

Into the Sunset

By Jennifer Williams

Hawaii

Yes, Hawaii is one of the United States, so it shouldn't be so different, right? Well... Hawaii is a chain of more than 125 islands so isolated in the Pacific (almost 2,500 miles from California and 4,000 miles from Japan) that it does at times seem like its own country, with its own customs and ceremonies.

While Hawaii is renowned for its gorgeous, varied scenery and moderate tropical climate, the state is also notorious for its high cost of living. Plus, Hawaii has some distinctive rules and regulations, including ones you should know before you go.

If you have pets, be sure to check out Hawaii's animal quarantine laws at http://www.hawaiiag.org/hdoa/ai_aqs_info.htm a few months before your scheduled arrival. Hawaii has a very strict policy concerning animals coming into the state, and has several requirements, including getting blood tests and electronic microchip identification, before dogs or cats are allowed to enter. Another helpful law to know concerns gun ownership: No one can own or obtain ownership of a firearm (including antique firearms and those inherited or received as gifts) in the state of Hawaii without first getting a permit to acquire one. For more information, visit <http://www.honolulu.gov/info/permit>.

Housing on the islands is at a premium, while storage space is at a minimum, so arrange non-temporary storage of your excess goods back home. It may help to know that military installations offer appliances, such as washers, dryers, ranges, and refrigerators, for military family housing and off-base military residents to use while there.

A great way to get acquainted with your new home before you go is to check out www.hawaii.gov, a website that can link you to various state departments and agencies, give you employment and school information and even can give you detailed visitor's information for when you feel like exploring your new home and its neighboring islands.



Relocating to the Pacific, whether it's Hawaii, Japan, Okinawa or Korea, can be an exciting experience in your military career. The vastly different lands and cultures that should make your tour so memorable can also be a bit frustrating at times, unless you prepare for what you're about to experience.

Japan

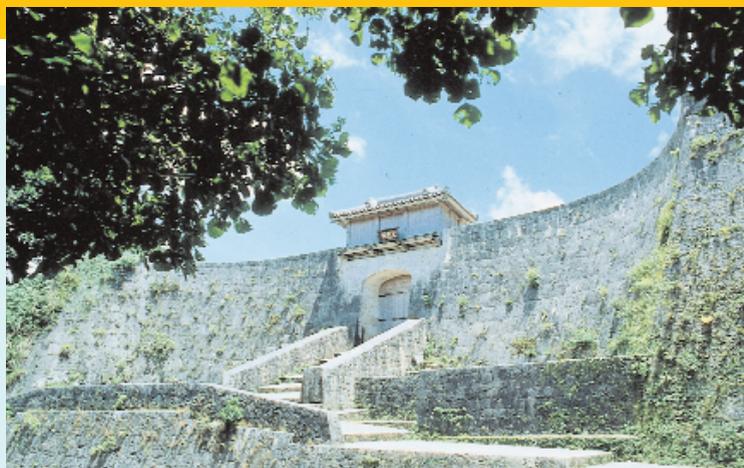
Visiting Japan's major cities, rural towns and villages is an odyssey through a thousand years, because no other nation on earth has been able to modernize and advance in technology while reflecting its traditions and cultural values at every turn. Towering skyscrapers in Tokyo may have Shinto shrines on their roofs while feudal castles may neighbor new office complexes and train stations.

Japan is one of the world's most earthquake-prone regions in the world, so an understanding of earthquake safety, including how to call for assistance in an emergency, is a must. And while you're at it, take a complete on-base or online course in basic Japanese, learn to drive on the left side of the road, and study the country's other special cultural customs and etiquette.

To really experience this country, you'll need to do your own exploring. Japan's climate varies from region to region, but generally speaking, the country has a temperate climate with four seasons. Japan's rainy season (tsuyu) typically lasts from early June through the middle of July, with rain returning with the typhoon season from August to October.

While you are visiting the fabulous temples, statues, museums and galleries which dot the countryside, don't miss the opportunity to take part in some of the local festivals. You might come across the Hanami (cherry blossom viewing) or Hinamatsuri (also known as the Doll's, Peach or Girl's Festival), which celebrates young girl's growth and happiness.

A helpful resource in touring Japan before you cross the ocean can be found at www.japan-guide.com. The website offers information on everything from finding a job to how to properly get rid of your garbage, and even features a guide to Japanese etiquette.



Okinawa

While Japan declared Okinawa a prefecture in 1879, this ancient "Kingdom of the Ryukyus" retains its own unique language, culture and cuisine.

The group of islands in the Ryukyu archipelago that encompasses Okinawa lies southwest of mainland Japan in the East China Sea. Its capital city, Naha, is a two-hour flight from Tokyo, Hong Kong, Seoul, Shanghai, Taipei or Manila. Although people on the main island of Okinawa speak what is known as Okinawan, local dialects on the other 43 inhabited islands differ considerably.

Its sub-tropical climate keeps Okinawa balmy even when neighboring countries are in the dead of winter. Okinawa's pristine white beaches, stunning coral and array of brilliantly colored flowers make the islands an ideal resort destination. In fact, Okinawa is in the same latitude zone as other famous beach resorts, including Florida, Hawaii and the Bahamas.

Okinawan cooking is generally spicier than Japanese food, and is more heavily influenced by Chinese cooking styles. Pork is a dominant ingredient in Okinawan cuisine, along with local seafood and native tropical vegetables and fruits.

Be sure to check out www.okinawa.com, a comprehensive website that features everything from interesting factoids and frequently asked questions about the islands to helpful native words and phrases and even recipes for traditional Okinawan cuisine.



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Korea

A very spiritual nation, South Korea reflects a heritage that has preserved much of its ancestry while becoming a thriving trade metropolis on the international scene.

Korea rests on a peninsula on the northeastern section of the Asian continent and is bordered by thousands of islands. China and Russia are to the north and Japan is to the east. The country has a temperate monsoon climate with four seasons—but between the cold, Siberian-influenced winters and the rainy and typhoon seasons of summer, the spring and autumn are the best times to really enjoy the peninsula and its host of islands.

But before you venture out into the countryside, take a free course in basic Korean. And while you're at it, learn some cultural necessities, such as how to properly greet others and how to behave at dinner gatherings.

Try out your new language and etiquette by venturing to either the local shikdang (small Korean restaurant) or an expensive formal restaurant. Wherever you go, kimchi will be on the menu. Served at almost every meal, kimchi is typically cabbage or radishes seasoned with red pepper powder, salt, garlic ginger and other flavors, and served with steamed rice (pap).

But you'll want to do some exploring if you want if you'd like to get to know this country for more than its food. From well-forested national parks and Seoul's sprawling metropolitan area in the north, to beautiful wide beaches along its coasts and romantic island getaways on Cheju-Do Island south of the mainland, South Korea packs a lot into its peninsula, and almost any destination can be reached in an hour or less by air from any other part of the peninsula.

One incredible resource for new residents and visitors alike is the revamped www.korea.net website, which not only features a search option, but offers links to various government agencies and the country's national tourism organization.

