

# GREENHEART TRAVEL High School Abroad

*Japan*

Curriculum Guidelines







## OVERVIEW OF THE JAPANESE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Japanese parents place a very high value on their children's education. The high school a Japanese student attends determines which universities they will be able to attend, which in turn ultimately determines the social standing they will be able to acquire later in life. Japanese students must pass competitive entrance exams to gain access to the most desirable high schools. The most common types of public senior high schools are regular or academic (*futsu*) high schools and vocational schools such as commercial (*shogyo*) and industrial (*kogyo*) high schools.

Exchange students will be placed in either a public or private high school.

High school in Japan is called *kōtōgakkō* and lasts 3 years. The school year starts in April and is divided into three trimesters (April to July, September to December, and January to March). The main vacation period is in July-August and lasts for about a month. There are other vacations for New Years (15 days) and at the end of the school year (3 weeks). Some schools work with a two-semester system (April/September with a summer break in between and October/March with a winter break in between). There are frequent holidays and school days dedicated to extracurricular activities



## Subjects in Japan

There are three grade levels in Japanese high schools: First year (10th grade), Second year (11th grade) and Third year (12th grade). Exchange students will be placed in First or Second year.

- First year (10th grade, 15-16 y. old). Until the end of the first year, all the subjects are compulsory: Japanese, Math (Analysis and Algebra), English, Sciences, Social Sciences (History, Economics and Geography), PE, and Art.
- Second year (11th grade, 16-17 y. old): In this level, students must specialize in one of two sections, or “tracks”: Sciences or Humanities. Almost all subjects are compulsory, only a few are electives like calligraphy, art, music and tea ceremony. Some schools are more focused on languages and others on sciences.

If the Japanese level of the exchange student is quite low, some schools may organize a special curriculum offering mainly elective subjects that do not require a fluent level in Japanese, such as Japanese language, Art, PE, Music, tea ceremony and calligraphy. Since learning written Japanese is difficult, Japanese schools are more focused on teaching Japanese language than American schools are at teaching English.

## Schedule

School in Japan goes from Monday to Friday. Some schools have classes on Saturdays. The average school day goes from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm. Each class lasts 50

minutes with a 10-minute break between classes. Most Japanese students are very conscientious about their studies and spend a lot of time in study hall.

Japanese people (including high school students) have very busy lives. It is very typical that a student leaves the house at 7 am and comes home at 7 pm. The average time to commute to/from school is about one hour in general. All Japanese high school students take buses, bicycles, trains, or a mixture of these three. The schools start around 8:30 am, end at 3:30 pm, and students even clean up their own classrooms before they go to club activities. Clubs normally run from 4 pm to 6pm.

## School Uniform and Behavior

Each school has its own unique uniform that identifies its students as being from that particular school. For this reason, schools often have strict rules governing not only how students are required to behave during school, but also after school, as their behavior can influence their school's reputation. For example, students are expected to refrain from chewing gum or consuming snacks in public places.

After class, students are in charge of cleaning the classrooms. They are organized in groups and take turns with cleaning duty. This will seem strange to American students, but it is the custom throughout Japan.

## Exams and Results

It is not mandatory for Japanese high schools to deliver a transcript, but if the student asks for one in the beginning of the program, they will usually receive one. *Please note that exchange students are excluded from receiving grades and credits in this program.*

## Extra-curricular Activities

Japanese high schools offer a wide variety of different extra-curricular activities. Activities are organized through clubs -- called "*Bukatsu*" -- sponsored by a teacher. In most schools, clubs can be divided into two types: sports clubs (baseball, soccer, judo, kendo, track, tennis, swimming, softball, volleyball, rugby) and culture clubs (English, broadcasting, calligraphy, science, mathematics, yearbook).

The members of the clubs meet for two hours every day after class and also during vacations. The relationships between *senpai* (senior) students and *kohai* (junior) students are very structured: the *senpai*'s duty is to teach, initiate and take care of the *kokai*, and the *kokai* serves and defers to the *senpai*.



This relationship is fundamental in Japanese society. This structure in school clubs is very similar to the way that business, political and social dealings are structured in adult Japanese society, so clubs are seen as an important part of the Japanese student's education.

## What Should I Do Next?

The best next step would be to meet with your high school guidance counselor or administration to discuss your interest in going abroad. Every school handles exchange students, transfer credits and going abroad differently so there isn't an "average" process that you can be guided through.

You should bring this document with you to the meeting with your counselor so they can get a better idea of what types of classes you would be taking abroad. This helps create a plan for possible transfer credits. During your meeting, you should ask about what credits you need to graduate and if any of those can be fulfilled from transfer credit abroad.

## Application Process with Greenheart Travel

We don't usually recommend starting the application process before meeting with your guidance counselor because we want to ensure that you receive sufficient credit from your time abroad. After you meet with them or have a better idea of your school's process, let us know! Our [application process is online](#) and happens in several steps, so it is pretty straightforward and we can help you start whenever you're ready.

In addition to completing an application, you will also be required to submit documents. You can be collecting the documents during the application process, but all documents will be due 14 days after you submit your deposit. The following documents will be required for all destinations:

- Letter of Recommendation (from a teacher, coach or guidance counselor)
- Transcript
- Dear Family Letter (one written by student, one by a parent)
- Parent Questionnaire
- Medical Form
- Copy of your passport

There may be additional paperwork required for specific destinations. Your program manager will inform you of what those documents are during the application process.