

## HOMESTAY ETIQUETTE

You will notice that in many Japanese homes and buildings there are various levels and distinct floor surfaces. You may find some or all of these in your particular situation.

1. The first and lowest is comparable to the street where you wear your shoes. When you enter a home, take off your shoes at the entrance way called the “genkan.” Set your shoes in order, facing the direction you will be going when you leave the house. If you don’t do it yourself, the hostess probably will. If you are the host or hostess, you should be prepared to do it for your guests.

2. The level just above the genkan is usually a wooden or western-style floor of some sort. Slippers will be available for you to wear while walking on this floor. It is not customary to be bare-footed. Use the slippers and keep clean socks on. In some homes it may be OK to just be in socks. (to avoid embarrassment, check for holes in your socks before packing!)

3. The next level up is the room with a surface of tightly woven straw mats called “tatami.” Never wear shoes or slippers on this level. Leave your slippers outside the door.

4. The floor surface of the toilet is often constructed with consideration for dampness. Therefore, in many homes and churches, there is a special pair of slippers to be worn only in the toilet area. Remembering to change back into your regular slippers, rather than wearing toilet slippers around the house!

## WHEN TO GIVE THE GIFT?

You should be ready to give your prepared gift as soon as you enter your host’s home. Don’t wait until after dinner. Give the gift soon after everyone has their shoes off and you are still standing in the entry way or after you have been led to sit down. This will start your homestay off on the right foot, and will make your host feel more at ease to serve you. When giving a gift, hold it with both hands, and simply say, “Dozo.”

## MEALS

Be polite and always try everything that is set before you. Your host won’t necessarily expect you to like everything, but he/she will expect you to try everything--after all, that’s the whole reason for the home stay.

## THE JAPANESE BATH

The bath in Japan is called the “ofuro.” The purpose of the bath is not only cleanliness but also relaxation. It is a Japanese custom you will come to enjoy and appreciate. But be warned, Japanese like their bath water very hot. Add a little cold water from the tap if you find the water too hot to enter.

1. In some homes which have baths, only cold water comes out of the faucet. The water is put into the bathtub and then heated by a unit in the tub. After the unit is turned off, the only hot water available is in the tub. However, these days, most homes have a shower with hot water.

2. Use the wash bowl provided to dip water out of the tub (unless there is a shower) and wash thoroughly and rinse off all the soap before you get into the tub so that the water remains clean for the next person. Do not pull out the plug, or the next person will not have any hot water.

3. Baths are usually taken in the late afternoon or evening in Japan. Do your best to adapt to the schedule in the place where you will be staying. Take your bath whenever you are asked to or you will inconvenience the rest of the family. Please do not insist that you “must take a shower in the morning.” However, your host/hostess may make that option available to you anyway.