

**Report**  
**Japanese Language School and Internship in Tokyo**  
**March 2004 – February 2005**  
**Silvia Küng**

Tokyo - a vibrant and alive city - one of the world's main economic centers - and most populous metropolitan areas. Tokyo is a city that presents a different view of itself at every turn. Starkly modern, it becomes a jewel box at night with a glittering display of neon and fluorescent lights. Look down one street and you'll see nothing but neon and concrete, but around the corner, you may find yourself in the bonsai-lined courtyard of a traditional inn. You'll find an amazing hodgepodge of old and modern architecture, often side by side; close to the soaring office blocks - an ancient wooden house, a Japanese inn, an old lady in a kimono sweeping the pavement outside her home with a straw broom.



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## Visa

A "Certificate of Eligibility" is required for any visa that needs to be valid for longer than six months. This certificate is issued by the authorities in Japan, and needs to be submitted to the Embassy in Berne.

As my visa application had been still in process by the Immigration Office at the end of February, I arrived at Narita Airport without a visa (Tourist). *It was not a problem, because I first visited the Japanese Language School.* After my documents had been checked by the Immigration Office, the Certificate of Eligibility had been sent to Switzerland Tourism Office in Tokyo.

It is now possible to change the visa status within Japan, therefore it is no more necessary to leave the country and submit the Certificate of Eligibility at a Japanese Embassy abroad in order to issue the visa.

As soon as Switzerland Tourism received the issued Certificate, I went to the Immigration Office in order to apply for the change of the visa status. The change of the visa status took about one week. Then I had been invited by the Immigration Office to visit them again. And to my great joy I received the visa stamp in my pass!

Usually the whole process time of a visa application takes about two to three months.

The visit of an authority in Japan usually takes a lot of time. I recommend visiting an authority early in the morning, otherwise there would be a long waiting queue and sometimes the visitors have to wait for some hours.

### Application for Certificate of Eligibility

The following documents will be required:

#### **Basics**

- Application Form (available only in Japan – employer to fill in)
- Copy of passport
- 2 pictures
- Detailed schedule of professional training in Japan (incl. Addresses, Dates, Internship Details – to be provided by employer)

#### **Graduation papers**

- Confirmation of graduation, Diplomas, Certificates
- Recommendation letter from (former) employer or University Professor
- Proof from (former) employer or University Professor that the Internship in Japan is mandatory and very important for further professional career/studies! **VERY IMPORTANT!!!**
- Testimonial from (former) employer (if no more student)
- Curriculum Vitae
- Statement by applicant; "Personal Objectives regarding the Japan year"

### **Scholarship from the Scholarship Fund of the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce**

- Confirmation for a Scholarship by the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce
- Agreement and details about the Scholarship
- Information about the Scholarship Fund of the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce
- Excerpts from the regulations of the Scholarship Fund of the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce

### **Internship in Japan**

- Confirmation and details of Internship
- Company Profile

### **Japanese language course in Japan**

- Confirmation from language school

### **Miscellaneous**

- Letter of Guarantee from parents (if possible; advantage)

The above-mentioned documents need to be sent to the company in Japan, which will submit the application for the Certificate of Eligibility to the Immigration Office in Japan.

*Note:* Applicants who are not graduates of a university or college of higher education (which simplifies matters greatly) will find it more difficult to secure a "student/trainee visa".

In Japan it is essentially the case that everything relates to formal education achievements (practical experience has no particular weight). For this reason it is very important to note that individuals who are currently working and who completed their training some time ago need to establish a link with training and to show that the Japan project is an integral part of their training/further training. A confirmation issued by the respective school is required.

Another important point is the financial safeguards provided during the stay in Japan. These safeguards should be guaranteed either through the scholarship program of the Scholarship Fund or if necessary through a letter from a guarantor (parents, company etc).

### **Opening Bank Account**

As my visa application had been still in process by the Immigration Office at the end of February, I arrived at Narita Airport without a visa (Tourist). There is the possibility to open a bank account without holding a visa.

The following steps are necessary:

- Registration at the Ward Office (Foreigner Registration Desk)
- Information to the Ward Office about the intention of opening a bank account in Japan
- Ward Office will issue a special letter for the bank
- This special letter and the confirmation of the registration have to be shown to the bank
- The bank will open the account after receiving an amount of cash

## Japanese Language School

From 1<sup>st</sup> of March until 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2004 I studied Japanese at GEOS Kudan Institute of Japanese Language & Culture. I enjoyed studying at this school very much. The atmosphere at GEOS is really good. The classes are small so teachers are able to explain things until everyone understands. The teachers are experienced and make sure the lessons are useful as well as fun. Because of the small classes everyone was able to practice the conversation frequently during the lesson. I learned much about conversation, grammar, new vocabulary and Kanji, but also about Japanese culture.

Once after the lesson our class and our teacher were able to see a **Sumo** Tournament. Sumo is the traditional national sport of Japan. In Switzerland I sometimes watched a part of a Sumo Tournament in the television. But I hardly understood it and thus I was not so interested in Sumo. However I really enjoyed watching a live Sumo Tournament. The whole atmosphere was fascinating, men and women alike are fans of the sport, and it is deeply and traditionally Japanese.

The location of GEOS Language School is in Kudanshita and only a five minutes walk from the Imperial Palace and Garden. In spring the **Cherry Blossom** trees are so beautiful in this area and therefore our class and our teacher enjoyed the "Hanami" viewing.

On Friday evening some GEOS students and teachers often went to a **Karaoke** Studio. Before we had eaten dinner together. I like singing in a Karaoke Box very much and I always enjoyed these evenings.



My classmates are from the following countries (from left to right):  
Taiwanese, Korean, American, me, our teacher Mrs. Hoshiai, Korean

GEOS Kudan Institute of Japanese Language & Culture  
Kudan Royal Bldg. 3F  
3-2-5 Kanda-Jimbocho, Chiyoda-ku  
Tokyo 101-0051  
Internet: [www.geos-japanese-insti.co.jp](http://www.geos-japanese-insti.co.jp)

## Home stay

From beginning of March until end of April I stayed with a host family in Tokyo. GEOS Japanese Language School arranged the home stay for me. The family had been carefully chosen by GEOS before my arrival in Japan.

My host family, Okubo-san, live near Kunitachi Station, on Tokyo's west side. Kunitachi area is a lovely place to live, as there are a lot of trees, flowers and gardens. As I saw family Okubo's beautiful big house with the large garden for the first time, I was really surprised. Because this large space is not usual for the living conditions in Tokyo.

Following I would like to introduce my former host family:

<i>Name of Family Member</i>	<i>Okubo-san</i>	<i>Profession</i>	<i>Hobbies</i>
Mother; Akemi	57 yrs	Housewife	Dancing, Gardening
Father; Hideyuki	58 yrs	Office worker	Golf
Daughter; Misato	27 yrs	House helper	Cooking, Dancing, Sports
Daughter; Tomoyo	24 yrs	Student	Shopping

*and*

The dog; Sherry (Puddle)

I was very happy that I could stay with the family Okubo. This family is very kind and I appreciated their hospitality. From the beginning they treated me like a family member and included me in their activities. My Japanese skills have improved faster during my stay with the host family, because I had the chance to use the Japanese language very often.

From Monday to Friday I visited the language school during the day, therefore I met the host family every evening for dinner. Misato, daughter, usually prepared the meals for us, and I liked helping her in the kitchen. Misato is an excellent cook and I was able to learn a lot about the Japanese meals. Every evening I enjoyed having dinner together with my host family. It was always cozy and we talked a lot, and they have all a sense of humor. The three Okubo women really like talking, but the father has always been quiet. During weekdays he usually came home late in the evening (around 21.00 h) and in the morning he left the house early.

Misato, the 27-year-old daughter, has become a good friend of mine. During weekends we have started playing tennis together. Also I often could join Misato visiting her friends, which I appreciated. In addition it is an excellent Japanese language training.

One day I was able to join my host mother and daughter to Yokohama. They showed me around Yokohama, including China Town, Port, Landmark Tower etc. Then I had been invited by my host family to eat lunch at a "Keiseki" Restaurant. Before I had often heard about "**Keiseki Ryori**" – it would be a very special, nice, traditional Japanese experience, but also expensive.

Eating in a "Keiseki" Restaurant was a wonderful experience for me; the waitress, wearing a Kimono, served us several courses of traditional Japanese meals, every course was beautiful prepared on a plate. It was not only lovely prepared but also very delicious. Not only the meals were delicious, I also enjoyed the atmosphere of the restaurant. It was in an old traditional Japanese house, surrounded by a beautiful garden. While having the meal, we were sitting on Tatami, and enjoying the view to the wonderful garden. The atmosphere was relaxing.



This photo was taken at the “Keiseki” Restaurant in Yokohama. From the left side; my host mother, our waitress, me, and my host sister Misato.

To stay with a Japanese host family is such a great experience. Through this stay I was able to gain an insight in the Japanese family life, and I could learn more about its culture etc. It was a wonderful time for me.

Although I live in my own apartment now, my two host families (last year and this year's) have become close friends to me. We often meet each other and I also was able to meet some of their relatives and friends too. The hospitality of everyone is wonderful. It is interesting for me to get the possibility visiting different Japanese houses and learning more about the Japanese family life.

## House-hunting

### *My Real Estate Agency*

SAKURA HOUSE CO., LTD.

K-1 Bldg. 9F 7-2-6, Nishi-Shinjuku,

Shinjuku-Ku, Tokyo 160-0023

PHONE:+81-(0)3-5330-5250 / FAX:+81-(0)3-5330-5251

E-mail: [info@sakura-house.com](mailto:info@sakura-house.com)

Opening hours: Monday - Saturday 8:50 h -17:50 h

Sakura House - is a Tokyo apartment, guesthouse and dormitory agency providing accommodation in Japan exclusively for foreign people. Sakura House present over 600 furnished rooms at 60 convenient locations in central Tokyo.

Usually, in Japan you need a large deposit (or key money, "*shikikin*" in Japanese) that is equivalent to 2 month's rent, and a gift money to the landlord (or "*reikin*" in Japanese) that is equivalent to a month's rent (not refundable), and an agent fee equivalent to a month's rent (not refundable off course) to rent a room in Japan.

Along with the first month's rent, you need to prepare a large amount of money that is equivalent to 5 month's rent, that will sum up to thousands of dollars.

But with Sakura House, you only have to prepare 30,000 yen deposit (up to 20,000 yen refundable) and the first month's rent. Rooms are furnished, and utilities like electricity, water and gas supply are included in the rent.

Additionally, you don't have to look for a guarantor, or a co-signer, that is usually required in Japanese apartment agencies.

What is the difference between a guesthouse / an apartment / a dormitory:

*Guesthouse* is a partially shared accommodation. You will have your private bedroom (the door can be locked), but you will share common areas like kitchen, toilet, bathroom and living room. Consider sharing a house or a large apartment with several people. Some people call it "-Gaijin House".

You will have all facilities on your own in an *apartment*. Sakura House has 1-room-studio type to 2DK rooms ideal for one to two people.

In a *dormitory*, you are going to share your bedroom as well as other facilities. Usually there's several bunk beds in a large room and you will stay with 3 to 5 other people.

Of course, monthly rent for an apartment is higher than that of a guesthouse, and dormitory, the cheapest.

After deep consideration I decided to rent an apartment, where I have all facilities on my own, despite the monthly rent is a little bit higher. Since end of April I have been living in an apartment, which is located between Monzennakacho and Kayabacho Station and next to Sumida Gawa River. I am happy that I will be able to stay in this apartment. It is my "home" and I feel comfortable here. The commuting time to the office is only about 25 min (Kayabacho to Kamiyacho with Hibiya Line only 13 min), which is "luxury" for the Tokyo life. Also I enjoy living near the Sumida Gawa River.

## **Internship at Switzerland Tourism Tokyo**

### General Introduction of Switzerland Tourism

*Switzerland Tourism – The marketing company for Switzerland, the land of vacations, conventions and travel.*

According to a Federal Decree dated 16 December 1994, the main duty of Switzerland Tourism is to promote demand among tourists at home and abroad for Switzerland, the land of vacations, conventions and travel. In this sense, the focus is placed on developing and implementing effective marketing programs and providing Switzerland with a strong, classically modern brand profile on the international markets.

The marketing organization Switzerland Tourism is a federal entity established under public law. It has a strong client and market orientation and is run according to commercial criteria.

The Switzerland Tourism team consists of 167 employees in 24 countries (83 at headquarters, 84 abroad).



### My Internship at Switzerland Tourism Tokyo

The Switzerland Tourism office is located in the Daini Waiko Building, which is situated next to the Kamiyacho metro station in Toranomon area. The office of the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce is also located on the same floor. The offices had been newly renovated and I was surprised about the large, bright and beautiful rooms.

The Switzerland Tourism Tokyo team consists of 10 employees. Mr. Roger Zbinden is the Director of the ST Asian Key Markets: Japan, Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore.

Switzerland Tourism Tokyo is divided up into the core areas of Sales, Marketing, Production, Media and Administration.

The *Sales and Marketing* division works in close cooperation with the Japanese land- / tour operators and the trade representatives. The Sales and Marketing team ensures that the market is developed effectively; Organization of seminars and presentations of the product Switzerland to the planning and sales staff of the various tour- and land operators, sales calls, familiarization trips to Switzerland, organization of fairs and events within Japan in order to promote Switzerland, distribution of brochures etc.

The *Production* division drafts advertising media and organizes trade show appearances, issues Internet web pages, brochures etc.

The *Media* division concentrates on active and long-term media work and helps to position Switzerland as an attractive destination for travel.

The *Administration* division is responsible for the whole accounting, human resources etc.

At the beginning of the Internship I got an exemplary briefing by our Administration Manager, Mrs. Tanaka. Also her effort and support in obtaining my visa was great.

From the beginning I have been comfortable in the ST Tokyo team and I have felt welcome by everybody.

Mainly I assist our Director, Mr. Zbinden, for different marketing projects. In addition I support my working colleagues. Unfortunately my assistance is not always possible because of the writing and reading of Kanji letters (everyday I am learning new Kanji). My career background and knowledge in the travel industry are helpful during the internship at Switzerland Tourism. It is very interesting for me to get to know more about the Japanese travel industry.

In addition I will be able to learn much about Marketing, which is a new field for me.

In June the **Swiss Festa** was held, which is Switzerland Tourism Tokyo's main consumer event. The Swiss Festa took place at a big hall in Yurakucho. I was pleased to assist the ST team before and during this big event. We provided a diverse and lively program about various Swiss travel related topics in an enjoyable atmosphere. Swiss folklore music, a prize draw and various booths from Japanese agents and Swiss product companies create a real Swiss experience in the middle of Tokyo. We collected about 600 consumers for this event.

I was appointed to assist at the reception welcoming our clients and informing them about the various activities during this day. It was a good training for my Japanese conversation skills.

In between the whole ST staff sang the "O Vreneli" Song on the stage. The Japanese like this song.

In mid of September I could work at the **STE (Switzerland Travel Experience)**, which took place at the Hotel Intercontinental in Tokyo. I was assisting at the reception welcoming our clients and answering their questions.

Our Swiss partners (Marketing- and Sales Manager from Tourist Offices and Public Transport Companies in Switzerland) came to Tokyo for this occasion. They had the possibility to show and explain in detail the advantages of their products to the Japanese travel trade people. The whole event had been organized by Switzerland Tourism Tokyo. This event is a “Must” for Swiss partners that want to actively work in the Japanese market.



→ STE event at Hotel Intercontinental

Our Swiss partners presenting their products

September was indeed an exhibition and fair month for Switzerland Tourism Tokyo team. After the STE the **JATA World Travel Fair 2004** was held, which was an interesting time for me. The JATA Travel Fair is the biggest travel fair in Japan. It attracts travel professionals as well as the general public. In 2003 there were around 90'000 visitors. ST Tokyo participated with an own booth. 108 countries and regions around the world were represented in this large exhibition site.



Photo above; left side Japanese visitor at this fair and right side I

In the background there is our booth; a log cabin surrounded with flowers and photos from the nature/alps of Switzerland and Heidi – the typical image of Switzerland here in Japan

Although Switzerland Tourism is a western company and the typically daily working routine of a Japanese company is not so marked, the **working environment** is still different. In the company, the Japanese colleagues often work much longer hours and stay for several hours after closing. It might be because of the solidarity that sometimes even those who have already completed their work, stay late at the office. It is also embarrassing to be the first one to leave. Also they

rarely use their vacation time, for this reason they will be forced by ST to finally take their holidays.

I also realized that the Japanese worker tends to view the use of time differently than western one. The western worker tries to complete a task in the most efficient manner and within the shortest time possible. It sometimes seems to me that the Japanese workers are perfectionists and work very exact and also in order to avoid mistakes. It takes longer to complete a task.

Furthermore in order to retain the harmony problems and criticism were not spoken out directly. Respect, sensitivity, and harmony are sometimes more important than the truth. From a Western perspective, it is like keeping the peace with "little white lies" if necessary.

Don't say "NO"; The Japanese try to avoid confrontations and direct questions that might create discomfort or a loss of face. Often they are criticized for being too vague, but their real intentions might be to respect and develop a relationship.

In Japan, the very first thing that happens in a business meeting is an exchange of **business cards**. This quickly establishes the seniority of the person you are meeting. The business cards are clean, without pen notes, and kept in a case that is readily accessible. The business cards are exchanged and presented formally with both hands. The card is presented facing the recipient so he or she can read it. The cards themselves are handled very carefully and respectfully, as if you are handling the person. The cards are carefully read, even if you do not understand a word (to not read it implies that one is not important).

## AJALT Language School

From beginning of September until end of November 2004 I studied Japanese at AJALT Language School. The lessons took place every Tuesday and Thursday from 08.00 am until 09.30 am. The location of the school is convenient as it is just around the corner from the Switzerland Tourism office. I enjoyed learning Japanese at this school. In my class there were only two students including me; it was almost a private lesson. My schoolmate was from China and therefore he knew already the Japanese script. For me the Kanji letters are still a big challenge.

## Other Activities

### SJCC Alumni Spring Event 04

On Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> April, the SJCC Alumni Spring Event took place at Tamagawadai Koen. While we were sitting in the park, talking and eating tasty food, we were enjoying the beautiful cherry blossom trees. It was a great opportunity to meet other Scholarship recipients and to share our life and work experiences in Japan.



“Hanami” Event with SJCC Scholarship recipients – enjoying the cherry blossom trees, eating tasty food, sharing work and life experience...

#### Hakone and Mt. Fuji-san

I went to a one-day trip around the Hakone National park. First I went by Shinkansen to Odawara, and then I traveled around Hakone by Tozan Railway, Cable car, Bus, Ropeway and Ship on the Lake Ashi. As it was beautiful weather and blue sky, I could see Mt. Fuji-san from different points during my trip. In the evening I went back to Tokyo by Romance Car, which was a nice experience. It was a wonderful day – I enjoyed the nature, using several transportation during the roundtrip and to see Mt. Fuji-san from time to time in the background.

#### Kamakura

I often visit Kamakura and Enoshima, because I love the sea, and the green hills around Kamakura are beautiful. Also my Japanese friend (Tomoko, 60 years) lives in Kamakura and I like spending time with her, we often go hiking, and she has shown me a lot of temple in this area. Sometimes we cook together in her house, which is an old traditional Japanese house with a large garden. During summer time the temperature is pleasant in the house, but in winter it is indeed cold.

#### Chiba-ken

I went by train around Chiba-ken along the shore with beautiful view to the sea. Before I hadn't known Chiba prefecture well, and I was surprised of the beauty of this prefecture with green hills, small villages, long beaches and shores etc.

## **My favorites Places in Tokyo**

### *Ginza*



Ginza is one of the biggest commercial towns and there are many shops, as well stores selling luxury goods. I am impressed about the large window displays, and at night when the street is illuminated, it looks fantastic.

### *Shinjuku*



Shinjuku is such a busy place at the center of the city and over two million people pass through the main train station every day – it seems to me that Shinjuku never sleeps. It is the busiest train station in the world. Around the station there are 60 exits! And I am still sometimes getting lost in the underground walkway of Shinjuku station.

From the top of the Metropolitan Government Building there is a beautiful view over Tokyo.

### *Odaiba*



Odaiba is one of my favorite places in Tokyo. The view to the Rainbow-Bridge and the Skyline of Tokyo is fantastic. I also enjoy the nature of the river and of the Odaiba Kaihin Park.

### *Asakusa*



Asakusa attracts me, as there is still the atmosphere of old Japan. Also I like to visit the Sensoji Temple, which is the oldest temple in Tokyo.

### *Tokyo Tower*



With 333 meters, Tokyo Tower is 13 meters taller than its model, the Eiffel Tower of Paris. From the observatory on the top there is a wonderful view over Tokyo, and under good weather conditions, Mt. Fuji-san can be seen in the distance. The Tokyo Tower is only a five minutes walk away from Switzerland Tourism office.

### *Meiji Shrine*



The large Meiji Shrine is located in the middle of a park and wood. When I first visited the shrine I was surprised at how far I seem to be from the hustle of Tokyo just a few hundred meters away.

### *Yoyogi Park*



The Yoyogi Park is an ideal place to do jogging or ride a bicycle, but sometimes I also enjoy a relaxing walk around the large park.



## Japanese Cuisine

For me Japan is like a cockaigne (Schlaraffenland); there are so many kinds of delicious food. Yes, I really like the Japanese cuisine. One of my Japanese friends is a cooking teacher at a school. Once a month on a Saturday she gave me private cooking lessons at her home.

### *My favorites dishes*



**Udon** are thick wheat-based Japanese noodles.



**Tempura** is seafood and vegetables deep-fried in tempura batter.

Tempura is a very popular Japanese food, and as well one of the best known outside of Japan.



**Oyakodon** (Oyako Domburi)

**Mother and Child Domburi**

The name of this popular domburi dish comes from its two main ingredients, chicken and egg.



**Katsudon** (Tonkatsu Domburi)

**Pork Cutlet Domburi**

Katsudon is served with tonkatsu (deep fried breaded pork cutlet), egg and onions on top of the rice.



**Rice** is Japan's most important crop, and has been cultivated by the Japanese for over 2000 years.



**Sashimi** is thinly sliced, raw seafood. Many different kinds of fish (and other types of seafood) are served raw in the Japanese cuisine.

Sashimi pieces are dipped into soya sauce before they are eaten. Depending on the kind of sashimi, wasabi or ground ginger is usually mixed into the soya sauce.



### **Nigiri**

Small rice balls with fish, etc. on top. There are countless varieties of nigirisushi, some of the most common ones being tuna, shrimp, eel, squid, octopus and fried egg.



### **Norimaki**

Sushi rice and seafood, etc. rolled in dried seaweed sheets. There are countless varieties of sushi rolls differing in ingredients and thickness. Sushi rolls prepared "inside out" are very popular outside of Japan, but rarely found in Japan.



**Soba** noodles are native Japanese noodles made of buckwheat flour and wheat flour. They are roughly as thick as spaghetti, and prepared in various hot and cold dishes.



### *My **not** so favorites dishes*



**Wasabi** is Japanese horseradish. It is most famous in form of a green paste used as condiment for sashimi (raw seafood) and sushi. However, wasabi is also used for many other Japanese dishes.

Wasabi has a strong, hot flavor and after eating my mouth, but especially my nose was burning.



**Natto** is a foul-smelling sticky web of fermented soybeans. When you get Natto with spoon or chopstick, you will find that the paste pulls a part of as if a spider web.

To the conclusion of this chapter, I would like to mention some **table manners** → some definite “Don’ts”:

- Do not stick your chopsticks upright into your food, especially in your rice bowl, as this is the way of offering rice to the dead.
- Do not grab your chopsticks in the palm of your hand as you would grab a stick. This is how a sword is handled.
- Do not pour soy sauce on your rice. You offend the chief. Other dishes are meant to flavour the rice as you eat. Rice is still considered a valued and precious item by elders.
- Do not blow your nose at the table.
- Do not play with food and try to figure out what’s in a particular piece. The Japanese are generally sensitive about this and you insult your host by being childish about the food being served to you. The way in which the food is arranged and presented is equally as important as the food itself.

## **Bowing**

Every day I was watching Japanese bowing on several occasions/places. And I try to understand this Japanese custom. But I think I will never really understand it, even if I would live in Japan for many many years. Bowing represents humility. You elevate, honor and respect the other person by humbling yourself or lowering yourself. The lower you bow, the more you are honoring or respecting the other party. As a Westerner, you are not expected to initiate a bow, but a bow should always be returned (except from personnel at department stores and restaurants who bow to welcome you, and to whom you can nod in return if you like). To not bow in return is similar to refusing a handshake. The person of lower status usually initiates the bow, bows the lowest, and is the last one to rise.

## Earthquakes

On September 1, 1923 at one minute before noon local time, a great earthquake devastated southeastern Japan including the cities of Tokyo (population of about 3 million) and Yokohama (population about 423 thousand). The earthquake had an estimated surface wave magnitude (Ms) of 8.19. Immediately after the shock numerous fires broke out in Tokyo and Yokohama. The city and harbor of Yokohama were entirely wrecked or burned. A large part of Tokyo shared the same fate. Loss of life was extraordinary, exceeding 140 thousand lives. Property damage was estimated to exceed one billion US dollars at the time.

The Japanese archipelago is located in an area where several continental and oceanic plates meet. This is the cause for frequent earthquakes and the presence of many volcanoes and hot springs across Japan. If earthquakes occur below or close to the ocean, they may trigger tidal waves (tsunami).

I am a little bit scared of earthquakes. They can occur at any time and place without warning. Once I had experienced an earthquake of Shindo 6.5 (scale for measuring an earthquake) in an earthquake simulator. This strong shaking and this power impressed me.

Afterwards I have prepared and kept a survival kit consisting of water and food for a few days, a flashlight, a radio and a first aid kit.

During and after an earthquake; Falling objects, toppling furniture and panic present the greatest dangers during an earthquake. Try to protect yourself under a table or doorway. Do not run outside, and try to remain as calm as possible. If you are in the streets, try to find protection from glass and other objects that may fall from surrounding buildings.

After a strong earthquake, turn off ovens, stoves and the main gas valve. Then, listen to the radio or television for news. In coastal areas beware of possible tidal waves (tsunami).

The scientists estimate that in the next 50 years with 95% probability a strong earthquake (Shindo 8) will strike the Kanto area like 1923. The Japanese call it "The Big One".

## Gifts

Most commonly, gifts are given when you are, or are going to be, indebted to another person, family, or business. So unless you are not planning to meet anyone on a trip to Japan, you should consider taking at least a few gifts with you. Another consideration is that the Japanese are constantly giving gifts and it would be embarrassing if you were empty handed.

Gifts are also important when returning from a trip for family, friends, and co-workers. This is one reason that the Japanese tourist is a valued customer in other countries.

Once a gift is given, the Japanese are sure to return with a "thank-you" gift called an O-kaeshi. This is an industry in itself as O-kaeshi are given at events such as weddings, funerals, births, illnesses, etc. Usually, the value of the O-kaeshi is half the value of the giver's gift. It is important to not be too lavish, as the receiver will be obliged to return at least half your gift's value back to you.

### HOW TO GIVE -

Gifts are always wrapped in paper, or at least in a fashionable box or container. Gifts are presented and received with a sense of humility and respect. Use both hands to give the gift and a bow. Often you say, "This is just a small thing" or "This is just a box of cookies." Receive the gift

with both hands and a bow. Traditionally, gifts are not opened at the time they are received, but as a Westerner you might want or be expected to open the gift. It would be best to ask if you may open it, opening it carefully and respectfully. Do not crumple up the wrapping paper, but fold it nicely.

**WHAT TO GIVE -**

- Food is a very common gift as Japanese homes are small and do not have much room for souvenirs or knickknacks
- Cookies, expensive candy, condiments

**WHAT NOT TO GIVE -**

- Items that symbolize the severing of a relationship such as scissors, knives, or letter openers
- Items in sets of four, a set is considered to be five, unlike the Western custom of a set of four, six, or eight
- Items totaling an even number, such as four flower stems (the number four symbolizes death); -
- Items totaling nine (the number symbolizes suffering)
- Flowers are generally used at times of illness, death, or courting only
- White and yellow chrysanthemums are for funerals

## Epilog

The Japan year was wonderful for me – an unforgettable experience with everlasting impressions. I was able to learn more about the country; its culture, language, social and business environments, and gain in-depth experience in working and living with Japanese colleagues through this year in Japan.

I would like to thank Mr. Dudler and the Scholarship Fund of the Swiss-Japanese Chamber of Commerce very much for the financial support and assistance throughout this year. It would not have been possible for me to realize my dream, one year Japan, without your great support.

My near future - after my internship I can continue to work for Switzerland Tourism Tokyo as an employee. I am very glad getting this chance, because I like my job very much and I feel comfortable here in Tokyo.

Thank you very much once more for everything.

Yours sincerely,

Silvia Küng