

Complete PCS Guide to Okinawa & MCAS Iwakuni, Japan

沖縄と岩国へようこそ！あなたの冒険は今ここから始まります！

Welcome to Okinawa & Iwakuni: Your Adventure Begins Now!

Table of Contents

- **Welcome to Your New Adventure in Japan!**
 - From Doubt to Home: Our Story
- **SOFA Status – Know Your Role**
- **Your Destinations**
 - Okinawa: A Pacific Paradise
 - Iwakuni: Quiet Beauty & Deep History
- **Pre-Departure Checklist**
 - Upon Receiving Orders
 - Flights: Submit Port Call Request
 - Household Goods (HHG) & Unaccompanied Baggage
 - Housing & Lodging
 - Medical Screening & Area Clearance
 - Pet Travel & Quarantine Requirements
 - Mailing Address
 - Schools & Child Development Centers
 - Orientation Brief & Driver's Handbook
- **Travel & Arrival Information**
 - AMC Flight Process (SEATAC)
 - Commercial Flights
- **Transportation to MCAS Iwakuni**
- **First Steps After Landing**
 - You've Landed in Okinawa! Now What?
- **At Your Unit: Personnel Administrative Readiness Checklist**
- **Living the Japanese Life**
 - Must-See Attractions in Okinawa
 - Outdoor Adventures & Family Fun
 - Okinawan Cuisine
 - Cultural Insights
- **Iwakuni, Japan: History, Beauty, and Tranquility**
 - Top Attractions Near Iwakuni
- **Exploring Japan: A Land of Endless Possibilities**
 - Top Destinations
 - Theme Parks
- **Family-Friendly & Safe**

- [Immerse Yourself in Japanese Culture](#)
 - [Experience Local Traditions](#)
 - [Language](#)
 - [Child Resources](#)
 - [Final Thoughts](#)
 - [Helpful Links](#)
-

Welcome to Your New Adventure in Japan!

Congratulations on your orders to Okinawa or MCAS Iwakuni! Whether you're a single Marine or bringing your entire family, get ready for a life-changing journey in one of the most beautiful, peaceful, and culturally rich countries in the world.

From Doubt to Home: Our Story

When our family first got orders to Okinawa, we were filled with questions, concerns, and uncertainty. Johanna and our daughter Jasmine weren't sure what to expect. But once we settled in, immersed ourselves in the culture, and embraced the kindness of the people, everything changed.

Okinawa didn't just become a duty station—it became home. The birth of our son here only deepened our connection. What started with hesitation turned into the most beautiful chapter of our lives. And now, it's your turn.

SOFA Status – Know Your Role

You're in Japan under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). This means:

- You're a legal resident of Japan
 - Be a respectful ambassador of the U.S.
 - Obey Japanese laws and customs
-

Your Destinations

Okinawa: A Pacific Paradise

Location: Subtropical island in the East China Sea, about 400 miles south of mainland Japan

Size: Roughly the same as Rhode Island

Population: 1.4 million residents, including a large U.S. military community

Okinawa is a dreamscape for explorers, food lovers, history enthusiasts, and adventure seekers alike. With its stunning natural beauty, vibrant cultural heritage, and endless array of unique experiences, this island paradise offers a journey that's as enriching as it is unforgettable.

Iwakuni: Quiet Beauty & Deep History

Location: Yamaguchi Prefecture on mainland Japan, about 30 miles from Hiroshima

Vibe: Tranquil, scenic, and full of cultural charm

Iwakuni is nestled in a peaceful area perfect for weekend explorations and deep cultural experiences—like the famous Kintai Bridge, Iwakuni Castle, and quick access to Hiroshima and Miyajima Island.

Pre-Departure Checklist

1. Upon Receiving Orders

Start Overseas Screening Immediately

Begin overseas screening for yourself and all dependents (if applicable).

Required Forms:

- NAVPERS 1300/16
- NAVMED 1300/1 & 1300/2
- DD Form 2807-1

Your Sponsor – Your First Friend in Japan

Every inbound member is assigned a sponsor to help with:

- Travel arrangements
- Housing & Temporary Lodging
- In-processing appointments

Reference: MCO 1320.11H MARINE CORPS SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Resources:

- **Okinawa:** <https://www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/marine-family-support/military-family-life/relocation-assistance>
- **Iwakuni:** <https://iwakuni.usmc-mccs.org/marine-family-support/information-referral-and-relocation/child-and-youth>

Stay in Contact with Your Sponsor

- Your unit will assign a sponsor once your name appears on the inbound roster
- Send your official orders or orders of intent to your sponsor ASAP

2. Flights: Submit Port Call Request

AMC Flight or Commercial Airline

- Request pet space(s) if you're traveling with pets
- Submit Port Call Request with confirmed dates
- Coordinate closely with sponsor for arrival planning and pet handling
- Sponsor will schedule NOWA (Newcomer Orientation Welcome Aboard) brief after flight is confirmed

3. Household Goods (HHG) & Unaccompanied Baggage

Use Move.mil to schedule:

- Household Goods (HHG) pickup
- Unaccompanied baggage shipment

USN personnel (3D MLG units):

- Must have at least two sets of woodland MARPAT (MCCUUs)

4. Housing & Lodging

Check in with Family Housing within 2 working days of arrival.

Fill out Housing Forms

- **Okinawa:** <https://www.kadena.af.mil/Agencies/Okinawa-Family-Housing/ofhTest/>
- **Iwakuni:** <https://www.mcasiwakuni.marines.mil/Organizations/Station/Facilities/Military-Housing-Division/Military-Family-Housing/>

Important:

- Send completed forms to your sponsor
- On-base housing is prioritized (based on rank & family size); off-base is only considered if on-base is unavailable
- Bring endorsed orders and area clearance

Finding Housing

- View at least 4 homes in the first 15 days, and 6 more every 15 days after
- Keep track of homes viewed on the TLA Data Sheet

On-Base Housing

- **Wait time:** 1–12 months, varies by family size and pets
- If you choose a smaller unit than you rate, you won't be moved later
- Comes with stove, fridge, washer/dryer, and dishwasher

Pets

- Dogs and cats often mean off-base housing
- You can't turn down housing just because of pets—you'll lose TLA

Off-Base Housing

- Expect \$5,000–\$7,000 in upfront move-in costs
- Housing Office helps with contracts, agents, and utilities
- Japanese homes are smaller—avoid large furniture

Shipping & Storage

- Ship only 75% of your HHG weight
- Bring essentials in express shipment (bedding, towels, hygiene)
- Storage on base available, but you pay (\$90–\$150/month)

Lodging Reservations

Sponsor will reserve TLF (Temporary Lodging Facility) and kennel space for pets, if needed.

Reference: <https://www.travel.dod.mil/Allowances/Temporary-Lodging-Allowance/>

5. Medical Screening & Area Clearance

Begin medical screening process ASAP (this can delay your PCS if not done early!)

Required Forms:

- NAVPERS 1300/16
- NAVMED 1300/1 & 1300/2
- DD Form 2807-1

Area clearance is issued after screening approval.

6. Pet Travel & Quarantine Requirements

Follow the import guide for Japan. According to III MEF MCIPACO 10570.1, certain dog breeds are prohibited in all Military Family Housing.

Requirements:

1. Microchip (must be done before any vaccinations)
2. Two rabies vaccines (at least 31 days apart)
3. FAVN (rabies titer test) – must arrive in Japan 180 days to 2 years after sampling
4. Valid health certificate from a military or USDA-accredited vet
5. Notify Japan's AQS at least 40 days before arrival

Choose your pet's transport method:

- AMC Flight or Commercial Airline (see pet-specific guides for each)

7. Mailing Address

- Your sponsor will obtain a PSC box or unit mailing address
- You can begin mailing essentials in advance
- Sponsor needs a copy of your orders to complete this

8. Schools & Child Development Centers

Sponsor provides school and CDC resources:

- K-12 School Liaison Program
- Child Development Centers (CDCs)

9. Orientation Brief & Driver's Handbook

- Sponsor schedules your New Orientation Welcome Aboard Brief located in Camp Foster
- Sponsor shares the Okinawa Driver's Handbook

Travel & Arrival Information

AMC Flight Process (SEATAC)

Step 1: Arriving at the AMC Counter

Location:

- AMC's check-in counter is next to Hawaiian Airlines (Ticketing level, main terminal at SEATAC)

Timing:

- Counters open 6 hours before departure
- Check in no later than 3 hours and 20 minutes before your scheduled flight
- Check the AMC SEATAC 72-hour flight schedule for updates

Lines:

- Two separate lines:
 - Accompanied service members
 - Unaccompanied service members

Step 2: Required Documents & Identification

Bring the following:

- Orders with funding data (e.g., USMC Web Orders)
- **Identification:**
 - Common Access Card (CAC)
 - Dependent IDs
 - Passports for all travelers
- **Pet documents (if applicable):**
 - Health Certificate
 - FAVN Test Results
 - Rabies Vaccination Record

Step 3: Baggage Guidelines

Baggage Allowance per Person:

- 2 checked bags (each under 70 lbs and 62 linear inches)

- 1 carry-on bag (under 45 linear inches)

Excess Baggage Fees:

- \$125 per additional checked bag

Bag Tags:

- All luggage must have identification tags (Name & Phone Number)
- AMC provides paper ID tags if needed

Step 4: Pet Import Requirements for Japan

Make sure your pet meets all import requirements to avoid quarantine:

1. **Microchip** – must be implanted before any rabies vaccines or FAVN test
2. **Two rabies vaccinations** – given at least 31 days apart
3. **FAVN test results** – showing sufficient rabies antibodies
4. **Health certificate** – issued by a military vet or USDA-accredited vet
5. **Travel Timing:**
 - Pet must arrive in Japan between 180 days and 2 years after FAVN blood sample

SOFA Personnel Benefit:

Pets may be allowed to complete quarantine at home on a U.S. base in Japan.

Commercial Flights

Step 1: Notify Japan's Animal Quarantine Services (AQS)

Timeline: At least 40 days prior to arrival

How: Email via the MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries) website

Where to send documents: Send to Narita Airport AQS, the likely port of entry from the U.S.

Step 2: Gather Required Documents to Email AQS

Email the following documents to AQS:

- Copy of your official military orders (e.g., USMC Web Orders)
- FAVN (Fluorescent Antibody Viral Neutralization) Certificate
- Health Certificate, completed within 10 days before travel
- Photo of the in-cabin pet travel bag
- Contact information (phone & email) of the person transporting the pet on arrival day

Step 3: Book Your Travel

Airline Booking:

- Book your pet with your U.S. commercial airline (DMO)
- Book your connecting flight to Okinawa

Airport Transfer:

- You'll likely land at Narita and transfer to Haneda Airport
- Allow 4–5 hours between flights for the transfer

Bring Printed Copies:

- Carry printed versions of all documents you sent to AQS

Arrival Process:

- AQS will email a map of the quarantine location
- AQS personnel will meet you on arrival

Reimbursement:

Pet travel expenses may be reimbursed — refer to MARADMIN 378/23

Step 4: Confirm Import Requirements (To Avoid Quarantine)

To meet Japan's pet import standards:

1. Microchip your pet – must be done before rabies vaccines or FAVN testing
2. Provide proof of two rabies vaccines – at least 31 days apart
3. Submit FAVN test results (showing adequate rabies antibody levels)
4. Have a health certificate from a military vet or USDA-accredited vet
5. Ensure your pet arrives in Japan between 180 days and 2 years after FAVN blood sample collection

Note: SOFA status personnel may be eligible to complete pet quarantine at home on a U.S. base in Japan.

Transportation to MCAS Iwakuni

Option 1 (Preferred): AMC "Patriot Express"

- Fly directly to MCAS Iwakuni on the Air Mobility Command (AMC) Patriot Express
- Lands on base, no additional travel needed
- Sponsors meet you at the AMC Terminal

Option 2: Narita → Haneda → Iwakuni Kintaikyo Airport

- Fly into Tokyo Narita International Airport, transfer to Haneda Domestic Airport, and take a domestic flight to Iwakuni Kintaikyo Airport
- Operated by All Nippon Airways (ANA)
- Final flight of the day arrives at 9:45 p.m. at Iwakuni

Option 3: Narita → Hiroshima

- Arrive at Narita, transfer to a late afternoon domestic flight to Hiroshima Airport (around 17:45)
- Only one flight daily; flight time ~1.5 hours
- Bring plenty of Japanese Yen—currency exchange may be closed upon arrival
- Daily ATM limit: 140,000 yen (~\$900) at convenience stores

- Customs & luggage recheck required at Narita
- Domestic planes are small—pack light!

Option 4: Narita → Haneda → Hiroshima

- Land at Narita, take an airport bus (up to 2 hrs) to Haneda, then fly to Hiroshima
- Clear customs and collect bags before bus ride
- English-speaking staff available at Narita to assist
- Save all receipts for travel reimbursement!
- Pets may be held for quarantine at Narita and follow later

Upon Arrival at MCAS Iwakuni:

- Sponsors will greet you at the AMC terminal or coordinate pickup
- **Unaccompanied:** Sponsors take you to barracks
- **Accompanied:** Sponsors escort families to housing or TLF (Atago Hills, Kintai Inn)

First Steps After Landing

You've Landed in Okinawa! Now What?

1. Arrival & Transportation – You're Not Alone

- Your sponsor will be waiting at the airport (Kadena or Naha) to greet you
- For unaccompanied E-5s and below, the JRC (Joint Reception Center) will provide transportation

They'll help you with:

- You
- Your family
- Your luggage
- Your pets

2. Baggage Support

No stress on carrying everything—your sponsor or JRC will ensure all bags (even excess) are transported safely to lodging.

3. Lodging & Housing

You'll be taken directly to temporary lodging or on-base housing (if available by grade/family size). Sponsor already arranged this ahead of time — no guesswork.

4. Pets

Your sponsor will help you:

- Get pets to their assigned kennel or quarantine location

- Ensure they're settled, comfy, and safe

5. Initial Food & Supplies

Your sponsor will help grab initial groceries and essentials from the commissary and exchange. No need to scramble—support is built in.

6. Transportation on Island

- Until you get your SOFA driver's license, your sponsor will help you get around
- E-5s and below: You'll need commander's approval to obtain a SOFA license
- You'll take the SOFA driving test during your Newcomers Orientation (NOWA)

Driving Resources:

- **Okinawa:** <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/533963/driving-okinawa> (please watch)
- **Iwakuni:** <https://www.mcasiwakuni.marines.mil/PCS-to-Iwakuni/Driving-in-Japan/> (please watch)

7. Orientation – NOWA & JRC

- You'll attend the NOWA Brief and complete JRC
- Spouse or single parent? A virtual NOWA option is available for you
- **Children:**
 - 9 and under: Not required to attend
 - 10 and older: Required to attend the brief

8. Update Medical Coverage

After arrival, make sure to update your TRICARE coverage.

Link: [Update TRICARE Overseas Coverage](#)

9. Your Support Network Has You Covered

From arrival to your first grocery run, from pet care to paperwork—you are not alone. Sponsors, JRC, and your command have already planned ahead to reduce stress and keep everything on track.

Pro Tip:

Keep a small folder handy with printed copies of:

- Orders
- Pet paperwork
- ID cards/passports
- Housing forms
- Contact info for your sponsor

At Your Unit: Personnel Administrative Readiness Checklist

After arrival and housing are settled, here's what you'll need to complete at your unit check-in to ensure your administrative readiness is fully squared away:

1. Unit Check-In & Inbound Actions

- Sponsor schedules your in-calls with your new unit
- Log into MOL (Marine Online) and initiate your Inbound Interview under the Travel section
- Begin your travel claim:
 - Lodging receipts
 - Airfare (AMC/Commercial)
 - Any other reimbursable expenses

Pet Expenses Reimbursement due to PCS (MARADMIN 378/23) January 2024:

Eligibility: A Service Member on a PCS order may be authorized reimbursement for the costs related to the relocation of one household pet that arises from a permanent change of station. A household pet is a cat or a dog, owned for personal companionship. **OCONUS:** all necessary expenses described above in connection with the movement of a pet is limited to \$2,000 per PCS move.

2. Update Emergency & Dependent Info

- Verify and certify your Record of Emergency Data (RED) in MOL
- Certify your PADD (Person Authorized to Direct Disposition)—also in MOL
- Update your Family Care Plan and Family Readiness Points of Contact (POCs)

3. Insurance & Notification Systems

- Review and certify your Servicemember Group Life Insurance (SGLI)
- Log into DoD MilConnect to make updates
- Enroll in AtHoc, the emergency notification system
- Review disaster preparedness guides on the MCCA Okinawa website

Quick Links:

- **MOL (Marine Online):** <https://mol.tfs.usmc.mil>
- **MilConnect (SGLI Updates):** <https://milconnect.dmdc.osd.mil>
- **MCCA Disaster Prep:** [MCCA Okinawa - Disaster Readiness](#)

Living the Japanese Life

Must-See Attractions in Okinawa:

Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium: One of the largest in the world, featuring a massive whale shark exhibit and captivating marine life.

Nago Pineapple Park: Fun for the whole family, with pineapple-themed rides, attractions, and, of course, delicious pineapple treats!

American Village: A lively district where East meets West, offering shopping, dining, live music, and entertainment.

Castles: World Heritage sites, is a window into the fascinating history of the Ryukyu Kingdom.

Outdoor Adventures & Family Fun:

Bios no Oka: A stunning nature park with boat tours, scenic walking trails, and water buffalo cart rides.

Okinawa Zoo & Wonder Museum: Perfect for kids, with interactive exhibits, animals, and educational activities.

Comprehensive Park: A vast outdoor area with playgrounds, sports fields, and even a BMX track for family-friendly fun.

Cape Manzamo: A breathtaking coastal viewpoint, especially beautiful at sunset, offering sweeping views of the East China Sea.

Need for Speed in a Go-Kart: Try Street Kart Okinawa

Okinawan Cuisine

Okinawa's unique cuisine blends Japanese, Chinese, and American flavors, creating dishes you can't find anywhere else:

Jack's Steakhouse: A local favorite for hearty American-style steaks, popular with both locals and military personnel.

Sam's By-the-Sea: A nautical-themed eatery serving delicious seafood and steaks.

Agu Pork Shabu-Shabu: Enjoy Okinawa's famous Agu pork in a traditional hot pot meal.

Taco Rice: A fusion of American and Okinawan cuisine—a flavorful mix of ground beef, cheese, lettuce, and rice!

Cultural Insights:

Driving: In Japan, driving is on the left side of the road. Take your time adjusting but be prepared for a unique driving experience! E-5s and below may request permission through the command to take the exam and obtain a SOFA license. Must complete Driver Awareness Training (Under 26 yrs old: CMCSDDAT01).

Tipping: Tipping is not a part of Japanese culture and may even be seen as rude. Exceptional service is simply expected.

Safety: Japan boasts one of the lowest crime rates in the world, making it one of the safest places to live and raise a family.

Iwakuni, Japan: History, Beauty, and Tranquility

Location: MCAS Iwakuni is located in Yamaguchi Prefecture, about 30 miles southwest of Hiroshima on the Honshu mainland.

Population: The base supports around 15,000 personnel, including service members, civilians, and dependents.

Why Iwakuni? Nestled amidst scenic landscapes and rich history, Iwakuni is a perfect blend of cultural heritage and natural beauty. It's also ideally located for exploring some of Japan's most famous landmarks.

Top Attractions Near Iwakuni:

Kintai Bridge: A historic wooden bridge and one of Japan's most iconic landmarks, surrounded by stunning cherry blossoms in the spring.

Iwakuni Castle: Take a scenic hike or enjoy the ropeway ride to the top of this reconstructed samurai castle for sweeping panoramic views.

Hiroshima: Just a short train ride away, visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and the Atomic Bomb Dome. Don't miss trying Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki, a local delicacy.

Miyajima Island: Famous for its iconic floating Torii gate, wild deer, and tranquil temples—perfect for a peaceful day trip.

Exploring Japan: A Land of Endless Possibilities

Living in Japan puts you in the perfect position to explore the entire country. Thanks to the efficient and extensive public transportation system, Japan is easy to travel across, whether you're seeking adventure in bustling Tokyo or quiet moments in Kyoto.

Top Destinations:

Tokyo: A high-energy city where neon lights meet ancient temples, offering endless shopping, dining, and entertainment.

Osaka: Known for its vibrant food culture, nightlife, and the magnificent Osaka Castle.

Kyoto: The cultural heart of Japan, offering tranquil temples, beautiful gardens, and the traditional Geisha district.

Nara: Famous for its friendly, free-roaming deer and home to Japan's largest Buddha statue.

With Japan's world-class rail network, weekend getaways and day trips are easy, affordable, and an essential part of your time here.

Theme Parks:

1. Tokyo Disneyland

Located in Urayasu (just outside central Tokyo), Tokyo Disneyland is a magical destination with classic Disney rides, parades, and character meet-and-greets. It's famous for its attention to detail and its magical atmosphere.

2. Tokyo DisneySea

Right next door to Disneyland, DisneySea offers a different vibe with more thrilling rides, maritime-themed areas, and an overall more adult-friendly feel. It's unique to Japan and features some amazing attractions like Tower of Terror and Journey to the Center of the Earth.

3. Odaiba (Palette Town & DiverCity Tokyo Plaza)

Odaiba is a massive entertainment complex with attractions like:

- **Gundam Statue:** A life-size Gundam robot statue standing at DiverCity Tokyo Plaza
- **Miraikan (National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation):** An interactive museum with exhibits about technology, robots, and space exploration
- **Odaiba Palette Town:** Home to the VenusFort shopping mall and the giant Ferris wheel

4. Sanrio Puroland

Located in Tama, Sanrio Puroland is a Hello Kitty-themed indoor amusement park. It's a dreamland for Hello Kitty and Sanrio fans, offering character-themed attractions, performances, and merchandise.

5. Tokyo Dome City

A large entertainment complex featuring:

- **Tokyo Dome:** A massive stadium for concerts and sporting events
- **LaQua:** A shopping, dining, and entertainment area
- **Thunder Dolphin:** A huge roller coaster that passes through a building
- **Spa LaQua:** A relaxing hot spring spa

6. Asobono (Indoor Play Center)

A perfect spot for families with young kids, Asobono in Tokyo Dome City offers a large indoor play area with slides, ball pits, and educational activities.

7. Joypolis (Odaiba)

An indoor amusement park by Sega, Joypolis is filled with high-tech arcade games, virtual reality experiences, and thrilling rides. It's a fun place to escape to if you're into gaming or want a fast-paced experience.

8. Roppongi Hills (Mori Tower and Tokyo City View)

While not a theme park, the Roppongi Hills complex offers a fantastic observation deck with views of the Tokyo skyline, including Tokyo Tower and Mount Fuji on clear days. It also has entertainment options like art museums, theaters, and high-end shopping.

9. Tokyo Skytree Town

Tokyo Skytree is a massive broadcasting tower with two observation decks that offer panoramic views of the city. The area around the Skytree has shopping, restaurants, and an aquarium, making it a popular

spot for both views and entertainment.

10. Legoland Discovery Center Tokyo

Located in Odaiba, Legoland Discovery Center is an indoor LEGO world filled with interactive exhibits, miniature cityscapes, and rides. It's a great place for families, especially young kids.

Bonus: TeamLab Borderless (Odaiba)

A digital art museum offering immersive, interactive exhibits that blend technology and art. It's a unique experience that is both fun and awe-inspiring, especially for anyone into contemporary art or technology.

These attractions provide a perfect blend of thrilling rides, immersive experiences, and family-friendly fun, making Tokyo an exciting destination for entertainment lovers!

Family-Friendly & Safe

Japan is one of the safest countries in the world, making it an ideal place to raise a family. The low crime rates and welcoming communities ensure a peaceful and secure environment for both children and adults. Public transportation is incredibly safe, and it's not uncommon to see children traveling independently!

Japan also places a strong emphasis on education, discipline, and respect. Families have many excellent educational options, whether through on-base schools, local Japanese schools, or international programs.

Immerse Yourself in Japanese Culture

Experience Local Traditions

Try participating in tea ceremonies, summer festivals, and cultural workshops to immerse yourself in Japan's rich customs.

Living in Japan presents the perfect opportunity to learn and engage with the local culture. There are countless ways to deepen your understanding of Japan's traditions, including:

Language

Even basic Japanese goes a long way in making connections. You can take classes on base or participate in local language exchange programs.

Basic Greetings:

- **Hello:** こんにちは (Konnichiwa)
- **Good morning:** おはようございます (Ohayou gozaimasu)
- **Good evening:** こんにちは (Konbanwa)
- **Goodbye:** さようなら (Sayounara)
- **Good night:** おやすみなさい (Oyasuminasai)
- **How are you?:** お元気ですか? (Ogenki desu ka?)

- **I'm fine, thank you:** 元気です、ありがとうございます (Genki desu, arigatou gozaimasu)
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Child Resources

- **K-12 School Liaison Program:** <https://www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/marine-family-support/child-and-youth/k-12-school-liaison-program>
 - **Child Development Centers:** <https://www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/marine-family-support/child-and-youth/child-development-centers>
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Final Thoughts

You're not just transferring duty stations—you're starting a new chapter. Embrace the culture, travel often, and don't be afraid to try something new. From ancient shrines to high-tech Tokyo, Japan offers a once-in-a-lifetime blend of duty, adventure, and discovery.

Soak it all in. Make memories. Enjoy every moment in the Land of the Rising Sun.

Helpful Links

- **Driving in Okinawa Guide:** <https://www.mcipac.marines.mil/Staff-and-Sections/Special-Staff/Safety-Office/Okinawa-Driving/>
 - **Okinawa MCCS Website:** <https://www.okinawa.usmc-mccs.org/about>
 - **Visit Okinawa on Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/visitokinawajapan?igsh=eTViMXU4dHNsZWJr>
 - **Exchange Rate Converter:** <https://www.exchange-rates.org/converter/usd-jpy>
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ようこそ日本へ — あなたの次の素晴らしい冒険が今、始まります。

Welcome to Japan—your next great adventure starts now.