

Setting Up Home

with Cody Jones and Ariana Coveny

Welcome to your new home!

You come in fresh from Tokyo Orientation, excited to find where you'll be living for the next year. You open the door to your home and... bugs and creepy crawlies everywhere! Mold covering the walls in the shape of Patrick Swayze's face! Cabinets filled with unidentifiable black spots! You don't know how to use any of your appliances and the last ALT didn't clean anything! The horror! Or, you find your dream home, well kept and cleaned and fully stocked with everything you need. You lucky dog, you.

Whether your first few days in your new home have been a dream or a nightmare, everybody will need to take some time to get things set up and prepare for the upcoming seasonal changes and the housekeeping challenges that come with them. Some will have to set up from scratch and put in a ton of elbow grease to make their house livable, and some will be ready from day one. Either way, we'll provide you information on housekeeping problems you may encounter while in Kumamoto, what you may need from your local supermarket, and what stores you have available to go to to get set up.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED NOW

Before we even touch on preparing for the seasonal challenges life in Kumamoto holds, let's get you set up, shall we?

A) Utilities!

Generally, you will pay for water, gas, electricity, phone, Internet, and Cable. Of course, every situation is dissimilar, but check with your supervisors to confirm what bills you are responsible for paying. Usually your bills will be automatically taken out of your bank account, but sometimes you will have

to pay in person or at a convenience store. Be sure to check the bills you receive in the mail. Some will be receipts, and some will be bills you have to pay. If your Japanese isn't very good, a good rule of thumb is that if it has a bar code, it's a bill. If it doesn't have a bar code, it's a receipt. However, **this is not always the case**, so if there's any uncertainty, ask your tantosha!

Chances are by now your tantosha has taken you around to get your cell phone, internet, cable, and other utilities set up. You likely will not have a choice in which provider you sign up with unless you know about your options beforehand. If some utilities have not been set up yet, particularly phone and internet, check up with them frequently to make sure nothing has slipped through the cracks. Your COs are extremely apt to procrastinate, and there's no shame in being proactive with them to make them get things taken care of. It's better to do it now, than to have a problem continue through December. If you do that, when you bring it up with your CO, they'll say, "Why didn't you bring this up sooner?" Check your contract and with your gun-mates to see if anything your CO is obligated to set up is unusually behind schedule or has slipped through the cracks!

B) Appliances!

Make sure all your appliances work NOW. If anything is broken, check your contract to see if your contracting organization is obligated to repair it. It will be much easier to get them to do so now than it is to get them to do it later. For example, one ALT's water heater didn't work. Had he brought it up with his CO immediately it would have gotten fixed quickly. However, he waited to bring it up until winter. Not only did his CO make him contact the repairmen himself, he also had to wait weeks for the part to get ordered to have his water fixed. Be proactive, and take care of these problems now!

THESE KANJI TRANSLATIONS APPLIES TO ALMOST ALL APPLIANCES:

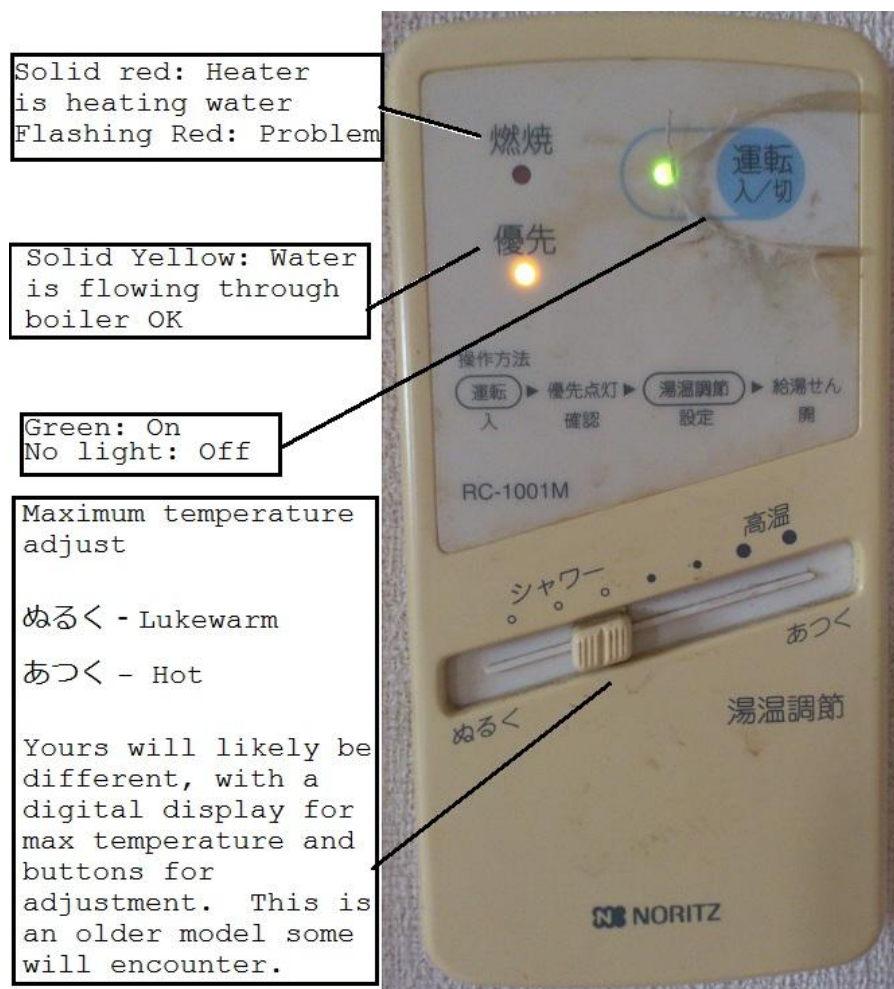
It's so universal we won't repeat it for every appliance.

切 or 消 – Off 入 or 付 – On

Commonly you'll find a button that says 切/入. This means **on/off**.

B.1) Water Heater

Your water heater is likely different from what you're used to back home. In Japan, there will be a panel somewhere in your house to turn the water heater on and off. It may be daunting to figure out if you're not comfortable with Japanese, so here's a translation of the typical panel.



Regarding the button that turns red: When this light is red, the boiler is working and water is being heated. Flashing red means there is a problem. On models where you have to fill your tank with Kerosene, this usually means you need to refill. On models where you don't need to refill kerosene, this likely indicates mechanical failure.

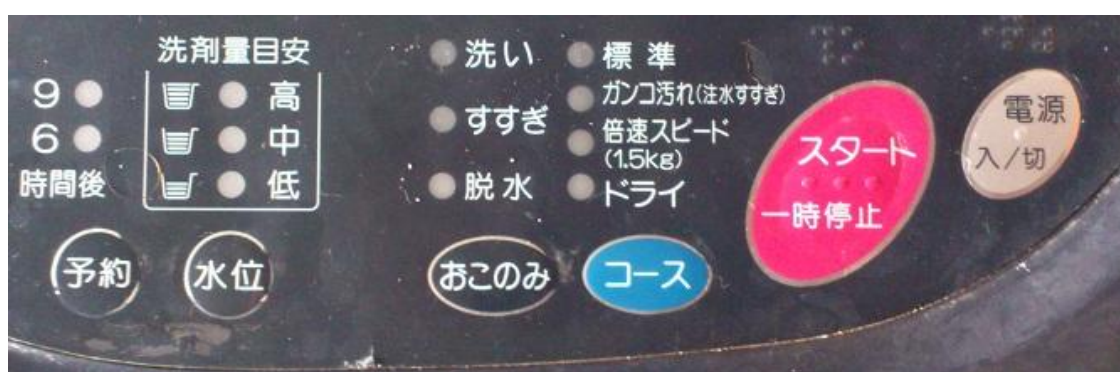
After the first time using it, generally you'll just have to push the power button to turn your hot water on and off, and perhaps have to adjust the temperature. In some cases, if you live way out in the inaka, you may need to fill up your boiler with

kerosene. If this is the case, your predecessor likely showed you where to fill the kerosene up. Kerosene (Toyu, 灯油) can be bought at any gas station and most grocery stores. You will need a plastic drum to dump the kerosene into, and a plastic pump to move the kerosene from the drum to the heater. Keep an eye on this, since running out of hot water in the dead of winter because you spaced on the kerosene is not a pleasant experience.



B.2) Laundry!

You most likely have a washing machine to do your own laundry. Here's a quick translation guide to the buttons you'll probably find on your washing machine.



予約 – Timer set

水位 – Water level

高 – High

中 – Middle

低 – Low

おこのみ – Cycle

洗い – Wash

すすぎ – Rinse

脱水 – Spin Dry

スタート – Start

コース – Course

標準 – Standard

注水すすぎ – Continuous rinse

スピード – Speedy

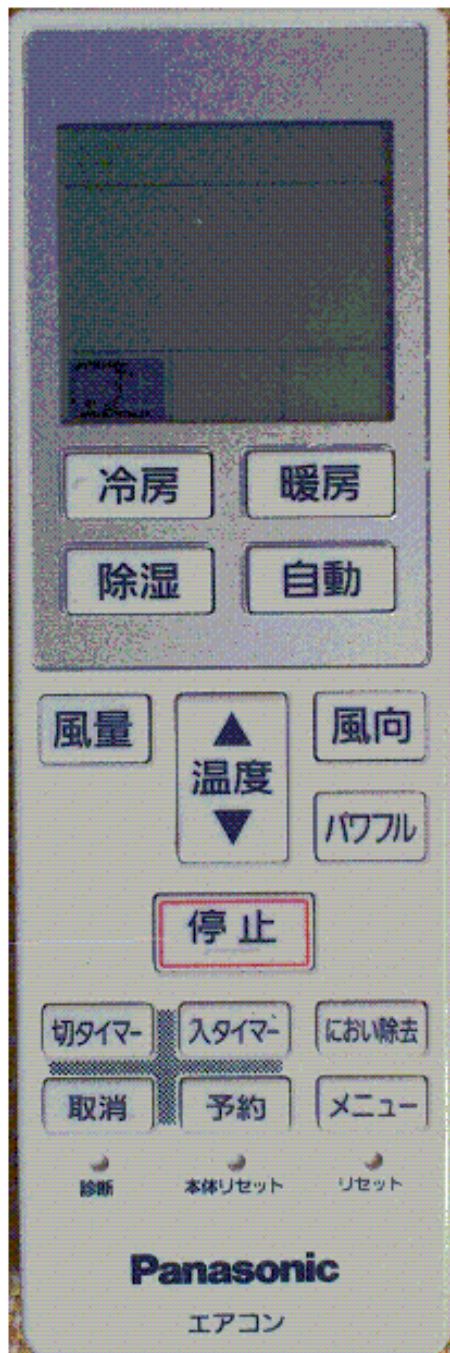
ドライ – Dry

Here are a few important items you may need or find convenient when you do Laundry in Japan. All of these items can be purchased at a home goods store or your local Daiso.

- 1) A laundry pole to hang laundry outside (monohoshizao 物干竿)
- 2) There are many types of hanging racks you can buy to dry clothes. These can be used outside, or on rainy days, inside. You can get large standing racks or racks that hang from a hook.
- 3) Hang-line clips, or large clips to hold futons to your railing
- 4) Laundry bags: It is common in Japan to put your clothes in a thing washing bag before putting them in the machine.
- 5) Lint catchers: Your washing machine likely does not have a lint catcher. Just place this small lint catching bag inside the machine and it will attract the lint for you!
- 6) Know the difference between fabric softener and detergent! It can be hard to tell sometimes. Softener = juunanzai (柔軟剤), detergent = gouseisenzaikei-sentakuzai (合成洗剤家洗濯剤) or santakuyou-gouseisenzai (洗濯用合成洗剤).
If you go to the following website you can get information on the various detergents you may find while in Japan.
<http://www.survivingnjapan.com/2011/11/guide-to-laundry-detergent-in-japan.html>
- 7) Don't leave the valve to your washing machine's water turned on! This can cause the valve to need to be replaced much sooner than later.
- 8) If you need to wash something larger than your machine can handle, or need to dry your clothes quickly, you can go to a coin laundromat (koin raundori, コインランドリ) to do your laundry. Be warned, it's very expensive compared to laundromat prices in the US and Europe.

B.3) Air conditioner!

Your air conditioner doesn't stop being useful in Summer. Your air conditioner has functions that remain useful all year round, from cooling, to heating, to humidity control. It can get expensive to use frequently, but it can be worth it to not have to *gaman* through the elements. Here's a quick translation guide of your typical air conditioner remote.



From left to right, top to bottom:

冷房 – Cooler

暖房 - Heater

除湿 - Dehumidifier

自動 - Automatic

風量 – Air volume

温度 – Temperature Up/Down

風向 – Air direction

パワフル – Powerful

停止 – Stop

切タイマー – Timer off (before setting timer)

入タイマー – Timer on (push to set how long from now the air conditioner will turn on)

におい除去 – Odorizer

取消 - Cancel (after setting timer)

予約 - Timer set

B.4) TV!

Chances are, if you opt to have cable, you're going to want to know how to use your remote. Or maybe not. Here's a translation guide anyway.

1. Input
2. Power
3. Analogue
4. Digital
5. Audio Input

6. Channel
7. Off Timer
8. Volume
9. Mute

10. Select
11. Return
12. Menu



You're welcome.

C) Seikatsu, Lifestyle!

There are a few aspects of home life in Japan that are going to be entirely new to you, and some that you may be familiar with back home but are completely different in Japan.

C.1) Cleaning!

Cleaning is an important step in keeping bugs away and fighting back mold. A few simple precautions, like vacuuming regularly, cleaning your toilet, and doing your dishes might make your life easier, and you'll find less challenges arising come the changing of the seasons. Here are some common translations of cleaning products:

- 1) Sponge - suponji スポンジ
- 2) Towel - taoru タオル
- 3) Mop - moppu モップ
- 4) Broom - houki ほうき
- 5) Scourer brush - tawashi たわし
- 6) Dish detergent - daidokoroyou-gouseisenzai 台所用合成洗剤
- 7) General cleaner - senjouzai 洗淨剤
- 8) Toilet cleaner - toirettouyou senjouzai トイレット用洗淨剤
- 9) Air freshener - shoushuu supurei 消臭スプレー
- 10) Fabric-freshener - Nuno-you supurei 布用スプレー
- 11) Bathroom cleaner - yokushitsuyousenzai 浴室用洗剤
- 12) Kitchen cleaner - daidokoroyou senzai 台所用洗剤
- 13) Bleach hyouhakuzai 漂白剤, burichi ブリーチ
- 14) Bug poison - sacchuuzai 殺虫剤
- 15) Bug spray - sacchuu supurei 殺虫スプレー

C.2) Hygiene

Just like before, here are some common translations of general hygiene products:

- 1) Soap - soupu ソープ、sekken 石鹸
- 2) Deodorant - nioikeshi 臭い消し
- 3) Shampoo - shanpuu シャンプー
- 4) Toothbrush - ha burashi 歯ブラシ
- 5) Toothpaste - ha migaki 歯磨き
- 6) Hair Brush - hea burashi ヘアブラシ
- 7) Shaving razor - kamisori 剃刀
- 8) Electric shaver - sheibaa シェーバー
- 9) Shaving cream - sheibingu kuriimu シェービングクリーム
- 10) Lotion - roushon ローション

C.3) Garbage!

Now we're getting into things you may not be familiar with. "But I've thrown out garbage basically all my life! What do you mean garbage is a foreign concept to me?! Stop patronizing me!" I hear you yell. Calm down and listen, and don't make me say it again. Japanese garbage collection is difficult. Back home you probably just take all your waste, throw it in one bag, take it out and call it a day, right? Do that in Japan and there's a chance you'll have your garbage given back to you to sort correctly. Here's some tips to do your garbage right!

- Different types of garbage can only be thrown out on **certain days!**
- **There are different separation rules for each city!** As if it wasn't hard enough to begin with. Be aware of the rules for your city. In general, you will have:
 1. Burnable Garbage (燃えるゴミ) - Paper, food waste, wrappers, non-recyclables, non plastics. Basically if you feel comfortable lighting it on fire, it goes in here.
 2. Recyclables: Come in different categories. Generally, you must have: PET bottles (plastic bottles), other plastics, soda cans, food cans, milk cartons, Styrofoam food containers, glass, soap bottles, cleaner bottles, news papers, and cardboard separated differently. Again, separation rules differ by city!
 3. Non Burnable garbage (燃えないゴミ) : Plastics too dirty to recycle, broken dishes, broken glass, etc. Basically, if you wouldn't want to

handle it yourself to clean for recycling, and it wouldn't be safe to burn, it goes in here.

- **Get a calendar from your local City Office.** This will have the separation rules for your city written out, along with what days you can throw out what garbage. This is important to get! If you need help understanding anything, ask your JTE or another ALT in your area for assistance!
- **Recyclables are generally thrown out at a different location than the other two types of garbage.** Additionally, you usually can only throw them out at a certain time of day while city employees watch to make sure things are sorted appropriately. All recyclables must be washed prior to throwing out. Finally, cardboard and newspapers must be bound before disposal. You can buy the plastic binding for these recyclables at any grocery store.
- **There are different trash bags for each city.** You will have to buy trash bags at your local grocery store. Be aware which trash bag is which -- ask your predecessor or gun mates if you need help!
- We all think about it, but don't try to sneak recyclables out in your garbage. Most likely, you will be found out and shunned by your neighbors, shunned I say, as the naughty gaijin.

C.4) Tatami care

You probably have not lived with tatami (畳) before, and lucky for us, it is ridiculously expensive to replace. So, we should gingerly take care of our tatami to avoid ruining it, molding it, or infesting it with bugs. Tatami is used in Japan because of its powers of absorbing humidity and “keeping a house cool,” and the same in winter, to keep things warmer. Some people claim to enjoy its odd grassy smell. It is made out of a reed called igusa and 98% of Japan's igusa is grown in Kumamoto!

- **Clean your tatami regularly!!!** Always be sure when cleaning your tatami to follow the run of the weave. In other words, don't go against the grain. If the tatami runs vertically, wipe vertically and not horizontally.
- For everyday cleaning, first vacuum the tatami, by going along the weave. Next, wipe the tatami down with a damp sheet or moist towel. You can

buy tatami cleaning sheets at the Daiso. There are also various sprays you can use that smell nice, just be sure to wipe the tatami down after you spray.

- Be sure not to get the tatami very wet or it will mold.
- If you get a stain or spill on your tatami, only use water to wipe it away with an old towel. Some mild, natural soaps may work well too, but be careful.
- Be careful with heavy furniture and moving it around. Heavy furniture can leave impressions and colorations on your tatami. This generally can't be avoided, but be careful when moving furniture around, as the tatami can be easily scratched and scarred.



SEASONAL CHALLENGES

No matter how well kept your home was when you arrived, you're going to face different challenges depending on the season. Japanese homes are less well insulated than they are in your home country, so the interior of your home will be more vulnerable to seasonal changes than you may be used to. Here's a rundown on some of the challenges you'll face for each season.

1) LATE SUMMER

Let's start where you are now, shall we? Late summer is after the rainy season is over, and generally goes from late July to late September. You

need to prepare for the rainy season and do a lot of home maintenance during it, but it's probably way too late for you worry about that now. If not, refer to the prevention steps in section 3, the rainy season/early summer. Assuming the fight has not already been lost, these prevention tips will help keep your apartment bug- and mold-free. If the damage has been done, then late summer's challenges have arrived.

A) MOLD

If your predecessor was a slacker, or even if not, chances are you've got mold everywhere. At this point, just worry about fighting it back.

- **Kabi Killer:** This spray is amazing for killing mold! Spray it directly on the mold then wipe down with a sponge or rag. Recommended primarily for bathroom and toilet use. This stuff is toxic, and it smells like it. You can use it anywhere in the house, but be sure to rinse and dry everything thoroughly afterwards!
- **Vinegar and Water:** Mix 3 parts vinegar to 2 parts water in a spray bottle and let sit for an hour. This is less instantly effective than Kabi Killer, but much safer. Recommended for kitchen and den use. Vinegar smells dissipates quickly, and frankly your other options are smelling mold or smelling Kabi Killer. Vinegar can be difficult to find in Japan, but if you check your local AEON you should be able to find it there. It will generally look like this, and have the kanji 酢 on the bottle.
- **Rotate furniture on your tatami:** We've covered basic tatami care in the previous section, but regarding mold: Tatami molds quickly, especially in the rainy season and late summer. If you have any furniture sitting directly on the tatami (as opposed to resting on legs), be sure to move it around at least once a week. Failing to do so will cause your tatami to get moldy and start to rot, which is something you want to avoid at all costs.

B.1) BUGS

The other late summer inconvenience is the sheer number and variety of bugs that can infest your home. Some are beneficial and can be left alone,

but others can be a real pain in the Patrick Swayze. Like with mold, you want to take precautions during the rainy season to prevent a full blown zerg infestation, but chances are it is already too late, and the broodlings are already in your base. Here's some tips on fighting back the different bugs you may see in your house.

- **Dani** だに・ダニ: Dani are little bugs that live in your tatami and bite your feet. Dani bites are little red marks that look like mosquito bites. Fortunately, they're easy to get rid of.
 - ◇ *Dani Spray*: Your first line of attack should be Dani spray, pictured below. Spray this on your tatami, your futon, or where ever else you think may be infested, air out to dry, and you're done. Cody has personally had this work both times he's had dani in his house. The spray is safe to use on any soft surface like a futon or tatami and is nontoxic to humans.
 - ◇ *Dani Bomb*: More drastically, you can use a "Dani no Sachusai", which is a dani bomb you let off under your tatami. You can also use a "Tatami ni Sasa Sachusai" which is a spray you inject into the tatami, or a "dani aasu", which is similar. Use only in case of extreme dani infestation
- **Cockroaches** ゴキブリ・油虫 "**Gokiburi & Abura-mushi**": Cockroaches in Kumamoto can range from as small as 5mm to as large as 5cm, and some can fly! Cockroaches are attracted to food that has been left out or dirty kitchens, but even if you keep your kitchen in tip top tidiness you may see a few of them.
 - ◇ *Gokiburi spray* (ゴキブリスプレー): Toxic spray that kills the cockroaches quickly. Be warned, they will freak out and run around a little before they die.
 - ◇ *Gokiburi Hoihoi* (ゴキブリホイホイ): Roach motels. Place in cupboards, corners of your home, and under large appliances.
 - ◇ *Gokiburi no Barusan* (ゴキブリのバルサン) - Roach bomb. See instructions for bug bombs at the end of this section.
- **Spiders, Kumo** 蜘蛛: A cockroach infestation can quickly lead to spiders taking up residence in your home. Fortunately, there are **NO dangerous spiders in Japan**. They're only creepy looking. Japanese people consider spiders to be protectors of the home, and good luck, so if you

must smash them try not to do so in plain view of your neighbors. We personally recommend just dealing with the spiders, because as horrifying looking as they may be they do help keep the insect population in check. There are two types of spiders that may surprise you when you first see them, though.

- ◇ *Jumping spiders*: You'll probably be shocked the first time you see these little guys leap away from you. Harmless, as said before, but your first encounter may leave you a little unsettled.
- ◇ *Huntsman spiders*: These guys are huge, and they're FAST. They're so fast that they don't spin webs, since they can just catch their prey with speed alone. They feast mostly on cockroaches, so if you have these big guys, the best way to get rid of them is to deal with your cockroach problem. You can also freeze them with freezing spray, or buy poison to spray at them. However, from our experience, this just makes them angry and causes them to run around in a panic. We recommend just avoiding them as much as possible, and trying to keep any cockroach problems under control. In the end, terrifying though they may be, they really do help keep your pest problems in check.
- **Mosquitos, Ka カ**: Mosquitoes are everywhere, and if you live near a rice paddy they're going to be plentiful, drawn in by the standing water. Here's some tips on not getting eaten alive:
 - ◇ *Mosquito coils (katori-senko 蚊取りせん子)*: Light a coil and the mosquitoes will drop dead and avoid coming near you. Smells bad, but effective. Leave your windows open, or otherwise keep the room well ventilated.
 - ◇ *Electric coils (denki-katori 電気蚊取り)*: Hang by your window to zap the mosquitoes.
 - ◇ *Bug sprays*: Look for any item with the kanji "mushi yoke" 虫除け, that means bug repelling.
- **Gnats, kobae, 子栄え**: Another common pest, particularly in the inaka.
 - ◇ *Kobae traps*: Small balls that attract the gnats and trap them.
 - ◇ *Kobae spray*: Spray around where the gnats are gathering. In our experience, more effective than the traps at keeping the problem under control.
- **Centipedes, Mukade, ムカデ**: The only bug that you may find in your

home that's actually dangerous. Mukade bites are poisonous, hurt like a mofo and can swell to insane proportions. Mukade range in size, but even small ones can ruin your day. Fortunately, they don't generally like to stay inside houses, but occasionally you may find some in your domicile. Folk wisdom says they come in pairs, and in our experience that tends to be the case. You'll encounter them more often on the ground floor and in the inaka. They like to lurk in dark places, so check your shoes before putting them on! Also, check under your pillow and sheets before getting into bed, as some ALTs have found them laying in wait under their pillow.

Prevention is more important than anything with Mukade, and unlike other bugs in this section the battle for prevention isn't already lost by the time new ALTs get into their homes! You have main two options for keeping these guys at bay.

- *Mukade repellent.* This stuff comes in individual packages of pellets you can place around the outside of your home to ward off the mukade. While not recommended on the box's instructions, we've also had luck with placing the pellets under tatami. Be warned, though, this stuff stinks like moldy cheese salsa.



- *Mukade poison.* This stuff comes in a big jar and is dangerous! You apply it like you would the mukade repellent, in a ring around the outside of your home. DO NOT put

under your tatami, and DO NOT INHALE any as you're laying it down. This stuff is TOXIC. Toxic though it may be, it is a surefire way to keep mukade (and other pests) out of your home for at least 90 days. Take caution if your neighbors have children or pets that may come around your home.



If you already have found one in your home, you have a few options for extermination.

Boiling water: Take a long stick and coax the centipede onto the end of it. Dip in boiling water. Boiling water is a surefire way to kill the mukade instantly.

Mukade spray: Like the gokiburi spray, spray directly onto the bug to kill it. Not recommended, as it does not die instantly, and will spend several minutes writhing around like a little nightmare before dying.

Cutting in half: Smashing these creatures doesn't work since they're resilient, however some ALTs have had great results just cutting the buggers in half with a knife. Folk wisdom says that mukade will release a pheromone that attracts more mukade if smashed or cut open, but we don't know for sure. Frankly, we've been too scared to try!

- **Yasude (ヤスデ).** We're only mentioning these guys because they can be easily confused for Mukade. In fact, many Japanese people call them mukade despite not being the dangerous kind, which has lead to confusion with ALTs in the past. These guys are millipedes and are generally

harmless. They're much smaller and much slower than their mukade cousins. They tend to show up more frequently during the rainy season than late summer, and none of the poisons either of us have tried have really killed them. Given that they're harmless, though, it's just better to learn to deal with them.

- **Slugs (Namekuji, ナメクジ)** These guys, harmless though gross, will frequently invade your shower during the summer. Salting them and washing them down the drain is one extermination method. Repellents (namekuji mushiyoke, ナメクジ虫除け) can also be bought at your local grocery store.

B.2) Drastic measures -- The Bug Bomb

If you're really unlucky, your house may already be infested past the point that any of the above tips can help you manage the problem. In this situation, you may want to bug bomb your house.

- Preparations: I won't lie, this is a huge pain in the Dennis Quaid. First, you want to make sure all your food is tightly sealed or even removed from your building. Then, you want to make sure any electronics you have that you don't want to risk being damaged by the bug bomb are stored elsewhere for the duration of the bomb. Finally, you want to alert your neighbors that you'll be bug bombing your home.
- The Bomb: You can do this per-room or do your entire apartment all at once.
 - ◇ Seal up the room you'll be bombing--all windows and doors tightly closed.
 - ◇ Open up the package, remove all packaging. The bomb has two parts, a canister of poison and a liquid catalyst.
 - ◇ When you're ready, place the poison into the catalyst. You'll have a couple minutes to get out, but you want to get out quickly.
 - ◇ Set off about one bomb per room.
 - ◇ Leave the room or your house for at least two hours.
 - ◇ After 2 hours, place a damp cloth over your mouth and quickly open up all the windows.
 - ◇ Leave for another hour.

- The Aftermath: CLEAN THOROUGHLY. Under appliances, under your tatami, inside cabinets, clean all the things! You'll find dead bugs basically everywhere. Some bugs, like yasude, seemed to be unaffected, but just about everything else was good and dead after Cody did it, even the otherwise resilient and Mukade. Wash all of your dishes as you don't want to risk any residue being left on there from the bomb.
- After 2 weeks you may have to repeat the process, as unhatched eggs may not be affected.

After this your house will be generally bug free so long as you maintain a certain level of cleanliness. This does not guarantee that all pests will be removed, though, as many yasude and huntsman spiders remained when Cody tried it.

C) KEEPING COOL

Bugs and mold aside, late summer means trying to stay cool. Here are some tips to help you not succumb to heat stroke!

Fan: The least expensive way to keep cool. Many fans have timers to shut off automatically that you can choose to use or not. Generally, you'll only need to know the following kanji to operate your fan effectively:

切: Power Off	弱: Low setting
中: Medium setting	強: High setting

Many fans also have an automatic shut off timer.

Curtains: Curtains are great for both summer and winter and provide a little bit of insulation that Japanese houses normally lack. You can buy cheap sun-reflecting curtains at Nafco for less than 1000 yen a set, if you want the bare minimum in curtain technology. Heavier, nicer curtains used in conjunction with the sun reflective ones do an amazing job of controlling the temperature in your house

Air conditioning: The Air conditioner, (Eakon, エアコン) is the best way to cool down your house quickly, but it can get expensive. Keep the doors to your room with the air conditioner closed and try to insulate as best

you can with curtains and the like to keep your energy bill down. Clean your air filter before using to circulate clean air without mold. The Japanese air conditioner is a pretty useful appliance throughout the year, so see more details about it in the appliances section.

Cooling face pads: You can find these at any drug store or general store. You place cool gel pad on your forehead or body and the pad stays cool for about 8 hours. Most people use them when you have a fever but it's a good way to cool down.



2) Autumn

Phew! We spend all that time beating the heat and fighting off a swarm of bugs and mold to be rewarded with... Typhoon season! When a typhoon is coming, make sure you have an emergency kit prepared, with flashlights, batteries, candles, matches, bottled water, cash, and something to keep your mind occupied. Some people have typhoon shudders on their houses that you may want to get secured in the event of a typhoon.

Also be sure to familiarize yourself with your own circuit breaker in the event of a power outage!

3) Winter

Winter in Kumamoto can be anywhere from mild to freezing depending on where you live. Some places will get much more snow than others, but on average temperatures range from -2 degrees C to 8 degrees C. This may be very mild compared to where you live, but keep in mind that Japanese homes tend to skimp on the insulation! You can take some steps to keep yourself warm in spite of that, though.

A) Stayin' Warm, Stayin' Warm, Ah-ah-ah-ah Stayin' Warm!

- Air conditioner: Your air conditioner has a heating function. Very convenient, but very energy-intensive and expensive.
- Electric or ceramic heaters: These heaters are meant to heat one room and come in different varieties. They heat up quickly but don't maintain a high level of heat.
- Kerosene heaters: A great way to warm up a room or two. Fill these babies up with kerosene, turn them on, and your room will get very warm very quickly! Take caution, as these heaters do burn gas to generate heat: don't place anything flammable on or near the heater, and if you start to get a headache from the kerosene fumes, crack a window to let in some fresh air. These are used frequently in your schools' Teacher's Rooms and elementary school classrooms, as they tend to be the lowest-cost way to keep warm. Some ALTs worry about them being a fire and safety hazard, but so long as you are careful, mindful of the potential danger, and don't do anything stupid you'll be fine. You will have to buy Kerosene (Toyu, 灯油) to keep these heaters running. Kerosene can be bought at any gas station. You will need a plastic drum to dump the kerosene into, and a plastic pump to move the kerosene from the drum to the heater. See the section about Water Heaters for a picture of the Kerosene pump and drum.
- Kotatsu: The traditional Japanese method of keeping warm. Kotatsu are basically coffee tables with a removable top so you can put a blanket over the legs. The heater, on the underside, warms everything under the blanket. The lowest cost way to keep warm, but you may succumb to a strong desire to never leave the blanket! Heat tech and other bands of insulative underclothes can be bought basically anywhere during the

colder months.

- Electric blankets, rugs: An effective way to warm a small area. They come in all different sizes and can be great for heating your bed or common room!
- Heat tech! - Thin, high-thread count tights worn under the clothes. They are basically long johns or thermals, and work really well. Even on the coldest days, wearing layers of heat tech combined with heating pads can be very effective inside and outside the home.
- Heating pads: Like the cooling pads in summer, you open these babies up and they get warm. You can stick them on the insides of your clothes when you go out to keep warm even away from your kotatsu and electric blanket. Most of your schools won't have heating inside the classrooms, so these become an invaluable resource at work!

B) Insulation tips:

- Bubble wrap your windows! This may sound ridiculous, and it definitely looks ridiculous. However, taping up a layer or two of bubble wrap to your windows gives you a nice, cheap insulator that will help keep the heat inside your home.
- Door seals - You can buy these fuzzy door seals at Nafco or any other home goods store. Tape these around your door frame to create a stronger seal on the door to prevent the heat from escaping your house. Also useful to a lesser degree in summer.

4) Spring, Early Summer, and the Rainy Season

Spring and warm weather comes around April and May in Kumamoto. Enjoy the warm weather! But be mindful that the rainy season is just around the corner, and now is the time to prepare so you're not suffering come June! A little bit of prevention before the rainy season sets in in June will go a long way. You will still likely get some mold and some pests coming into your house, but not nearly to the extent you would without these measures.

A) Mold prevention

- **Humidity stickers (shikke tori, 湿気取り)** - Place these around your home to suck moisture out of the air. Put them in closets, drawers, cupboards, etc. Basically, humidity sticker AAAAAAAALL the things. These come in many varieties and brands. Be sure to only peel off the clear plastic wrapping and not the entire white paper filter. Replace when the bottom half has filled with water. The ones far below go in your shoes and hang in your closets.
- **Vacuum seal your winter clothes and guest futons in vacuum bags.** Vacuum seal bags are available at Daiso and grocery stores. It is a great way to store your winter clothes during the summer so you won't have to wash the mildew out before using again. Throw a humidity sticker in there before sealing!
- **Air flow, air flow, air flow!** Open your windows! Be sure to get fresh air circulating in your home. Leave the windows open even when it rains. Run your fan. This mold build up is the reason Japanese houses are so drafty -- keeping as much air flowing as possible minimizes the mold problem.
- **Air out your futons and blankets.** Hang them outside on sunny days. Aim for once a week on this. There are bars you can purchase at home good stores to help air them out. Put the futon up every day and don't leave it laying on the tatami, to keep the tatami from getting moldy.
- **Air conditioner** - It may be too early for AC, but if you can't leave your windows open for whatever reason, your air conditioner has a humidity control setting you can use to suck moisture out of the air.
- **Move your furniture!** Just like in late summer, furniture sitting directly on your tatami should be moved around frequently to prevent tatami rot and mold.

B) Bug prevention:

- **CLEAN! CLEAN CLEAN CLEAN!** We can't stress this enough! The best way to stop the bug invasion is to give the bugs no reason to invade! Stay on top of your dishes, vacuum regularly, and maintain a standard of household hygiene to keep the bugs from coming in. Cleaning with bleach can discourage bugs from gathering in your house, if you don't mind the fumes.

- **Repellants and poisons** - Remember the mukade repellent and poison mentioned in the Late Summer section? Late April, early May is the time to start spreading that around the perimeter of your house. There are repellents (mushi yoke, 虫除け) for almost every type of bug you'll need to worry about. Look for these at your local Daiso or grocery store. These products will generally have a picture of the pest they're intended to repel clearly on the label.

Remember, preventive measures taken between April and June will make your rainy season and late summer so much more comfortable than it would be otherwise!

WHERE TO SHOP IN KUMAMOTO

We've told you the translations for things you may want to buy and let you know what else you may need, but you probably are wondering "Where on earth do I even buy all this stuff?"

Don't worry, guys and gals, we've got you covered there too.

1) Internet

- **Amazon Japan** - <http://www.amazon.co.jp> - The best way to do online shopping in Japan. Amazon Japan has everything from appliances to foodstuffs. You need a little bit of Japanese knowledge (or at least a Japanese dictionary for the search), so if you're uncomfortable with that you can get one of your gun mates to help you out. Best of all, all Amazon purchases can be paid for at a Family Mart or Lawson's convenience store! In a nutshell,
 1. Finish your order on Amazon's site. Make sure your payment method is "pay at a convenience store".
 2. Wait for your order confirmation e-mail. It will have a pay code in it. Your item will not ship until you pay.
 3. Go to any major national chain convenience store: Circle K,

Lawson Station, Family Mart, Seven Eleven, etc. Look for a touch screen kiosk.

4. You can use these to pay for all kinds of things like plane tickets and concerts. There'll be a bunch of stuff on there, but the Amazon payment option should be fairly prominent; probably on the front screen.
5. Make sure your number is correct and complete the payment. You'll get a slip of paper. Take the paper to the cashier and pay for your item.

Searching online will give you more detailed instructions.

- **Yahoo! Auctions** - All in Japanese, but the Auctions section of Yahoo is Japan's equivalent of eBay. If you're confident in your Japanese, or have a friend willing to help you, take a look and see what kind of deals you can get!
- **ALTs selling stuff!** – You'd be amazed at what people are selling, especially just before and just after the new ALTs arrive. Check the Kumamoto JET forums, your e-mail inbox, and the KumAJET Facebook page frequently to see what your colleagues are hocking.
- **The Meat Guy** - <http://www.themeatguy.jp> - Need a big-Dennis-Hopper piece of meat? Yakiniku not cutting it for you anymore? The Meat Guy has you covered. At this website you can buy many different cuts of meat from all over the world and have it shipped to your address in Japan.
- **Ezo Beer** - <http://www.ezo-beer.com/eng/sales-license.htm> - Do you like beer? Are you sick of drinking nothing but the watered down, flavorless light beer Japan loves to brew? Have we got a website for you, then. At Ezo Beer you can purchase beers brewed all over the world and have them shipped to your Japanese address. It's a bit pricey, but when you're jonesing for the taste of good ale the price is worth it.
- **The Flying Pig** - <http://www.theflyingpig.com> - The Flying Pig is a website that delivers anything from whole turkeys to frozen burritos to your door. That said, they pretty much resell what comes to Costco, so they serve as a middle man. But it's a great resource for Thanksgiving parties and international food.

- **The Foreign Buyers Club** - <http://www.fbcusa.com> - Another website that sells foreign foods.

2) Furniture

Most furniture outlets will have a delivery option to have your purchases sent directly to your home, often without an extra cost.

- **Nitori (ニトリ)** is one of the best! A furniture/home goods store comparable to a Japanese version of IKEA. Probably the cheapest store with the best selection of kitchen goods, furniture, bedding, and other household goods. There are different locations throughout Kumamoto City, Yatsushiro, Hikari no Mori, etc.
- **Mr. Max** - Mr. Max is a discount store with just about everything from furniture, lamps/lighting, school supplies, food/drinks, to electronics. It's comparable to an American Walmart.
- **Nafco / Two-one Style / Home Wide** - All stores are similar, selling toiletries, food, gardening supplies, home appliances, bikes, tents, bath goods, hardware, and furniture, but prices vary from location to location, so be sure to compare before buying.
- **Nikko-Nikko-Do / Doki-doki / Hard Off / Off House** - These are all recycle shops, 2nd hand stores. They sell furniture, clothes, electronic goods, and in some cases even musical instruments! Hard Off and Off House has many locations in Kumamoto city, and there's typically one recycle shop or another in each area. Ask your gun mates for advice on the closest recycle store!
- **Sakoda** - Sakoda is located in Uto City, and has one of the best but most expensive furniture and home goods selections. While the furniture/household goods are pricey, they have an excellent foreign/international food section!
- **Franc Franc** - A swanky and pricey store, Franc Franc has a very fashionable selection of home goods, and furniture, and cute kitchen/bath goods. It also has a good selection of air fresheners, scents to hang in your closets, and some international products as well. There is a location in Kumamoto City on the Kamitori.

3) Hardware Stores

- Komeri - A hardware store that sells tools, kitchen/bath goods, pet supplies, gardening supplies, light bulbs, electric tools, and more. Anything you need for around your house can most likely be found at Komeri.

4) General Stores

These stores all sell a variety of things, but are great chain stores.

- Direx and Taiyo - Direx and Taiyo are both good super markets, selling everything from clothes to food to appliances. Every store is different so check around!
- Drugstore Mori and Cosmos - Both are Drug Stores. They both sell bath and beauty supplies in addition to over the counter medicines and other miscellany. If you're looking for shampoo/conditioner, lotions, razors, soaps, make up, cleaning products, or toiletries, check out one of these stores!

5) Superstores

As if our previous small-business destroying recommendations didn't get your capitalism pumping, check out these outlets.

- AEON - AEON is a chain of malls with many locations throughout Kumamoto. Each location has it's own grocery store, home supply store, bedding section, kitchen section, clothing section, bakery, and basically anything else you can think of. Many locations also have restaurants located inside them. There's a location in Ogawa, Yatsushiro, Amakusa, Uto, Kashima, and pretty much every other city in Kumamoto.
- YouMe Town - YouMe town is another mall similar to AEON. You can find a similar selection of items at YouMe town and it will generally be a large shopping center with many stores. Good locations include Yatsushiro, Kumamoto, and Hikari no Mori.

- Tsutaya - Tsutaya is your place to sate your need for entertainment. You can rent DVDs and CDs as well as buy books, manga, and video games at most locations. Rentals require a membership but that can be obtained at no cost. They also sell stationary, school supplies, art supplies, books, magazines and electronics.
- Daiso - The 100 yen store. Unlike dollar stores back in the US, the Daiso actually has things you might want to buy for cheap. They have kitchenware, stationery, decorations, school supplies, books, hardware tools, gardening supplies, insecticides, pet supplies, repellents, souvenirs, and more. If you're looking to save money, check here first for the cheapest prices on anything you want to buy before going elsewhere!
- Daiei - A multi-level store that sells everything from clothes, shoes, accessories, and groceries. It's basically a department store. There is a prominent location in Kumamoto City on the Shimotori.

6) Electronics Stores

- Best Denki - Best Denki is an electronics store with pretty much appliance you'd need: cameras, computers, cell phones, MP3 players, printers, ink, hair appliances, fans, kitchen appliances, cables, chargers, batteries, headphones, etc. There is also an Apple Store at the Kumamoto Shimotori location.
- Yamada Denki - Basically the same as Best Denki, but with a different variety of products compared to Best Denki. Some locations have lower prices than Best Denki.
- Kojima Denki - Most locations have multi-leveled stores. They carry a huge selection of different electronic items. Similar selection to Best Denki.
- Deo-Deo - Another electronics store, generally smaller than the others.

Be sure to keep your warranty/receipts on all your electronic purchases!

7) International Foods

Costco - No, I'm not pulling your leg. There is a Costco in Japan. Yes, I'm serious, and we can have that conversation about multinational stores

driving local businesses into the ground another time. This Costco is in Fukuoka Prefecture, about 2 hours away. There is a bus that you can take up there, and Costco can ship your purchases directly to your home. If you drive, take the IC to the Fukuoka exit and head left toward Hisayama. Website: http://www.costco.co.jp/eng/whs_876.htm

Plaza @ Kumamoto: Plaza is the basement-level store inside one of the department stores in Kumamoto City. Located on the Kamitori, Plaza sells many international candies, snacks, sodas, and gift items

8) Final Shopping Notes

- Most stores will offer point cards. You will probably end up collecting 20-30 point cards if you get one at every place you shop. Some will offer discounts, but honestly most will end up being a waste of wallet space unless you shop somewhere frequently. Most are free to sign up for, but check beforehand to make sure you don't have to pay a fee.
- Here are some good Sale Kanji to know:

...% off 割引 waribiki
...yen off 円引き enbiki
Half price 半額 hangaku

終わり

We hope that this guide has been some help in getting you established. If there's something not in this guide you need help with, ask! Ask your fellow Kumamoto JETs or your Gun-mates. The ALT community in Kumamoto is very friendly and we're always willing to share our experiences to help you in a pinch. Welcome to Kumamoto!