

General Misawa Information

Weather:

Winters are cold, but not biting so. It rarely gets below zero without wind chill. It can and does get below zero with the wind chill. It is very dry here in the winter. We get an average of 10-12 feet of snow annually. It usually comes in 1-4 inch increments. It snows often... kind of like rain showers in Florida. The sun then comes out and melts some of the snow. There's rarely more than 6 inches on the ground unless we get a large dump of snow. If you can, buy your winter coats from the states, as the BX here doesn't seem to realize how cold it can get here and doesn't stock truly warm winter coats. (In my opinion.) Buy a car with 4-wd or at least front wheel drive for obvious reasons.

In the spring things warm up and it rains a lot. Snow can sometimes last past Easter. June is the rainy season. Spring is a very beautiful time of year. The cherry blossoms are awesome!

Summers are very humid and sometimes hot. We can have a couple to several weeks of 90+ degrees and 90% humidity. On-base housing doesn't have AC. Window units are NOT allowed *either*. *We don't get AC as Misawa summers are typically* not that hot for a long enough time to warrant it. Off-base houses typically have an AC in the living room and sometimes in the master bedroom.

Fall is nice as things cool down. It can again rain a lot, Snow starts in November, but doesn't really accumulate until January.

Typhoon season runs from June to November. But we don't usually see any until August/September. But, by the time a typhoon reaches us from the south its usually nothing more than a bad wind and rainstorm.

Schools: Misawa has one Jr/Sr high school; two elementary schools. We have a youth center (Lunney) and a teen center (Wakasa) for the kids to use. There are many various playgroups available for younger children and parents to attend. Child development centers usually have waiting lists. Home day care providers may help out in this area.

Sports: All kinds for all ages. Ask about specific sports if you want. We even have a indoor swimming pool that's open year round with swimming lessons and aqua aerobic classes.

The Food court in the BX mall complex currently has: Anthony's Pizza (delivers), Baskin Robbins, Taco Bell Express, Robin Hood, A & W Express and Charlie's Steak House (sandwich type). The BX mall now also has a Cinnabon and Seattle's Best Coffee. The Mokuteki (Cafe Mokuteki) which is open 24 hours now delivers (main base only) as well.

Cars: Everyone buys used. You can't take Japanese cars back to US without it costing a fortune. It is now possible to bring a car from the US to Japan but it can cost \$3-5000 for the process to get it registered here. It's usually not worth the cost and effort. The average used car price is \$2-4,000, with trucks and vans running up towards \$ 7,600. But you can often find a decent car for less. Sometimes you can even get one free (they go fast, usually just junkers.) Make sure it has 2 years Japanese Compulsory Insurance (JCI) on it.

Or at the very least one year JCI left on it. You must also purchase liability insurance on top of JCI.

Pets: If you brought a pet, keep all the paperwork you needed to bring it with you. We have a veterinary clinic on base. There are also 2 vet clinics off base that speak good English and in fact they are sometimes cheaper! In the event of an emergency after hours you may call the hospital emergency room (NOT 911!!!!) to have them call the vet on call, or you may have to use the off base clinics. There are also people who pet-sit as a home business.

Military personnel will get up to 20 hours of FREE child care when you PCS in or out of Misawa.

Recreation: You won't like it here only if you choose not to. There is so much to see and do it'll, quite possibly, take you your whole tour to see it all! Skiing (dirt cheap!), snow/ice festivals, ice-skating, hockey, sledding, snow shoeing, etc. are available in the winter. Spring brings more festivals, cherry blossoms, and trips/tours. Summer has water skiing, canoeing, paddleboats, swimming, hiking, trips/tours, festivals, camping, etc. More of same in fall. The Japanese LOVE it when we join in on their festivals. It doesn't matter if you know what you're doing or not! The base regularly has trips/tours offered. Plus, many places are within easy driving distance. We also have an indoor heated swimming pool (The Himburg) that's open year around and they offer swimming classes and water aerobics.

The People: Japanese are some of the most polite, friendly: and courteous people. Just remember their culture and customs are different from ours and we are in their country and that this "ain't Kansas any more Toto." Japan is also a very SAFE country.

Yes, you can drink the water here. Fresh fruits and vegetables (in season) and seafood are cheaper and better quality off base. Just wash all fruits & veggies first. The commissary doesn't carry fresh chicken but it's cost is quite reasonable at the Japanese grocery stores.

Phones: US portable/cordless phones are ILLEGAL in Japan, It's a \$10,000 fine if caught with one. All phones ON base are DSN lines. The bill comes directly out of your Sure Pay, long distance is separate and you must arrange for it from one of the local agencies you'll see advertised. Long distance services are available for as little as .11 a minute. Phone cards are great too.

Phones in homes OFF base can be one of the following: an already paid for phone line (owned by landlord) and phone lines you can either rent or buy (to buy is about \$400). Renting the phone line for 800 yen per month is the most common these days. Or you may have no phone at all.

Internet Access: The on-base IPS offers analog dial-up and ADSL but the cost is high compared to the prices off-base. On-base you'll pay \$30/mo for analog and \$60/mo for ADSL. The ADSL service on-base is definitely sub-par. If living off-base ISDN or ADSL is the definite way to go. Flat rate (no per minute cost) ISDN service is \$20-25/mo and ADSL is as low as \$30/mo. The choice depends on where you live. If you're too far from downtown then ISDN is the only option. The ADSL service right in town can provide up to 1.5 meg throughput while being a few kilometers out it will be slower. I get about 400K throughput on average.

Catalog/Internet shopping is very popular here. Family Services has catalogs for loan out if you need any. Family Services also runs a loan closet for anything you may need temporarily. Items such as cribs, high chair, pots/pans, irons/boards vacuums, microwaves, etc. are available.

TV and Radio stations: Misawa currently doesn't have cable TV on-base. Here's what we have: Channel 4-weather, 6-spectrum (variety), 7-AFN Atlantic (Same programming as AFN Pacific, just 6 hours later), 8-ESPN, 9-Commander's -Access Channel, 10-Channel "V" (Asian music channel), 11-AFN Pacific, 12-Community/Services Access Channel, 13-STAR sports, 20-CNN Asia, 23-Chinese TV, 24-Navy movie channel, 25-BBC news. The rest is Japanese.

AFN Pacific broadcast off-base. AFN also now offers 4 satellite TV channels. You'll have to spend about \$100 for the dish and \$25/mo to rent the decoder. My preference is Skyperfect TV (digital satellite service). I get FOX, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, CNN, BBC news, Discovery, National Geographic, Super Channel, History Channel, Animal Planet and a couple movie channels for about \$35/mo.

The Japanese channels are very interesting even if you don't understand it! And on the weekends they will sometimes (Sundays at 9pm) play movies in English.

For radio, we have one AM channel-AFN. If you live on base, you can hook your home stereo up to the TV cable and pick up a bunch more.

Medical: The hospital is generally good for routine care. More complicated cases get referred to Okinawa or Hawaii. Having a baby here is no problem as they're a well practiced baby factory.

The dental clinic sees dependents for annual teeth cleaning ONLY during their sponsor's birth month.

Travel in/out of country: Most people end up flying out of Tokyo to their onward destinations. Getting to Tokyo is a one hour flight or three hours on the bullet train. The basic cost is about \$130-140 each way. You can drive to Tokyo in 8 hours but the tolls will cost you \$120 each way! A lesser used option is flying Korean air out of Aomori (1.5 hour drive) to Seoul and then onward.