



Computing in Japan.

JET's, in general, find that they spend a lot of time in front of a computer screen. Most morning routines at school would usually involve a coffee, checking ones e-mail and catching up on the news from home.

E-mail is one of the most important methods of communication between JET's (how else would you be able to invite 160 people to your 1LDK for a party in the weekend?) . Every JET should have an e-mail address. If you do not have one, there are many free services available that will provide one (e.g. Hotmail). Most *official* news from the JET Committee and elsewhere will be relayed by e-mail and / or fax. In addition, events, parties, requests for help, etc. will all come via e-mail.

Great! How do I get started?

Well, in order to dazzle you teachers with your incredibly professional looking worksheets, you will need to get access to a computer. You can either buy and / or use your own, or use one at one of your schools.

School Computers

Almost every school should be equipped with a computer (or computers) that are available for communal staff use. Usually these will have Internet access also. Some schools have installed firewalls and filters that prevent access to certain websites (sometimes including Hotmail) making them relatively useless as a communication tool.

School computers are invariably in Japanese (no surprises there!), and so you will have to get used to a Japanese language version of Windows and Word. If you have used either of these two pieces of software before it will be fairly intuitive. In addition, the Japanese keyboard layout (AO6) is slightly different from the normal 101 keyboards that we are used to.

One (or more) teachers will usually be designated the computer guru in your school. If you own, or plan to purchase a laptop for use at school, these teachers will be able to assist you to connect to the school LAN (network).

Owning Your Own

Often JET's make the decision to purchase their own computer after being here a few months. Laptops are popular due to their convenience and the ability to take them home after you have completed your year(s) here.

Where do I buy one?

Japan is well known to be an electronics paradise. All the latest high tech gadgets are available here, and often before they are released elsewhere in the world. Most electronics stores sell a variety of computers, both laptops and desktops. A good laptop can be purchased for around 150,000 yen. Anything cheaper would usually be perfectly adequate for things like general word processing, but if you are purchasing one new, it is better to pay a little extra and get a lot more.

The best place to shop for computers and related items, is Akihabara (or Electric Town as it is sometimes known). Akihabara is in Tokyo and is about 2 ½ hours from

Mito by train (Take the Joban Line from Mito to Ueno, then the Yamanote Line from Ueno to Akihabara). Most stores in Akihabara have some English speaking staff, cheap prices and generally more variety than you would find anywhere else. In some stores you are able to order in English software. International models are sometimes available also.

TIPS AND TRICKS

Most Japanese electronics stores promote and operate customer loyalty programs based on point cards. Yodobashi Camera (electronics as well), Bic Camera (electronics also) and WonderStation to name a few, all operate similar programs. Usually about 5-15% of the purchase price will be credited onto the card to offset purchases made at a later date. When you consider that 10% of 150,000 yen is 15,000 yen and that 15,000 yen is enough for a cheap printer or a good kerosene heater, these cards are definitely worth signing up for. Cost to join= NOTHING! (But sometimes you can't use the points on the same day that you get them)

What should I look for? (specifications correct as at 22/7/03)

If you plan to use your computer for word processing, internet access and writing the occasional CD, most laptops priced around 130,000 yen would suit your needs.

An average system should include:

- An Intel or AMD CPU operating at a minimum of around 1.5 GHz
- 128-256MB of DDR Memory
- 14.1-15in screen
- 30-40Gb Hard Drive
- Modem and or 10/100 LAN Adapter
- Minimum DVD Reader/24x CD Burner

Other options that will add to the cost are:

- USB 2.0 or Firewire ports

What else should I consider?

•Often computers sold in Japan carry only a Domestic Warranty. If the computer dies or needs a component replaced under warranty, it will need to be returned to Japan for authorised servicing. Ask about an International Warranty before purchasing.

•Japanese computers carry Japanese keyboards. If you find this irritating, ask if an international model is available.

•What plugs are provided with the computer. Will it operate normally in your home country? What about voltages and Modems?

•Can you get English software on your computer instead of the Japanese versions?

How much extra will this cost?

•The Japanese version of Windows generally runs about 25% slower than the English version. This is due to the complexity of the Japanese character set in use in this version.

Bringing one from Home:

To avoid all the traps and pitfalls of purchasing a computer here, many JET's elect to bring a computer from home. In many cases the prices may be cheaper in your home country.

Things to consider:

- Japanese electricity is 100 volts at a frequency of 50 or 60Hz. Nearly all laptop computers have a universal power supply, however be warned, some don't. Voltage adapters are available in Japan but they are usually quite expensive.
- If you are bringing a computer from Europe, you will need to purchase an adapter for the telephone socket as the plugs are slightly different here.

Notes for Geeks:

Some of us just can't stop ourselves from tinkering with any new machinery we get. Some of us just prefer to build things ourselves. Here are a few pointers for the more technically minded:

- Shopping for parts in Japan can be a trying experience. Most Japanese computer store clerks know only a little about their products, even less jargon, and almost no English. It is sometimes like trying to communicate with someone by trying to translate through two languages. Before you go shopping for parts try to gather as much information about the product as possible.
- Steer clear of Japanese domestic models, If you wish to upgrade a driver or need a need a new BIOS or other kind of support, you will probably need to navigate through a badly constructed Japanese website to get it.
- If you purchase a Japanese computer with the intention of wiping the Hard Drive and replacing the operating system with an English version, beware. As soon as you wipe the drive, you will have invalidated the manufacturers warranty.
- White Box , or OEM parts carry an extremely short warranty in Japan. In the region of two weeks to a month.

ARRRRGH! It's Dead

If the gerbil powering your computer dies or if you mistake the CD tray for a cup holder and it snaps off, you will need to get it repaired. There are three possible scenarios here.

1)It's a Japanese Computer

Probably the easiest scenario to resolve. If the computer is still under warranty, just return it to the store that it was purchased from (Just like home), or contact the

manufacturer to find the nearest repair depot. If it isn't under warranty then you will need to find a Japanese retailer who does repairs.

2) It's a foreign computer that is under warranty

Warranties come in two flavours. International and Domestic warranties.

If it is an international warranty, then it is reasonably simple to resolve. Ask someone to find the nearest branch of that manufacturer, and make contact with them. If the computer is running an English operating system, it may take a little longer to get repaired as they will need to send it to someone with English skills.

If it is a domestic warranty, then refer to the next section

3) It's a Japanese computer with an English Operating System you have installed yourself, or an international model that is out of warranty.

If this is your situation, you will usually need to find a shop that specialises in English computing, or a local computer guru who is willing and able to help you. Many Japanese shops will not take computers with English operating systems for repairs.

Software

Computing in Japan is a little different from computing in an English speaking country. Here are a few points to look into:

ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE:

If you don't have it... GET IT!. If you already have it . . . UPDATE IT! Schools and businesses in Japan are notoriously bad at installing and maintaining Anti-virus software. The result is that there are ALOT of worms and virii floating around. In the 9 months I have been here, I have encountered more virii and worms than in my previous 10 years computing. In addition, most JET's will be storing worksheets and other personal information on their computers. Ask yourself, do you really want to loose all that information because someone sent you some "Pictures of the party last night".

What software should I get?

Norton Anti-Virus is recognised as one of the best packages available. It monitors your system while it is running, as well as scanning all *incoming* and *outgoing* e-mails for infected files. An English version of Norton Antivirus can be purchased online (www.symantec.com) and downloaded for about USD\$39.95. If you intend to purchase this, consider buying Norton Systemworks as it includes the Anti-Virus program as well as a set of utilities to maintain the health of your computer for only a little extra.

Other Anti-virus packages are available that include different features and cost more/less. I personally have tried many of them and would recommend Norton Antivirus above the rest, however, different people have different opinions. You can evaluate Trial versions of Anti-virus software (usually time limited to 15-30 days) by going to the sites listed below:

•Norton Antivirus (www.symantec.com)

•McAfee Antivirus (www.mcafee.com)

•Pc-cillin (www.download.com)

Updating the software:

Anti-virus software is only effective if it knows what to look for. Every good Anti-virus program has a library of virii signatures built into it. The library is very similar to a library of medical books, with lists of symptoms that your computer may exhibit and treatments. As more virii and worms are found, new entries are made in the medical book. HOWEVER your Anti-virus program can only work effectively if it has the latest version of these books.

Many modern Anti-virus programs are able to automatically update themselves on the internet. Norton calls this feature LiveUpdate and the whole process usually takes less than five minutes. BUT . . . some anti-virus programs require that you download a small program or package of files, and somehow use these to replace the existing library.

FIREWALLS

If you plan to use a high speed connection to the internet (especially if you use file sharing software like Kazaa, Gnutella, Limewire, Morpheus or Bearshare), you should also use firewall software. There is a remote, but very real possibility, that your system could be target for a hacking attempt or used for some other malicious purpose without you knowing. Download a program called ZoneAlarm from the Internet to protect yourself. ZoneAlarm is free for personal use.

JAPANESE KEYBOARDS IN WINDOWS

Windows 95, 98(SE) and ME

To change the 101 (normal style) keyboard to the Japanese A01 style you will need the following files:

•KBDJPA01.KBD (Japanese Keyboard Driver File. Save to the C:\windows\system folder)

•JKEYB.REG (Registry Entry. Double click on the file and merge into the registry)

These file can be found at this site:

<http://www2.gol.com/users/pbw/jkeyb.htm>

Once this is done, go to *Control Panel* and then the *Keyboard* icon. On the *Language* tab highlight your version *English (US or UK as the case may be)* and then press *Properties*. Then you will be able to select the newly created *Japanese Keyboard Layout A01*. Once you have done this press apply.

Windows 2000 and XP (Home, Corporate and Professional)

Go to the *Device Manager* and select the current keyboard. Click on *Update Driver* and select either a *PC/AT 106 Keyboard* or a *Japanese PS2 Keyboard*. Next, go to the *Control Panel* and select *Regional Options* then select *Japanese Language* as an addition language option. You may require your installation disk for this step. Reboot your computer. Once the computer has restarted, go to *Control Panel* and then *Keyboard*. Change the keyboard layout of the English Language to Japanese

The Internet

You haven't been on the `net for close to 3 weeks and your Hotmail account is set to explode with all the e-mails from Uncle Larry wanting to find out how you are in Japan. You need to get online.

Connection Methods:

There are three main methods of connecting to the Internet in Japan.

1)Dial-Up (max 56k).

This is by far the most common method but it can also be the most expensive depending on how much you use it. The actual cost of the Flat Rate (all you can use) account is relatively low, about 2,000 yen per month with OCN. However, NTT charges 10 yen for 3 minutes for a local call which works out to 200yen per hour. If you spend 1 hour each day on the net writing mails and reading news from home, that works out to 6000 yen for local call charges alone plus the 2,000 for the account, so the grand total for the month is about 8,000 yen.

How do I get started?

Firstly, you will need a 56k modem installed and working correctly in your computer. The next step is to go to the local electrical appliance store, or sometimes railway station, and pick up a connection brochure. Ask your supervisor to help you fill out the form and fax it off. About a week later you will receive a letter in the post detailing your passwords, login names and other settings. You may need to ask your local computer guru to help you setup these options if you are not able to do so yourself.

2)ADSL (max 26M in some areas)

In simple terms, if you are in an area that has it, GET IT! Download speeds of up to 26M make this kind of connection significantly faster than a dial-up account. In addition there are NO LOCAL CALL CHARGES and no limits on the amount that you can download each month for this kind of service. By now you are thinking that you will need to sell your first born child into slavery to pay for this account WRONG. In the last year, the prices for these plans have gone through the floor. An all you can use, 26M account has an average monthly charge of about 3,000 yen (plus NO local

call charges) and this includes the rental modem.

But there must be some kind of catch? Right?

Yes, there is.

ADSL is mainly confined to urban areas. In addition, the rollout of this technology is still in its early stages. If you live in the South of Ibaraki you are more likely to have access to this service than those in the North. You must also live within about 6km of a telephone exchange, as the ADSL signal degrades over distance. Anyone living in a rural area can almost write off any chance of using this kind of connection.

How do I get started?

NTT is VERY slow at getting anything organised so contact Naomi at <http://www.bricks.co.jp/e-isdn/engmenu.html>, who is an authorised reseller for NTT. Naomi's address is Naomi@bricks.co.jp. Bricks do not charge anything for this signup service and they are a lot quicker than dealing with NTT directly.

You have two options regarding the modem that you will need. You can rent them for about 300 yen a month, or purchase one outright (about 15,000 yen). Options with the rental modem may be limited (ex internal vs external) and the type of connection between the modem and the computer will affect overall data transfer speeds.

You will also need a `splitter` (a small plastic box which connects to the telephone outlet in your apartment). These can be purchased for around 1,000-2,000 yen. (This comes with a rental modem)

The next step is to go to the local electrical appliance store, or sometimes railway station, and pick up a connection brochure. Ask your supervisor to help you fill out the form and fax it off. About a week later you will receive a letter in the post detailing your passwords, login names and other settings. You may need to ask your local computer guru to help you setup these options if you are not able to do so yourself. Most Internet Service Providers (ISPs) do not support English operating systems so you will not be able to call them for help with configuration.

3)ISDN

ISDN the third option between ADSL and Dial-up in terms of speed. Prices for the FletsISDN plan from NTT around 3,000 yen a month. Using this kind of connection you will be able to use your telephone at the same time as using the internet, and if you are using some operators have an agreement with NTT so that if you sign up for it you will not be charged local calling fees.

You will need a piece of equipment called a Terminal Adapter (T.A.). These can be purchased for around 10,000 yen and most electronics stores. The terminal adapter plugs into your regular telephone socket and acts both as an ISDN modem as well as a splitter, to allow you to make calls at the same time as using the internet.

ISDN isn't for everyone though. Only some areas qualify for the `Flets` (all you can use) plans. If you can't get Flets, then there isn't really much of an advantage over a standard dial-up connection in terms of speed or costs as you'll be paying the normal local calling charges (10 yen for 3 minutes)

See the above instructions for signing up for an ADSL connection if you wish to use ISDN.