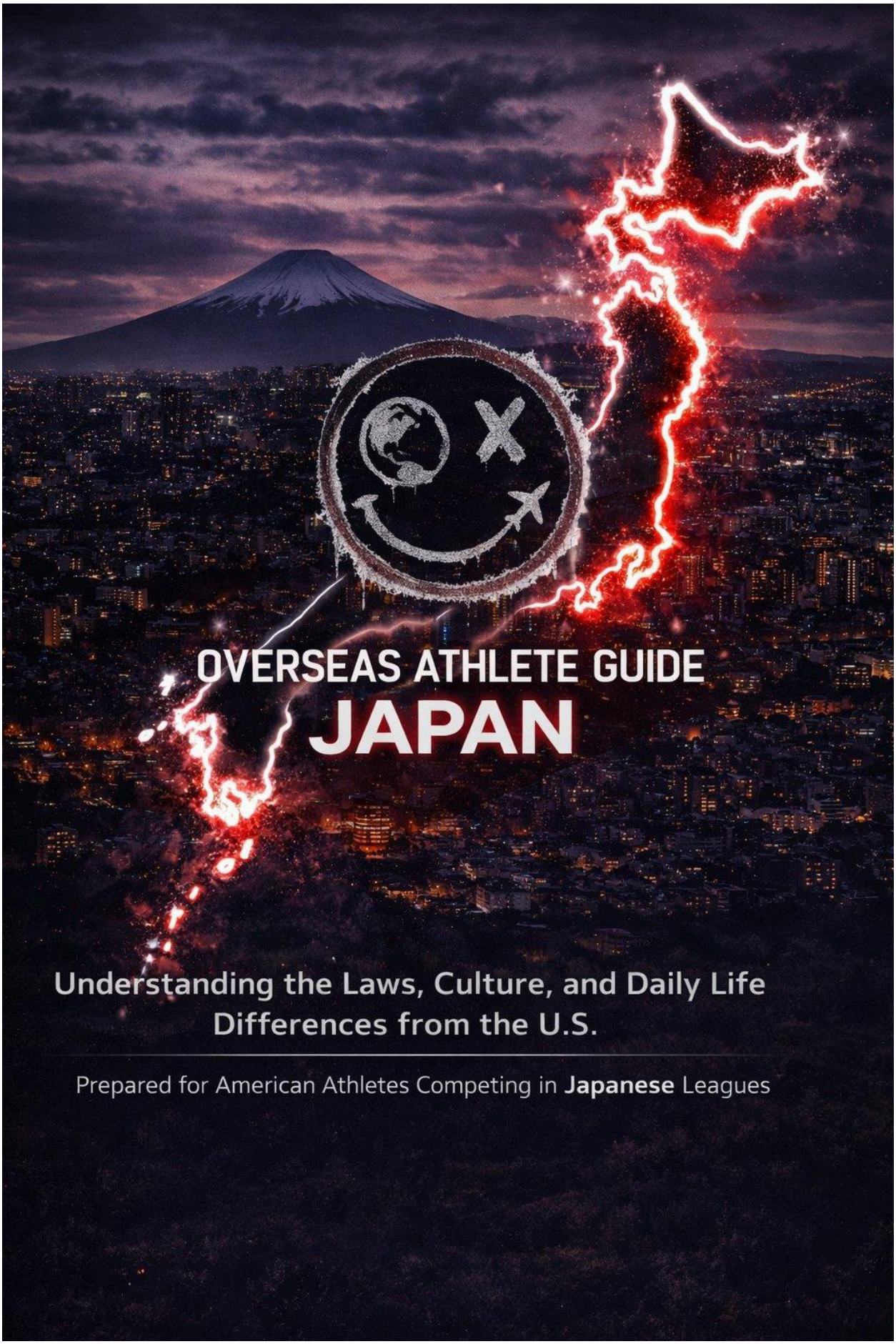

OVERSEAS ATHLETE GUIDE
JAPAN
Understanding the Laws, Culture, and Daily Life Differences from the U.S.
Prepared for American Athletes Competing in **Japanese** Leagues

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The Legal Framework in Japan

1. Employment Contracts

In Japan, professional basketball players in the B.League are employed under Japanese labor law. Your contract is governed by the Labor Standards Act and supplemented by B.League regulations.

- Japanese labor law is employee-friendly. Contracts must clearly specify salary, working conditions, term of employment, and termination conditions.
- Most import contracts are fixed-term, aligned with the B.League season (October through May, with playoffs extending into June). Your contract should specify salary, housing, flights, car or transportation allowance, insurance, and bonus structures.
- B.League clubs can register up to three foreign players, but only two can be on the court at the same time. An additional spot exists for either a naturalized player or an Asian special quota player.
- The B.League is transitioning toward a franchise-based model starting with the 2026–27 season (B.League Premier, B.League One, B.League Next), which will change the promotion/relegation structure and introduce salary caps.
- Import salaries in the B.League typically range from $100,000 to $400,000+ USD per year depending on the tier and the club's budget. Top B1 clubs pay significantly more for marquee imports.

> **If it is not in writing, it does not exist. Get everything documented: salary, payment dates, housing details, flights, transportation, insurance, bonuses, and termination clauses.**

2. Work Visa and Residency

As an American professional basketball player, you will need an Entertainer Visa (2nd Category / Kogyo 2-go) to play in Japan.

- Your club obtains a Certificate of Eligibility (CoE) from the Immigration Services Agency of Japan. This is the first step and is handled by the club.
- Once the CoE is issued, you apply for the Entertainer Visa at the Japanese consulate in the U.S. Bring the CoE, passport, completed visa application, photo, and your contract.
- Visa durations range from 15 days to 3 years depending on your contract length. Most B.League imports receive 1-year visas.
- Upon arrival in Japan, you receive a residence card (zairyu card) at the airport. You must register your address at the local ward office within 14 days.
- You are only authorized to work in the activity specified on your visa. Side jobs, coaching clinics, or other paid work require separate authorization.

- If you switch clubs mid-season, your visa status may need updating. Your new club must handle the paperwork.

> **Japan's immigration system is precise and bureaucratic. Missing deadlines, failing to register your address, or working outside your visa authorization can result in fines, deportation, and future visa bans.**

3. Taxes

Japan has a dual tax system: national income tax and local inhabitant's (residence) tax.

- National income tax rates are progressive: 5% on the first ¥1.95M, rising to 10%, 20%, 23%, 33%, 40%, and 45% on income above ¥40M. A 2.1% reconstruction surtax is added on top.
- Local inhabitant's tax is a flat 10% plus a per capita charge of ¥5,000/year. This is assessed based on the previous year's income and starts in June of the following year.
- Non-resident taxpayers (in Japan less than one year) pay a flat 20.42% national tax on Japan-source income with no deductions. Once you become a resident (one year+), progressive rates apply.
- Social insurance contributions for employees total approximately 14.75% of salary: health insurance (~5%), pension (~9.15%), and unemployment (~0.55%). Your employer pays a matching amount.
- Many B.League import contracts are structured as net salary deals. Confirm whether your deal is gross or net. The difference is significant given Japan's combined tax and social insurance burden.
- Japan's tax year runs January 1 to December 31. If you earn income from sources other than your club salary, you must file a final tax return (kakutei shinkoku) by March 15 of the following year.

> **You must still file U.S. taxes as an American citizen. The U.S.-Japan tax treaty helps avoid double taxation. Claim Foreign Tax Credits via Form 1116. If foreign bank balances exceed $10,000 at any point, file an FBAR. If foreign assets exceed $200,000, file FATCA Form 8938.**

Residence tax is a common surprise. It is based on your income from the prior year and billed starting in June. If you leave Japan mid-season, you may still owe residence tax for the previous year. Sort this out before departing.

Healthcare and Insurance

Japan has a universal healthcare system. As an employee enrolled in social insurance, you are automatically covered under the Employees' Health Insurance (Kenko Hoken) system.

- Japan's healthcare is excellent. Hospitals and clinics are clean, efficient, and well-equipped. You pay 30% of medical costs out of pocket, with the insurance covering 70%.
- The 30% co-pay applies to everything from doctor visits to prescriptions to hospital stays. For major expenses, a High-Cost Medical Expense system caps your monthly out-of-pocket costs.
- Your club handles enrollment in social insurance. Confirm this is done before the season starts.
- Sports-specific injuries, physiotherapy, and rehabilitation are generally covered, but access to English-speaking sports medicine specialists may be limited outside Tokyo and Osaka.
- Dental care is covered under health insurance but with limitations. Cosmetic and advanced dental work requires additional payment.
- Workers' compensation (Rosai Hoken) covers injuries sustained during training and games. Your employer pays the full premium.

> **Japan's healthcare system is excellent but operates almost entirely in Japanese. If you do not speak Japanese, finding English-speaking doctors can be challenging outside major cities. Your club should help arrange medical care, but do not assume this.**

Laws and Everyday Regulations That Surprise Americans

1. Drug Laws

Japan has some of the strictest drug laws of any developed country. This is the single most critical legal section of this guide.

- Cannabis is completely illegal in Japan. Possession, use, sale, and importation are all criminal offenses carrying penalties of up to five years in prison for possession and up to seven years for distribution.
- Japan does not have a medical cannabis exemption. There is no legal pathway for recreational or medical use.
- Even trace amounts of THC detected in your system can result in arrest. Japan customs screens incoming travelers, and drug-detection procedures are thorough.
- Prescription medications legal in the U.S. may be controlled or banned in Japan. Stimulant medications (Adderall, Ritalin) are illegal. Some codeine-based medications are restricted. Check the Japanese customs website and your embassy before bringing any medications.
- A drug arrest in Japan means immediate detention, often for 23 days without charge under the Japanese pre-charge detention system. You will not be released on bail during investigation. Your career in Japan will be over.

> **Japan is zero tolerance on drugs. There are no warnings, no diversion programs, no second chances. A drug offense means arrest, detention, deportation, and a permanent ban from entering Japan. This is not an exaggeration. Do not bring anything, do not use anything, and do not carry anything for anyone.**

2. Police and Public Conduct

- Japanese police (Keisatsu) are professional, polite, and thorough. Crime rates are extremely low.
- You must carry your residence card (zairyu card) at all times. Police can request to see it, and failure to produce it can result in a fine.
- Public behavior expectations are high. Loud, disruptive, or intoxicated behavior in public is frowned upon socially and can result in police intervention.
- If you are arrested in Japan, you can be held for up to 23 days before formal charges. Access to a lawyer during this period can be limited. Understand your rights and contact the U.S. Embassy immediately.

3. Driving

- Japan drives on the left side of the road (opposite from the U.S.).

- An International Driving Permit (IDP) is required for Americans. Your U.S. license alone is not valid. The IDP must be obtained before leaving the U.S. through AAA.
- Japan has strict DUI laws. The blood alcohol limit is 0.03%, far lower than the U.S. (0.08%). Even one drink can put you over the limit.
- Penalties for DUI are severe: fines up to ¥1,000,000, license revocation, and potential imprisonment. Passengers who knowingly ride with a drunk driver can also be fined.
- Many imports in Japan do not drive. Public transportation (trains, buses) is world-class, punctual, and covers virtually the entire country. Clubs often provide transportation or a car.

4. Employment Protection

- Japan's Labor Standards Act protects employees with strong provisions against unfair dismissal.
- Fixed-term contracts (like import contracts) have specific termination rules. A club cannot terminate you mid-contract without cause unless the contract includes a specific termination clause.
- Disputes can be taken to local labor standards offices or, for international basketball disputes, to FIBA's Basketball Arbitral Tribunal (BAT).

5. Cultural Laws and Expectations

- Tattoos may restrict access to gyms, pools, hot springs (onsen), and some public facilities. Many establishments ban visible tattoos. This is cultural, not legal, but it is strictly enforced.
- Noise complaints are taken seriously. Loud music, parties, or disruptions in residential areas can result in police visits and formal complaints.
- Garbage disposal is highly regulated. You must sort trash into multiple categories (burnable, non-burnable, recyclable, plastic, etc.) and put it out on the correct day.

Cultural and Lifestyle Differences

1. Basketball Culture

Japan's basketball culture has exploded in recent years, driven by the success of the B.League, the rise of Rui Hachimura and Yuta Watanabe in the NBA, and the country's strong performance at the 2023 FIBA World Cup.

- The B.League is the fastest-growing professional basketball league in Asia. Attendance has surged, with some clubs drawing 10,000–20,000+ fans per game.
- Fan culture in Japan is organized, enthusiastic, and respectful. Expect coordinated chants, organized fan sections, and a level of event production that rivals the NBA in presentation quality.
- Basketball is covered in Japanese media, but it competes with baseball (NPB), soccer (J-League), and sumo for mainstream attention.
- The anime/manga series "Slam Dunk" had a massive cultural impact on basketball in Japan. Many Japanese fans grew up watching it and have deep emotional connections to the sport.

The B.League is building toward becoming one of the top leagues in Asia. Playing well here creates visibility across the Asian basketball market.

2. Daily Life and Social Culture

- Japan is one of the safest countries in the world. Violent crime is extremely rare. You can walk anywhere at any time of day or night.
- Punctuality is non-negotiable. Being late is considered deeply disrespectful. Trains run to the second. Meetings start on time. Practice starts on time. Be early.
- Respect and hierarchy are central to Japanese culture. Bow when greeting people. Address coaches and staff respectfully. Show deference to seniority.
- Japan operates on a culture of indirect communication. People may not say no directly. Silence, hesitation, or vague responses often mean disagreement or discomfort. Learn to read between the lines.
- Personal space and quiet are valued. Speaking loudly on trains, in restaurants, or in public spaces is considered rude.
- Learning basic Japanese goes an enormous distance. Many people outside Tokyo and Osaka speak limited English. Apps like Google Translate with camera function are essential tools.

3. Food and Drink

- Japanese food is exceptional. Fresh, high-quality, and available at every price point from convenience stores (konbini) to Michelin-starred restaurants.

- Convenience stores (7-Eleven, FamilyMart, Lawson) in Japan are a revelation. Fresh meals, onigiri, bento boxes, and quality snacks available 24/7.
- Rice, noodles (ramen, udon, soba), grilled meats, sushi, and vegetables are staples. Protein-heavy diets are easy to maintain.
- Tipping does not exist in Japan. It is considered rude. Service is included and consistently excellent.
- Alcohol is affordable and widely available (even from vending machines). Social drinking after work or games (nomikai) is common, but moderation is expected.

4. Housing

- Apartments in Japan are small by American standards. A typical one-bedroom apartment may be 25–40 square meters.
- Most clubs provide housing for imports. Confirm the details: size, location, furnishing, internet, proximity to the gym.
- Shoes are removed at the entrance of every home and many businesses. This is non-negotiable.
- Walls are thin. Sound carries. Be respectful of neighbors.
- Utility costs (electricity, gas, water) are moderate. Internet is fast and reliable.

5. Cost of Living

- Tokyo and Osaka are expensive. Smaller B.League cities are significantly more affordable.
- Groceries are reasonable. Eating out can range from very cheap (ramen for ¥500–800) to expensive, depending on the restaurant.
- Public transportation is world-class but can be expensive for long-distance travel (shinkansen bullet trains). Get a Suica or Pasmo card for convenience.
- Mobile phone plans are available from major carriers (NTT Docomo, au, SoftBank) and budget carriers. Prepaid SIM cards are easy to get at airports.
- Japan is still a cash-heavy society, though cashless payments are increasing. Carry cash, especially outside major cities.

6. Time Zones

Japan is 14 hours ahead of the U.S. East Coast and 17 hours ahead of the West Coast (no daylight saving in Japan).

- This is the most difficult time zone gap of any major basketball market. Staying connected with family requires intentional scheduling.
- Early morning in Japan aligns with evening in the U.S. Plan calls accordingly.

- LINE is the dominant messaging app in Japan. WhatsApp is less common. Download LINE before arriving.

Japanese League Structures and Tiers

B1 (First Division)

The top tier of the B.League. Currently 26 teams divided into East and West conferences. Each team plays a 60-game regular season. Top 8 qualify for best-of-three playoffs. The season runs October through May/June.

- Three foreign players can be registered per club. Only two can be on the court at the same time.
- One additional spot for a naturalized player OR an Asian special quota player (from 14+ eligible countries).
- Major B1 clubs include: Alvark Tokyo, Chiba Jets, Utsunomiya Brex, Kawasaki Brave Thunders, Ryukyu Golden Kings, Shimane Susanoo Magic, Hiroshima Dragonflies, Yokohama B-Corsairs, Osaka Evessa, and many more.
- B1 is a high-quality league with strong organization, excellent facilities, and growing budgets. Playing well here opens doors across Asia.

B2 (Second Division)

14 teams in East and West conferences. Same 60-game format. Promotion to B1 and relegation from B1 create competitive stakes at every level.

- Same foreign player rules as B1. Quality and organization vary by club.
- Some B2 clubs are well-funded with strong community support. Others are smaller operations.

B3 (Third Division)

15 semi-professional teams. 60-game schedule without conferences. Serves as the entry point for emerging clubs. The pathway from B3 to B2 to B1 exists through promotion.

- B3 is a developing tier. Organization, pay, and facilities vary widely. Due diligence on the specific club is critical.

The 2026–27 Restructure

Starting with the 2026–27 season, the B.League is restructuring into B.League Premier, B.League One, and B.League Next. Classification will be based on attendance, revenue, and arena capacity rather than on-court performance alone. Salary caps will be introduced. Foreign player rules will expand to allow up to four on the court simultaneously. This is a significant shift that will reshape the competitive landscape.

> **The restructure means the league you sign into in 2025–26 may look very different by 2026–27. Understand which tier your club is likely to land in under the new system.**

Salary Protection and Late Payment Enforcement

Japan is generally one of the most reliable markets for on-time payments. Japanese business culture prioritizes honoring commitments, and B.League clubs, especially in B1, tend to pay on time.

- B1 clubs are generally financially stable. B2 and B3 clubs carry more financial risk.
- Your contract should specify exact payment dates and methods.
- If payments are late, follow the same escalation process: formal email to club, copy agent, escalate to league office, then FIBA BAT if necessary.

> OverseasX takeaway: Japan is one of the more financially reliable overseas markets, but do not skip the contract details. Protect yourself the same way you would anywhere.

How to Structure Financial Accounts

- Japanese bank account (required for salary deposits). Your club should help you open one. Bring your passport, residence card, and seal/signature.
- Multi-currency account (Wise, Revolut) for JPY-to-USD conversion. Exchange rates matter given the significant yen fluctuations in recent years.
- U.S. home base account for savings and stability.
- Japan is still cash-heavy. You will need physical cash regularly.
- FBAR required if foreign balances exceed $10,000. FATCA if assets exceed $200,000.
- Residence tax is billed in arrears. Budget for this if you stay more than one year or leave mid-season.

> OverseasX takeaway: The yen-dollar exchange rate can significantly impact your actual earnings. Monitor it and plan your transfers strategically.

Legal Risks Overseas Athletes Should Prepare For

1. Drug-Related Arrest

The most serious risk in Japan. Zero tolerance, severe penalties, 23-day pre-charge detention.

2. Visa Compliance

Missing registration deadlines, working outside your visa scope, or failing to update paperwork after a club change.

3. Contract Disputes

Disagreements over salary, housing, or early termination. FIBA BAT is available for international disputes.

4. Tax Surprises

Residence tax arrears, not understanding gross vs. net, not filing U.S. taxes.

5. Medication Issues

Bringing prescription medications that are banned in Japan (Adderall, certain cold medicines) can result in arrest at customs.

6. Cultural Missteps

Tattoo restrictions, noise complaints, garbage violations. These are not criminal but can create serious friction with your club, neighbors, and community.

Key Takeaways for American Athletes

> Read your contract carefully. Every clause. Every payment term.
>
> Confirm your visa type and ensure your club handles the Certificate of Eligibility.
>
> Understand gross vs. net salary, especially given Japan's dual tax system.
>
> Do not bring any drugs, cannabis products, or banned medications into Japan. Check customs rules before packing.
>
> Hire a cross-border tax accountant who understands U.S.–Japan taxation.
>
> Confirm health insurance enrollment through your club.
>
> Download LINE. It is the primary communication app in Japan.
>
> Learn basic Japanese. Even a few phrases earn enormous respect.
>
> Respect the culture: punctuality, quiet, cleanliness, and humility define the standard.
>
> Embrace the experience. Japan offers one of the highest qualities of life in the world.

Regional Personality Breakdown: Japan

Japan is geographically diverse, stretching from the subtropical south (Okinawa) to the snowy north (Hokkaido). The B.League has teams across the entire country, and the experience varies dramatically by region.

1. Tokyo / Kanto Region

B1 Teams: Alvark Tokyo, Chiba Jets, Utsunomiya Brex, Kawasaki Brave Thunders, Koshigaya Alphas, Gunma Crane Thunders, and more

Crowd vibe: Tokyo-area clubs play in front of large, enthusiastic crowds. Chiba Jets and Alvark Tokyo have some of the strongest fanbases in the league. Production quality is high.

Lifestyle pace: Tokyo is one of the great cities in the world. Endless food, entertainment, culture, and nightlife. World-class public transit. Everything you could want is available.

Climate: Hot and humid summers, mild winters. The season runs through fall and winter.

Common trap: Tokyo is overwhelming. The sensory overload, the pace, and the endless options can derail your routine if you let them.

Fanbase type: Organized, enthusiastic, respectful. High production value. Growing rapidly.

2. Osaka / Kansai Region

B1 Teams: Osaka Evessa, and nearby clubs

Crowd vibe: Osaka is known for its warmth, humor, and directness. More outgoing than Tokyo. Basketball fans here are passionate.

Lifestyle pace: Fast but friendlier than Tokyo. Incredible street food culture (takoyaki, okonomiyaki). More affordable than Tokyo.

Climate: Similar to Tokyo. Hot summers, mild winters.

Common trap: The food scene can make discipline difficult. Osaka is called Japan’s kitchen for a reason.

3. Okinawa / Southern Islands

B1 Team: Ryukyu Golden Kings

Crowd vibe: The Golden Kings are one of the most successful and beloved clubs in B.League history. The fanbase is passionate, loyal, and deeply connected to the team.

Lifestyle pace: Island life. Subtropical climate, beaches, and a laid-back pace completely different from mainland Japan. Okinawa has a distinct culture influenced by its Ryukyu Kingdom history and U.S. military presence.

Climate: Warm year-round. Tropical in summer. Mild winters.

Common trap: Island isolation. Limited options compared to mainland cities. Away game travel is all flights.

Fanbase type: Fiercely loyal, proud, community-driven.

4. Northern Japan (Hokkaido / Tohoku)

B1 Teams: Levanga Hokkaido, Sendai 89ers, Akita Northern Happinets

Crowd vibe: Northern clubs have dedicated fanbases in smaller markets. The atmosphere is intimate and supportive.

Lifestyle pace: Slower, quieter, and more rural. Hokkaido has stunning natural beauty, excellent food (seafood, dairy, ramen), and heavy snowfall in winter.

Climate: Cold and snowy winters. Hokkaido experiences serious winter weather from November through March.

Common trap: Isolation and winter can test your mental health. Limited English speakers. Smaller social circles.

Fanbase type: Community-driven, loyal, appreciative.

5. Central Japan (Nagoya / Chubu)

B1 Teams: Fighting Eagles Nagoya, SeaHorses Mikawa, San-En NeoPhoenix, Shinshu Brave Warriors

Crowd vibe: Central Japan clubs range from urban (Nagoya) to rural. SeaHorses Mikawa have a strong tradition.

Lifestyle pace: Nagoya is Japan’s third-largest city with a more laid-back feel than Tokyo. Surrounding areas are quieter and more affordable.

Common trap: Smaller cities can feel isolating. Language barriers are more pronounced outside Nagoya.

6. Western Japan (Chugoku / Shikoku / Kyushu)

B1 Teams: Hiroshima Dragonflies, Shimane Susanoo Magic, Saga Ballooners, and others

Crowd vibe: Hiroshima Dragonflies won the 2024 B.League championship and have built tremendous momentum. Shimane has been one of the top clubs in recent seasons.

Lifestyle pace: Western Japan is generally slower and more affordable. Beautiful coastal and mountain scenery. Strong community identity.

Climate: Mild to warm. Kyushu is warmer than the Kanto region.

Common trap: Very limited English. Cultural adjustment is steeper in smaller western cities.

Fanbase type: Community-driven, growing, proud of local identity.

Fanbase Personality Decoder

Organized and enthusiastic: Coordinated chants, fan sections, high production. Common at major B1 clubs.

Community-driven: The team is the town. Your off-court behavior matters. Engage and you will be embraced.

Fiercely loyal: Small-market clubs where the team means everything. Buy in and you are family.

Growing: Newer or smaller clubs building their fanbase. Energy is building and your effort can help shape it.

How to Verify the Vibe Fast

Ask five imports who played in that city the same five questions:

- What is the crowd like after a loss?
- How do they treat imports during a bad stretch?
- Does the club pay on time?
- Is the club organized day to day?
- What is the biggest lifestyle adjustment?

If three out of five give the same answer, that is the truth.

Final Notes: Read This Before You Sign

Japan is one of the most unique and rewarding overseas basketball experiences available. The quality of life is exceptional. The fans are passionate and respectful. The league is growing rapidly. The country is safe, clean, and organized at a level that will genuinely surprise you.

But Japan also requires a level of cultural adaptation that most other markets do not. The language barrier is real. The social expectations are different. The drug laws are unforgiving. The bureaucracy is precise.

The athletes who thrive in Japan are the ones who embrace the culture with genuine respect, set their routines early, protect themselves with solid contracts, and approach every day with the discipline and humility that Japanese culture rewards.

If you are reading this while deciding, use it like a checklist. If you are reading this after you signed, use it like armor.

The goal is to play well, get paid, stay healthy, and leave Japan with an experience and a perspective that changes how you see the world.

Japan is precise, respectful, and extraordinary.

But precision does not replace preparation.