

# Enkai Etiquette Guidelines

## Ready for some fist pumping?

- Okay, it's not that kind of party, but it's a party nonetheless. There are a number of reasons for enkais: the Welcome Party; the Farewell Party; the End-of-year Party; the Start-of-the-year party; the We-worked-hard Party. This is a chance to mingle with your teachers, enjoy copious amounts of tea *or beer* and try some food that you may not generally get to eat.

## Types of Enkais

- **Cost**
  - Enkais can range between ¥3000 - ¥6000. Some might even be more than that.
  - The cost varies on how formal the occasion is.
  - Depending on your school, the cost of the formal enkais can be decreased if you contribute to the teacher's account<sup>1</sup>.
- **Formal**
  - The cost is usually on the higher end of the scale
  - Dress code: suit. Though the bounenkai and the shinnenkai may not be as formal.
  - ✧ The Welcome Party (kangeikai): Happens in April when the new teachers arrive
  - ✧ The End-of-year Party (bounenkai): Happens in December when the school term ends
  - ✧ The Start-of-the-year Party (shinnenkai): Happens in January just before the school term starts
  - ✧ The Farewell Party (soubetsukai): Happens in March and it's for the teachers that have been transferred or are leaving.
- **Casual**
  - The cost is usually on the lower end of the scale
  - Dress code: some teacher's wear sports clothes, rock the "cool biz" look or whatever they've worn to work that day.
  - ✧ We-worked-hard Party (otsukaresamakai): This can happen at any time of the year
  - ✧ A Welcome Party for you: Some of your school's *may* even have a party for you.

## Process

- **Punctuality**
  - Arrive a little ahead of the start time because you need to pay (have the exact value), possibly draw your seat number from a hat ("the lottery") and find your seat before the drink orders and the formalities begin.
- **Seating**
  - Once you have found your seat, you may have to sit in seiza (kneeling with the tops of your feet flat on the floor and your buttocks resting on your feet) on a cushion until after kanpai. If you have a problem sitting in seiza, sitting cross-legged is also fine.
  - Most people will sit in seiza until after kanpai and then shift to a more comfortable position.
- **Food and drink**
  - Before the speeches start, everyone will place their orders for a beverage, most people start with beer if you drink alcohol and if you don't, there is a selection of non-alcoholic beverages to choose from, oolong tea is usually ordered initially.
  - At certain events, bottles of the beverages will be served and someone will most likely pour your choice into your glass. Hold your glass with both hands, one on the base of the glass, while whomever fills your glass for you, thereafter, offer to do the same, again, holding the bottle with both hands.

1 - Refer to "Contributions" on the Office Etiquette handout

- **Food and drink** (*continued*)
  - DO NOT DRINK OR EAT ANYTHING BEFORE KANPAI!
  - There may be a few speeches and then KANPAI.
    - ✧ Try to clink your glass with as many people sitting close to you as possible
    - ✧ It is polite to make sure that the lip of your glass is lower than the lip of the other person's glass. Especially if there's a difference in status (junior vs senior) or age (younger vs older).
  - There may be platters (communal dish with food) for everyone to select food from and you will have your own chopsticks and small plate(s). When there are no serving tongs/chopsticks and you have to use your own chopsticks to take food from the platter, use the back-end of the chopsticks.
  - TIPS:
    - ✧ To pace yourself, keep your glass half-full. It is *very* possible to lose track of the number of drinks you've consumed because people will constantly top it up for you or keep offering different drinks for you to sample. It is also polite to top up everyone else's drink when it's about  $\frac{3}{4}$  empty.
      - KNOW YOUR LIMITS
        - Nobody wants to take care of a drunk ALT
        - It's unlikely that anyone will cut you off until it's way too late, so you need to cut yourself off.
      - ✧ Don't stick your chopsticks into your food so that they're upright, rather let it rest flat across your plate or the chopstick rest.
    - Remember: "UMAI!" The beer is umai. The food is umai. Life is umai. It's good to show that you're having a good time....and if you're not, it usually only lasts for 2 hours, so take solace in that 😊
    - Note: Teachers tend to get pickled at times and then sleep for a bit. They're overworked and tired. Don't draw unnecessary attention to them at the party or the next day. They'll wake up at the end and probably keep partaking in the festivities.
- **Conclusion**
  - The organiser(s) will say a short speech thanking everyone for attending and then everyone will either sing a song (possibly the school song) or do some sort of hand-clapping thing. If you don't know what to do, just try to follow as best as you can.
  - Everyone will leave the venue immediately.
  - Teachers will split into smaller groups and you may be asked to join a second party (nijikai). Try to experience this at least once. The teachers are far more relaxed than at the enkaï. \*Just note that it can be a bit expensive.

## General

- Participation is highly encouraged!
  - Try to find a balance because the cost can add up
  - If you decline an invite, apologise and explicitly express interest in the next one.
  - It is extremely rude to cancel, so make sure it's for a very good reason if you need to.
- If you have specific dietary requirements, inform the organiser or your supervisor a few days ahead of time.
- Never drink and drive/ride. Also, make sure that you have metabolised the alcohol before you drive the next day.
- Try to limit your cell phone usage during the party.
- Lastly, just enjoy yourself and of course, be respectful. You'll be surprised how many teachers will actually speak to you even if their English vocab and your Japanese vocab is limited or non-existent.