history separate from mainland Japan. In 1609, the Shimazu clan from Satsuma, in southern Japan, invaded Okinawa and the island assumed status as a Satsuma colony. For the next 270 years, Satsuma demanded taxes from the Okinawan people and controlled trade in exchange for island protection. Japan abolished the royal government in 1879 and formally annexed Okinawa as a prefecture.



Okinawa stood in a strategic location during WWII. The Battle of Okinawa proved to be one of World War II's longest and hardest fought campaigns, claiming the lives of an estimated 120,000 people. Okinawa was the only place where there was a land battle in Japan during WWII, and it was the bloodiest battle of the Pacific War. In addition to the Japanese military people who died fighting in the Battle of Okinawa, more than one third of the civilian population, 100,000 people, died. The Okinawa victims were not only killed by bombs and shells, but also by the Japanese military.

Following the Battle of Okinawa and the end of World War II in 1945, Okinawa was under United States administration for 27 years. During this time, the United States established numerous military bases on Okinawa and during the Korean War, flew bombing missions from Kadena AB over Korea and China.

In 1972, the U.S. government returned Okinawa to Japan. Under a treaty, the United States Forces Japan (USFJ) have maintained a large military presence and it obliged to defend Japan in close cooperation with Japan Self-Defense Forces.

## POPULATION

Okinawa's population is estimated at 1.4 million. Approximately 1,576 Soldiers and approx. 1,700 family members along with DAC / NAF Employee are stationed /work in Okinawa.

## GOVERNMENT

The system of local government in Japan is structurally similar to the U.S. Okinawa is one of Japan's 47 subnational jurisdictions, called prefectures. Each prefecture has its own elected executive Governor and each municipality had its own elected executive mayor and elected assembly.

Accidents and crimes committed by U.S. service members have created pressure to reduce the number of U.S. military bases. At present, the U.S. and Japanese governments are trying to reach an agreement to the relocation of the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to reduce noise, reduce air pollution, and improve public safety. While local nationals periodically hold protests, they are directed at the Japanese government rather than U.S. Forces and are always peaceful.

## CLIMATE

Okinawa is located between Japan and Taiwan in the Pacific Ocean and is in the same latitude zone as subtropical paradise locations such as Hawaii, Florida, and the Bahamas.

Temperatures range from highs in the mid-90s in the summer to lows in the high-40s in winter and humidity in relatively high throughout the year. Vegetation on the island is green and lush year round.

Okinawa's Rainy season begins the beginning of May and ends the middle of June. The temperature stays very warm during that time, even at night, and the days become very humid

Typhoon season officially begins 1 June and ends 30 November. Typhoons are Okinawa's version of hurricanes and the storms bring fierce winds and rain. Buildings on Okinawa are built of concrete to endure regular typhoons and residents are very safe if they stay indoors until the all clear is sounded.

## LANGUAGE

The traditional Okinawan language is near extinction and most residents speak Japanese.

American military personnel from every branch of service are based on Okinawa. With so many English speakers, stores and restaurants located near military installations are usually English-friendly with English menus and English speaking staff.

If you take time to learn conversational Japanese, get out, and use it, you will find it easy to enjoy the company of the pleasant and industrious.



## RELIGION

Okinawa religious beliefs are characterized by ancestor worship and the respecting of relationships between the living, the dead, and the gods and spirits of the natural world.

Turtle-back shaped tombs line the hills and streets and can be found in a lot of sizes all across Okinawa. These tombs serve as vaults for holding the remains of the deceased in carefully arranged tombs.



## CULTURE

Because of its geographical location, Okinawa has been influenced by many cultures. The most prominent of those are Japanese, Chinese and American. The primary influence on Okinawan life comes from mainland Japan, since the island is Japan's 47<sup>th</sup> prefecture. Okinawan business, fashion, and social behavior are similar to Japanese. Okinawa's population is estimated at about 1.4 million people.

## TIME

Okinawa is located in the Japan Standard Time zone (JST) and is +14 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time in the United States. (+13 hours ahead during daylight savings which Okinawa does not adjust for.)

## ELECTRICITY

The standard voltage for U.S. appliances and electronics is 120V and the standard voltage for Okinawa is 100V. 120V electrical outlets are standard in on-base homes, offices, and most Americanized rentals off-base, but off-base your electronics may require a transformer to adjust for the correct voltage.

## CURRENCY

Yen is the national monetary unit of Okinawa, although on-base transactions (Commissary, BX, Shoppette, gas stations, and clubs) are done in U.S. dollars. Many places off-base will accept U.S. dollars as well. The yen rate changes on a daily basis, but can be found on the radio station, Wave 89.

## DRIVING

Vehicles in Okinawa are driven on the left side of the road so car steering wheels, windshield wipers, and turn signals are all opposite of what is standard for Americans. Speed limits are marked in kilometers per hour, many roads are very narrow, and traffic is often very congested. While major roadways are well marked with English signs, many smaller streets are not marked at all and directions are given via landmarks rather than addresses.

In order to drive on Okinawa you must take a SOFA driver's license test. You can download a handbook for Japanese Traffic Regulations at:

<https://www.mcipac.marines.mil/Staff-and-Sections/Special-Staff/MCIPAC-Safety/Safety-Office/Okinawa-Driving/>

To receive a motorcycle license on Okinawa you must complete a Motorcycle Safety course. This course is available on Okinawa but it is recommended that you attend the course prior to leaving the States.

## **ISLAND ACTIVITIES**

Okinawa may be a small island, but there is a lot to do if you go out looking for it! The warm, sunny climate provides opportunities to trek the miles of beaches enjoy local attractions and visit neighboring islands. In addition, there are many cultural assets, festivals and castle ruins to explore. The climate makes it perfect for those who enjoy swimming, snorkeling, scuba diving, golf, boating, and taking part in other recreational activities year-round.



## **SPONSORSHIP**

You will be assigned a sponsor from your gaining unit. Your sponsor should contact you within a few days to introduce him/herself. If you do not receive any correspondence from your assigned sponsor, please make contact directly with your gaining supervisor. Communication between you and your sponsor is instrumental in making your PCS a smooth transition.

Prior to your arrive, your sponsor is expected to answer your questions via email and assist with making billeting arrangements, obtaining a PSC mailing box, and any other needs you have.

Upon arrival, your sponsor is expected to meet you at the airport, help you check-in to billeting, and assist you with reporting to in-processing appointments.

## **MOVING TO OKINAWA**

### **KADENA AIR BASE**

Kadena Air Base is home to the 18<sup>th</sup> Wing, and includes support from Army and Navy forces. Kadena itself is sprawled across some 4,900 acres with an adjoining munitions area of 6,300 acres.

## KADENA PEOPLE (estimates)

Active Duty: 6,600

Family Members: 9,500

U.S. Civilians: 1,100

Japanese Civilians: 3,000

Avg. Contractors: 900



## FLIGHT ITINERARY

Please provide your sponsor and supervisor with your flight itinerary prior to your arrival. It is recommended to coordinate with your sponsor for transportation arrangements to your temporary living facility (TLF). It is also a good idea to work out a back-up plan on what to do in case your sponsor does not meet you.

## HOUSEHOLD GOODS (HHG) SHIPMENTS

Okinawa is no longer a weight-restricted area. From the U.S., you are authorized to ship the full amount of HHG authorized. The U.S. Government had no permanent storage facilities on the island, so if you ship too much and find you have inadequate room, storage will be at your own expense on the local economy, which can be quite expensive). Housing is smaller than most stateside locations and shipping oversized

furniture items (i.e. King size beds, large entertainment centers, etc.) is discouraged. Once you ship your personal property to Kadena AB, the Transportation Management Office (TMO) is not authorized to reship excess property back to CONUS storage. We recommend you correspond with your sponsor and obtain all possible information needed to make a decision regarding shipment and/or storage of your HHG. Major appliances (washer/dryer, refrigerator, and stove) are available for people residing on and off base for the duration of your assignment. TMO will supply loaner furniture \*beds, couches, table, chairs) for up to 90 days.



## **HOUSING**

If you have dependents, you are eligible for on-base government family housing. The waiting period for on-base housing generally ranges from 30 days or less. Single family, duplex, and multiplex units are available. While waiting for on-base quarters, you are entitled to receive a Living Quarters Allowance (LQA) to cover most living expenses off base. Rent and utilities off base are expensive. Your LQA should be sufficient to cover rent and utility costs with the rent and practice energy conservation (i.e. do not run the air conditioner when you are not home, etc.). You can usually find off-base housing within 30 days. Once you move on base, you lose your LQA, but you pay no rent or utilities for government quarters. However, there is a charge for telephone service, cable television, and Internet services, if you choose to use them. Contact your sponsor if you need additional information.

## **PRIVATELY OWNED VEHICLE**

Aside from motorcycles, POVs are not brought to Okinawa. (Please be mindful that the humidity and ocean elements can be harsh on motorcycles.) There is a good supply of Japanese used cars locally available at reasonable prices (normally \$1,000 to \$4,000). Storage of a stateside POV is authorized. If you have any questions regarding the POV shipment to Okinawa, please contact your nearest TMO. While in Okinawa, you will need a SOFA driver's license. After your arrival, you and your spouse may obtain a SOFA driver's license after passing a written test. You may also obtain information regarding the associated costs in owning a vehicle, such as the required road tax and Japanese Compulsory Insurance (JCI).

## **PASSPORT**

There are two types for passports: official passports and tourist passports.

Official passports are authorized at no cost for PCS moves to overseas locations. Submit application(s) for you and authorized U.S. citizen family members. Applications must be submitted immediately to preclude unwarranted delay in reporting to Japan. Processing could take four weeks or more. Contact the CPO at the nearest military installation to initiate applications for official passports.

Non-Official travel scheduled while stationed at Kadena, either back stateside or elsewhere, you will travel on tourist passports.

Non-U.S. citizen dependents are not eligible to obtain and use a U.S. passport. These individuals must apply for and obtain a passport from the country in which they claim citizenship.

VISA is not required for DoD civilians and eligible family members covered by the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), regardless of nationality. However, such eligible family members must have ID cards and must be listed on the PCS orders.

Passport applications are available at [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov).

## **PCS TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION**

You may be required to use the AMC military contract flight, (also called Patriot Express or Freedom Bird) if available. The flight flies from the U.S. (Seattle) to Kadena AB.

If you use a commercial flight, you will fly through mainland Japan and change to a domestic carrier for the flight to Okinawa. You will fly into Naha International Airport (Approx 40 minutes from Kadena AB) where you may be met by your sponsor.



## **COST OF LIVING ALLOWANCE (COLA)**

Living in Japan can be relatively expensive, so a Cost-of-Living- Allowance (COLA) is paid to military members stationed overseas to help off-set expenses. It is a balancing factor designed to permit service members to spend the same portion of their basic compensation for current living expenses without incurring a reduction in their standard of living. It is a tax-free allowance paid at a flat rate based on base pay, size of family, and post of assignment. It is subject to adjustment based on the yen/dollar exchange rate or as costs fluctuate relative to those stateside.

## **TEMPORARY LIVING FACILITY (TLF): SHOGUN INN**

Kadena's Shogun Inn, Navy Gateway Inn and West Pac Inn offers TLF facilities. Your sponsor can help make arrangements for your arrival. Please visit: <https://www.dodlodging.net/>

## **MEDICAL AND DENTAL FACILITIES**

Kadena Medical and Dental Clinics are located on Kadena AB for routine pediatric and family practice appointments. Torii Station only has a Dental Clinic, which serves Active Duty and space available for spouses and their family. After hours, Emergency Procedures for Dental will be through Evans Dental Clinic, located on Camp Foster. The U. S. Naval Hospital is nearby on Camp Foster for emergencies and specialized care. Military pharmacies will not honor private physician's prescriptions. Bring enough prescript medication with you to last until you can get an appointment and a new prescription. You may want to have your sponsor check to see if either the Kadena Medical Clinics or U. S. Naval Hospital stock your medications.

## **PETS**

The process to bring a pet into Japan can be very extensive (6-9 months). Pet owners are recommended to start this process as early as possible by visiting a Veterinary Facility) preferably an on-base vet clinic). All of the steps in the process must be completed in order to avoid any delays. Okinawa is rabies-free and the Japanese Animal Quarantine Service regulations strictly require that all animals entering Japan be examined to ensure they are free from communicable diseases.

Provided below are a couple of websites that you can visit to obtain information about brining your pets to Okinawa.

AMC Travel Website: <http://www.amc.af.mil/Home/AMC-Travel-Site/>

Japan Animal Quarantine Service website: <http://www.Maff.go.jp/aqs/languages/info.html>

OCONUS Country Instructions: [https://archive.move.mil/documents/OCONUS\\_Country\\_Instructions.pdf](https://archive.move.mil/documents/OCONUS_Country_Instructions.pdf)

## CHILDCARE

Torii Station currently does not offer childcare on installation nor family housing. First thing to do before looking into childcare for your child is to create an account on <https://public.militarychildcare.com> and follow the prompt of questions. Childcare is offered on Kadena AFB and majority of the USMC installations.

## DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE DEPENDENT SCHOOLS (DoDDS)

School age children can attend DoDDS from kindergarten through grade 12.

KINDERGARTEN students must be five years old on/or before 1 September of the current calendar year to be eligible to register for the upcoming school year.

SCHOOL ZONING When you are living in temporary billeting you child is zoned for the school in that area. When you have been assigned permanent housing (ON or OFF BASE), there is a possibility that your child could be moved to another school, unless you live in the same zoned area.

### SCHOOL REGISTRATION CHECKLIST

- PSC orders with dependent names
- Previous school records for student
- Passport or Birth Certificate for student (age verification)
- Social Security number for student
- Student Health History (DSPA Form 120.1)
- Immunization records
- House Assignment Letter (from housing office), Off-Base Lease Agreement, or TLF Receipt

Visit <https://www.dodea.edu/Pacific/south/> for additional information.

## BASE FACILITIES

Kadena AFB, USMC Installations (Kinser, Foster, and Courtney Camps) offers normal base facilities including a Base Exchange, commissary, schools, and education center, as well as recreation, childcare, medical, and club facilities. Camp Lester only has a shoppette and a middle school.

Base theaters are on Kadena AFB, USMC Installations besides Camp Lester, golf courses (Banyan Tree, Kadena AFB/Chibana Golf Course) (Taiyo Golf Course, USMC) and state-of-the-art physical fitness center, on Kadena AFB, Torii Station, Camp Foster and all northern USMC installations.

Off -base there is also Kadena Marina, Torii Station beachfront and the Okuma military recreation resort on the northern part of Okinawa.

## BANKING

Due to electronic banking, most of the conveniences of home are available to you on base and on most military installations on Okinawa. You may keep your Continental United States (CONUS) checking account or establish one at one of the base banking facilities: Department of Defense (DoD) Community Bank (an affiliate of Bank of America) or Pentagon Federal Credit Union (PFCU). Navy Federal Credit

Union (NFCU) is also available and located on USMC installations. Some people keep one in the CONUS and one overseas.

You will not incur international fees for using your debit or credit card at on-base merchants. Many merchants' off-base do accept credit cards but you may incur international/exchange fees. You will find you will use cash much more on the economy than you probably did in CONUS. The banking facilities on-base (including ATMs) can give you both dollars and Japanese yen currency.

It is a good idea to call your credit card company ahead of time to let them know of your international move so your card does not get flagged for fraud as you PCS.

## **TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

Currently there are three telephone providers for Okinawa, AU, Softbank and DOCOMO. Most Americans that call back to the states frequently prefer to use internet services such as Skype, Vonage, and Magic Jack, Facetime audio and Facebook Messenger. Cell phone and iPhone service is also available from English-friendly off-base service providers or you can find them in all Military Installation Malls located in the Exchanges itself.

## **TELEVISION/RADIO**

The American Forces Network (AFN) broadcasts radio and television programs to military installations on Okinawa. AFN television provides a variety of news, sports, and regular television programming from all the major American networks. AFN also provides one FM and one AM radio station to the island which offer a variety of American music. (Look for a car with a CD player to enjoy your favorite music when you want it!)

## **POST OFFICE BOX**

Your sponsor can obtain a PCS mailing address (post office box) up to 30 days in advance of your reporting date so you can arrange to have mail forwarded. Contact your sponsor for more information.

## **SHOPPING**

The Commissary and Base Exchange (BX) may not have the wide selection of brands you are used to, but you will find the most common grocery, household, furniture, and clothing items you will want.

You also have many different off-base options for food, furniture and clothing. Keep in mind that clothing off-base tends to run very small/petite. Items like men's shoes and women's clothing are not geared to American sizes.

## **RESTAURANTS**

Kadena has many American familiarities found stateside: Pizza Hut, Baskin Robbins, Chili's, Burger King, Popeye's Chicken, Macaroni Grill, Subway, and other fast-food outlets. Off-base American favorites like PFC and McDonalds are favorites for the local-nationals too.

The wide variety of off-base Japanese restaurants serving everything from Japanese favorites like sushi and soba, to Japanese-style Italian, Mexican, and Thai foods will satisfy adventurous cuisine enthusiasts too.

## SUGGESTED LINKS

Kadena's AMC terminal / Space A Travel: <https://www.kadena.af.mil>

Space A Travel Tips: <https://www.amc.af.mil/Home/AMC-Travel-Site/AMC-Space-Available-Travel-Page/>

Okinawa visitor's bureau: [www.ocvb.or.jp](http://www.ocvb.or.jp)

### OTHER USEFUL SITES:

<https://kadenafss.com>

<https://home.army.mil/okinawa>

[www.OkinawaYardSales.com](http://www.OkinawaYardSales.com)

<https://torii.armymwr.com>

[www.metoc.navy.mil/jtwc/jtwc.html](http://www.metoc.navy.mil/jtwc/jtwc.html)

<https://www.mccsokinawa.com>

## SUGGESTED ITEMS TO PACK WITH HOUSEHOLD GOODS

- Dehumidifier
- Good sunglasses for the entire family
- Lightweight raincoats for the entire family (to endure the rainy season)
- Stock up on hard to find specialty items: soap, hair products, lotions, vitamins, particular style of running shoes, printer ink, vacuum bags, etc.
- Sudafed (brand) is only available from the clinic's pharmacy with a doctor's prescription. If you are prone to allergies, you may wish to bring some with you.
- Will you want a fence? It is suggested to bring chain link fencing; it is VERY expensive and hard to come by on island. (You will have no problem selling it if you choose not to put up a fence.)
- Summer clothing, shoes, beachwear
- Light jackets, sweatshirts, jeans – the humidity year-round can make even a 60 degree winter day feel chilly.
- If you are considering a new camera or electronics, best to shop while still stateside
- Income Tax Returns (Federal, State, Local)
- Insurance Policies
- College Transcripts
- Wills and Powers of Attorney
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## ITEMS TO HAND-CARRY WITH YOU

- Birth Certificates for self and dependents (certified with state seal, not a hospital birth record)
- Health Certificates for Pets
- Immunization Records for self and dependents
- Marriage Certificate (state or county certified, i.e. with seal)
- Medical Records for self and dependents
- Naturalization Records
- Other legal documents to prove legal guardianship, joint custody, adoption, dependent parents, etc.
- Passports for self and dependents
- School records for school age children (transcripts of credit)
- Shipping and Storage documents for your property
- Multiple copies of Travel Orders
- An extended supply of prescription medications
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

We hope this guide helps you in the coming weeks as you prepare for an exciting assignment in Okinawa.