

How to Find Out Stuff in Tsukuba City

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Useful resources and personal advice from one foreigner to another

This article was originally written by Eleanor Olds Batchelder, with a little help from her friends. Note from Eleanor: I wanted to help newcomers get acquainted with the excellent information resources in the city as quickly as possible, so this guide is mostly about where to get information. It is specific to the Tsukuba area, and it pretty much ignores the enormous number of resources in Tokyo and/or nationally; however, you shouldn't!

The article was updated in March 2003 by Shaney Crawford and again in April 2007 by a number of Tsukuba residents on the occasion of the first Tsukuba Orientation for newcomers to the city. (See: <http://www.alientimes.org/Orientation>)

Key to this page:

Holidays: Everything in Japan tends to close in the period 12/28 to 1/4, so those are not noted here, but other holidays are. Always call ahead during that Year-End/Year-Beginning time. Language codes: [E]nglish, [J]apanese, [B]engali, [C]hinese, [F]rench, [G]erman, [I]talian, [K]orean, [Pe]rsian, [P]ortuguese, [R]ussian, [S]panish, [T]agalog, [Th]ai. [E/J] (with a slash mark) means two versions, one in English and one in Japanese, while [EJ] (no slash) means bilingual (same source handles both).

BEST INFORMATION SOURCES

City Hall(s)

When you apply for your alien registration card at the Sakura City Hall, go to the International Relations and Culture Division (on the main floor, to your right as you enter) and pick up some local newsletters, a garbage calendar [J] and explanation [ECK], and a map. If you are a short-term visitor (less than three months) and therefore don't need to register, visit the Sakura City Hall or the TsIC (see below) to pick up these items.

- Tsukuba City International Relations and Culture Division at the Sakura City Hall: Tel: 029-857-3132 [EJC], email: ctz030[at]info.tsukuba.ibaraki.jp, http://www.city.tsukuba.ibaraki.jp/hp/e_hp/
- All City Halls are open 8:30-5:15. Tel: 029-836-1111

Tsukuba Information Center (TsIC)

TsIC is not a tourist center, but is there to help new residents, both foreign and Japanese. The staff there includes two English speakers, but they are not always in the office. They have a lot of information about resources in Tsukuba, but you will have to be assertive and ask questions. On the plaza above the central bus terminal, next to Nova Hall. Open 10-5, seven days a week. Tel: 029-852-6789 [JEI], [www\[at\]info-tsukuba.org](http://www.info-tsukuba.org) <http://www.info-tsukuba.org/english>

- Short videos (8 minute) about life in Tsukuba [E/K/C/S/F]
- Classes in Japanese language and traditional arts, and a number of social activities; ask for the current schedule [EJ]
- Bulletin board for language lessons, goods for sale, etc.

- Daily newspapers and a couch to sit on while you read them (Japan Times, Herald Tribune)
- Lending library of books [EJ]
- Help with language problems, such as reading the Japanese yellow pages, making phone calls in Japanese to get information, etc.

TAIRA List

TAIRA is an email list for the foreign community in Tsukuba to exchange information about life in Japan. Even before you arrive, subscribe to it (email to [majordomo\[at\]eve.bk.tsukuba.ac.jp](mailto:majordomo[at]eve.bk.tsukuba.ac.jp) with 'subscribe TAIRA' in the message body). You'll receive 5-10 messages a day on a variety of subjects, at least some of which are likely to be useful and interesting to you. It is the best place to ask for whatever specific information you need: Where to buy large-size ski boots? How can I see Japanese in my computer? Where can I find a piano teacher who speaks English? Often has announcements of local events, and cars and household furnishings for sale ("sayonara sales"), sometimes very cheaply. Most messages are in English, but members are from all over the world; if you send a message in your own language, probably people will respond (have to use the Roman alphabet, however).

- TAIRA archives: All of the messages on TAIRA are stored for future reference (thanks to Tadashi Takemori!). So, before asking a question of the whole list, try a fast keyword search of the archives at <http://eve.bk.tsukuba.ac.jp>
- There are other mailing lists for more specialized communities. See the Tsukuba Wiki page on mailing lists at http://tsukuba.wikia.com/wiki/Mailing_Lists or the "Email Lists" section on the Website Collection page on the Alien Times website at <http://www.alientimes.org/Main/TsukubaWebsiteCollection>. These groups and their contact points change, as people come and go, so ask in your workplace, post a query on TAIRA list, or start one yourself!

Tsukuba Public Library

In the "Ars" (a-ru-su) building, just north of Tsukuba Center, accessible from the pedestrian walkway or the street. Stop at the circulation desk and ask for the Guide pamphlet [J/E/C/K], then head for the foreign books section (on your left as you enter the front door). A good selection [E/C/F/G/I/?/K/P/R/S] of general fiction and nonfiction, including many books on Japanese life, culture, travel, etc., and travel guides for foreign countries, and some maps of Japan and Tsukuba in English. Residents can get a borrower's card quickly. Open: Tu-Fr 9:30-7:00; Sa-Su 9:30-5:00; closed Mo and various other days, get a current calendar when you visit. It may be buried in a Japanese flyer, so ask (karendaa). Tel: 029-856-4311 [J] http://www.city.tsukuba.ibaraki.jp/hp/e_hp/guide/library.html

- Children's books in various languages
- Latest edition of Alien Times (bound copy of back issues available on request)
- Magazines [E/C/F/G/K/S] and newspapers (Daily Yomiuri, Japan Times, New York Times, Herald Tribune, Student Times)
- Music CDs and cassettes, and videos [mostly J]
- Online catalog [J] (<http://www.city.tsukuba.ibaraki.jp/lib/iliswing/opac/Kensaku.jsp>) is a little hard to use, but try typing the author or title of a foreign-language book in capital letters.
- Interlibrary loan service is available.
- Three local branches, where material can be requested and returned, and bookmobiles.
- In the same building is a small art museum, with changing exhibits, and pamphlets about galleries and museums in the wider Ibaraki area. Meeting rooms upstairs can be rented.

Handbooks, directories, etc.

You may have to take a walk around town to get these, as they are not all available in one place. Have a look at the pamphlets section of the Alien Times site (<http://www.alientimes.org/topics/pamphlets.html>).

- My Town Tsukuba [E/J]. Absolutely indispensable city street map on one side, which shows the many bike/walking paths as well as the streets and highways, and then descriptive info on the other side. The name of this publication may change from time to time, so ask for "city map." [A4-size foldout, 2003]
- Tsukuba City Handbook [E]. History, etc. [A4-size pamphlet, 1999]
- Living in Tsukuba [EJ], International Div, Tsukuba City Office. Daily life (phones, schools, garbage, etc.). [A5 size, approx. 100 pp, 2001]
- Guidebook for Foreign Residents of Ibaraki [J+E/C/F/ P/T/Th], Ibaraki International Association. Duplicates Living in Tsukuba to some extent, but has other useful information, too. [A5 size, 2004]
- Tsuchiura/Tsukuba [JE] A good sightseeing guide for the local area, from the Tsuchiura-Tsukuba Convention Bureau. Descriptions are keyed to maps in the back. Prices and hours are only in Japanese, but you can perhaps decipher the numbers - look for the paragraphs printed in red. [A4 size, 23 pages]
- Tsukuba Portable Guide Book: Welcome to Tsukuba [EJ], Tsukuba City Tourism Division [51pp, 2005]
- Tsukuba Convention City, Facilities Guide [E/J]. Mostly business-oriented, but has a good section on things to see and do, and a listing of shops. Several copies in Public Library English section (291.3). [A5 size, 287 pp, 2000]
- Workplace resources: Find out what they offer at your workplace for orientation and support services. Ask for what you need. AIST-affiliated researchers, see http://www.aist.go.jp/aist_e/visit_aist/visitors/index.html.
- See "Tsukuba Web Guides" on AT site: <http://www.alientimes.org/Main/TsukubaWebsiteCollection>.

Newsletters

- Alien Times [E]: By and for foreigners in Tsukuba. Necessary. Back issues online at <http://www.alientimes.org> and some at the Library. Tel: 029-855-1907 [EJ]
- E-Ibaraki Report [ECPJ]: From Mito (Ibaraki Intl Assoc + Ibaraki Ken), so less relevant to life in Tsukuba, but has some general information and features. Tel: 029-301-2857 <http://www.pref.ibaraki.jp/bukyoku/seikan/kokuko/e-ibaraki-report/index.html> [JE].
- Joyo Living [J]: Weekly newspaper for the Tsukuba/Tsuchiura area, with a lot of information about local activities, etc., but all in Japanese. Available at the Library and TsIC. Just thought you should know it exists.
- Tsukuba City Newsletter [E]: Events and service announcements, concert hall schedules etc. From Tsukuba City International Relations and Culture Division. Tel: 029-857-3132 [EJC]. Back issues at http://www.city.tsukuba.ibaraki.jp/hp/e_hp/
- TsukuBlog [E]: Articles about events, activities, news, history of Tsukuba. Updated daily. (Only available online: <http://blog.alientimes.org>)

TOPICS (ALPHABETICAL)

Activities and Groups

For relaxation, meeting people, improving yourself, or just killing time...

Groups aimed at foreigners and/or in English

- Ibaraki Hash House Harriers: the drinking club with a running problem (ibaraki3.infoseek.ne.jp)
- ITC (International Training & Communication): meets 2nd Tue. afternoon of the month to prepare and give speeches in English (IHMelissa[at]aol.com, <http://www.kasei.ac.jp/cs/mariko/ITC/Tsukuba.html>)
- RVC ("Russian Vodka Ceremony"): football club, plays soccer almost every Sunday afternoon at the NIRE pitch, on Nishiodori ([carninci\[at\]rtc.riken.go.jp](mailto:carninci[at]rtc.riken.go.jp))
- TsIC offers informal gatherings such as Conversation Across Cultures (English chatting time) and Japanese chatting time; see above.
- Tsukuba Toastmaster's Club [EJ]: public speaking & international communication (Ms. Suzuki 029-853-8201, [garden\[at\]mail1.accsnet.ne.jp](mailto:garden[at]mail1.accsnet.ne.jp), <http://www.kit.hi-ho.ne.jp/toastmasters>)
- Tsukuba Walking and Mountaineering Club (TWMC): organizes hikes on weekends (<http://eve.bk.tsukuba.ac.jp/twmc>)
- Cricket Tsukuba: plays cricket in Amakubo Park. ([mr_innocent2\[at\]hotmail.com](mailto:mr_innocent2[at]hotmail.com), <http://members3.jcom.home.ne.jp/blossomy/cricket/index.html>)
- In addition, check the TAIRA Community Page, TAIRA list, and Alien Times for new groups forming (or start one!).

Groups which are largely for, and in, Japanese

No one keeps a list of these, but here are some types that I know exist, to fire your imagination. When you decide what you want, ask at the TsIC, ask at your workplace, ask!

- Dance: square dance, folk dance, social dance, ballet, flamenco, etc.
- Music: orchestra, choir, piano, drum/taiko
- Lessons: ikebana, kimono, tea ceremony, shamisen, etc.
- Sports: search Alien Times; check "pool" and "gym" in the TAIRA Archives. The various universities may have facilities that are open to outsiders, but information is mostly in Japanese; you will need to be resourceful.

Spectator events

- Concerts and performances at Nova Hall and Capio Hall. Pick up flyers in their lobbies [J]. English listings for the current month in Tsukuba Newsletter and Alien Times.
- Comprehensive list of traditional events at http://hpcgi2.nifty.com/tradevents/index_e.cgi
- Movies: Cineplex 8 Tsukuba, in Tsukuba You World on Route 354 between Higashi and Nishi Odori, <http://www.kadokawa-cineplex.co.jp/tsukuba/> [J].
- Bars and restaurants with English language and/or foreign clientele: See ads in Alien Times and notices on TAIRA.

Bicycles

- If you have a good bicycle, register it. (My registered bike was stolen, and recovered by the police six months later.) Bikes are sometimes stolen even from apartment bike-shelters.

- For safety, use the 100-yen-a-day bike garage near the bus terminal. If you tell them you'll be late, you can pick it up even after closing time. This late-pickup arrangement is not absolutely secure, but thefts are rare.
- For parking, see: <http://www.alientimes.org/Main/FindingAParkingSpaceForYourBicycleInTsukuba>

Books to Borrow or Buy

Libraries

- Tsukuba Public Library, see above.
- List of libraries in Tsukuba: <http://blog.alientimes.org/2007/03/libraries-in-tsukuba/>
- The local universities have libraries that are more or less accessible to the public: U. of Tsukuba, Tsukuba Gakuin U. They have online catalogs accessible via the Internet.
- The Tsukuba Christian Center has a large collection of books that you can borrow freely, or donate yours; also family-type videos. Call Tim at 029-855-1907 [EJ]. Also, informal lending libraries with English books at TsIC.

Bookstores with English books

Most new and used booksellers in Tsukuba have at least a shelf or two of foreign-language books. For a bit more, try:

- Maruzen Bookstore, above the University of Tsukuba post office, sells at about a 10% discount and will special-order almost any book for you at no extra charge. Tel: 029-858-0409 [J].
- Kumazawa Bookstore (LaLa Garden)
- Libro Bookstore, Seibu Department Store (5th floor)
- Kasumi Book Land (south of Jusco/Seibu/Creo)
- Internet booksellers will ship to Japan, either fast/expensive or slow/cheap, and may be cheaper than buying imported books locally. Also try <http://www.amazon.co.jp>.

Buses and Trains

- Tsukuba Express train line runs to Akihabara in 45 minutes (express) to 57 minutes (every stop). Consider buying a Pasma card (<http://blog.alientimes.org/2007/03/densha-mo-bus-mo-pasma/>).
- Pass up the Bilingual Transportation Map, and get the free Kanto-Tetsudo Bus Route Map (EJ, 2000), and the accompanying 4-page list of bus routes, free at the Center Bus Terminal and TsIC. The bus-number system is new and not yet fully implemented, so be aware that in some buses the signs may not be visible (propped in lower part of front window), and most posted schedules and maps still have no numbers. Tsukuba Center bus terminal office is open seven days a week, 8:30-7:00 M-F, 9:00-7:00 SaSuHol. Tel: 029-852-5666 [J+ "a little" E]
- Free buses called "TsukuBus" make a circuit of the various city office branches about 8 times a day, and anyone can use them for their own purposes. Fares range from 100 yen to 400 yen depending on the destination. Get a map and schedule at TsIC or at any branch office of City Hall.
- Highway buses from Tsukuba Center to Narita (make advance reservations, Tel: 029-852-5666) and Haneda airports, to Tokyo and Mito, and between Tokyo and Tsukuba-san. Buy strips of 5 tickets for a 16% savings.
- JR trains: Take a bus to Tsuchiura, Arakawa-oki, or Hitachino Ushiku Stations. JR office in the Center Bus Terminal. Tel: 029-858-4458 [J]. M-F 10-6, Sa 10-5.
- General cautions: If you plan to travel early or late, check the first/last trip times (nothing runs all night in Japan). Also, beware of bus and train schedule changes over New Year's - not just the "holiday" schedule, but a completely different one.

Children

- **HEALTH:** Get [Mother and Child Health Handbook \[E/P/T\]](#) from your nearest Health Center (hoken sentaa), located next door to each City Hall. Tel: 029-836-1111. They also have a booklet on free immunizations and health checkups [E/J/C]. (Note: You can only get one copy of the Mother/Child Booklet.) You can also find additional information on monthly immunization schedules in the monthly multilingual editions of the Tsukuba City Newsletter, which you can find in the City Halls, Library or the Tsukuba Information Center. More details can also be accessed on Clinics and Health Centers on the City Hall website.
- **EDUCATION:** The Tsukuba City Hall website provides information on public school admissions policies as well as on the location and contact numbers of nurseries, schools, universities, children's halls, etc. There is also an international elementary school: Tsukuba International School, grades 1-6. Tel: 029-859-5553 [JE]. <http://www.tsukubainternationalschool.org>
- Tsukuba Mothers' Network is an international group that plans informal activities for mothers and preschool kids. Ask for current contact info at TsIC. tsukubamothers@yahoo.co.jp

Churches

For a listing of local religious activities in English, see [Religion](#) in Alien Times website (<http://www.alientimes.org/Category/Religion>).

Health Insurance

- If your company does not provide health insurance ("shakai hoken"), then you must enroll in the public health insurance plan provided by the national government ("kokumin kenkou hoken"). Visit the city hall after your arrival if you are not sure which one you have. Students usually belong to the national government plan, while researchers who are receiving salaries in Japan usually have insurance through their employers.

Internet

- Free public access to the internet is available at the Library, the Citizen's Support Centre, the Community Network Centre, some Community Centres and City Halls (soon to be all).
- Internet cafes: Non Cafe

Jobs

- Hello Work Tsuchiura (Public Employment Security Office) 029-822-5124 (Address: 1-18-19 Manabe Tsuchiura)
- Tsuchiura Labor Standards Inspection Office 029-821-5127 (Address: 2-14-11 Chuo Tsuchiura)

Language Study

- Tsukuba Cultural Foundation: Japanese conversation classes at Capio Hall (1-10-1 Takezono. Tel: 029-856-7007, email: [class\[at\]tsukubacity.or.jp](mailto:class[at]tsukubacity.or.jp))
- Tsukuba Professional Japanese Teachers Association: qualified Japanese language teachers provide various Japanese lessons (Ms. Suzuki 029-853-8201, [garden\[at\]mail1.accsnet.ne.jp](mailto:garden[at]mail1.accsnet.ne.jp), <http://www.geocities.co.jp/CollegeLife-Cafe/7017/office1.html>)
- TsIC: Keyaki-no-kai volunteer group offers several levels of Japanese classes
- Rainbow Club (niji no kai, or "the Ichinoya language class"): mostly for people affiliated with Tsukuba University, but sometimes accept others (Mrs. Ogawa, Tel: 029-874-0537 [JE])

- Private teachers of various languages post notices at TsIC, as well as individuals looking for language exchange partners.
- Check at your workplace to see if they sponsor in-house Japanese classes.
- While you are learning, don't be afraid to try to communicate any way you can. Use pidgin language and gesture. You'd be surprised how unnecessary words can be sometimes! (And this from a linguist...)

Legal Information

Consult in person or by phone at the Ibaraki International Association, Mito. Tel: 029-244-3811
[\[E/J/P/C/Th/T/\(Pe\)/S\]](#), 9-4:30. "Legal, labor, residency, marriage, and general life problems. Free and confidential, with interpreter."

Maps

The best city map is available free [\[J/E\]](#) at TsIC and City Hall (Sakura Branch - Int'l Relations and Culture Division. See the maps page of the Alien Times website for other possibilities (<http://www.alientimes.org/topics/maps.html>).

- See the Tsukuba Dictionary (http://www.city.tsukuba.ibaraki.jp/hp/e_hp/dictionary/index.html) for help on place names in Tsukuba.
- Street names: Be warned that most streets in Tsukuba are unnamed, a continuing inconvenience. In addition, the few named roads tend to have several names: "Noda Sen" = Route 354; "Ushiku-Gakuen Sen" = the north-south section of Route 408 just west of Tsukuba. Some road names are optionally preceded by "Gakuen" (Gakuen Higashi Odori = just plain Higashi Odori). Also, major roads in this area are called sen in Japanese, although elsewhere sen is usually reserved for train lines.
- Getting lost: Because of the lack of street names, and because neither houses nor lampposts display addresses (as elsewhere in Japan), it is a necessary local custom to use commercial landmarks ("turn left at Cocos"). Unfortunately, these are not marked on the maps. The locations (banchi names) displayed at major intersections are often unclear as to which of the four corners of the intersection the name refers to. Look for the very nice local area maps on signboards at some corners, which are useful if you are not headed in a direction "off the map," so to speak. In general, plan on getting lost the first time you go anywhere! However, Tsukuba is not that large, so you will soon get to know most of it, and it is generally a beautiful place to be lost in.

Medical Information

- Medical Handbook [\[J+E/C/P/Th/T\]](#) by Ibaraki International Association at TsIC.
- Health counselling and free HIV testing at the Ibaraki Public Health Service Center, Matsushiro 4-27. First and third Mondays of the month [\[E\]](#), or second and fourth [\[Th\]](#), 1-5 p.m. Tel: 029-851-4920.
- Schedule of emergency medical service (rotated among local doctors) is printed in English each month in Tsukuba Newsletter.

Pets

- Some landlords do not want pets in apartments and you should check your lease before signing it. In some cases, you may have to enroll in a "Pet Insurance Plan" that will cover any damage done.

Shopping

Household furnishings, appliances, etc.

- TAIRA List announces many sayonara sales.
- Department stores: Seibu and Jusco in the Center; Joyful Honda (Arakawaoki), Yamashin Gran Stage.
- 100-yen shops are great for lots of little stuff. One of the best is Daiso (in Dayz Town or on Route 354 straight out from the south exit of the AIST institute area). Look for others in your neighborhood.
- Recycle shops: There are a quite a few in Tsukuba, not so cheap, but better than buying new. Look under "risaikuru" in the local yellow pages, and check the TAIRA archives.

Daily necessities

- Ask your neighbors where they get their groceries. If possible, check before you commit to a place to live, as some locations are rather inconvenient to any markets.
- In Tsukuba, as in all of Japan, convenience stores (conbini) are open all the time and sell many different kinds of things; get acquainted with them.

Sightseeing

- For trips near Tsukuba and throughout Ibaraki, visit the Tsukuba City Tourist Center, just outside the gates at Tx Tsukuba Station.
- For annual local events, see <http://hpcgi2.nifty.com/tradevents/>, Alien Times (<http://www.alientimes.org>), and TsukuBlog (<http://blog.alientimes.org>). Try looking up "festival," "onsen," "sightseeing" on the TAIRA archives, or post a query on TAIRA List.