

# **I. Japanese housing conditions**

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In Japan, land price is expensive and housing conditions regarding its rent and size are not good compared to other countries. Accommodation is a very serious problem even for the Japanese particularly in urban areas, which lack spacious and low cost housing.

## **1. Japanese rental housing**

In Japan there is both public housing and private housing. Apartments make up the majority of rental housing.

### **a) Public housing**

Public housing is provided by official organizations such as prefectural, city, and town governments, and housing supply corporations. Any non-Japanese who has an alien registration can apply for this kind of housing regardless of nationality. There are two types of housing: *Koei Jutaku* (public housing) is for people who have a low income; and *Tokutei Yuryo Chintai Jutaku* (delux family housing) and *Kosha/Kodan Jutaku* (Public Corporation housing) for those with a middle-class income. These apartments provide a certain level of facilities at relatively low rent. It is necessary to pay two to three months' rent as a deposit (guarantee money) at your tenancy, but key money which is necessary for private housing is not required. However, qualifications such as income are precisely determined, and only those who satisfy these qualifications can apply. As there are many applicants, the tenants are determined by lottery. After moving in, the tenants must comply with the regulations for use (i.e. nobody is allowed to live together with the tenants without permission). This type of housing is mainly apartments, which generally include kitchen, bath, and *oshiire* (closet), with one to four rooms.

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## **b) Private rental housing**

Private rental housing is owned by individuals and private companies. The type varies in rent and size.

### **\* *Aparto* (Apartment)**

These are mainly two-story buildings constructed from light-weight steel, wood, or mortar, and house 4 to 8 households. Some of them share a toilet and/or have no bath.

### **\* *Mansion* (Apartment)**

In Japan, housing which is bigger than an *Aparto* and built with reinforced concrete is called a *Mansion*. The insulation is better than an *Aparto*, and privacy is better. Some have a custodian living on the first floor or others have an underground parking lot.

### **\* *Detached house***

Detached houses have recently been designed using a mixture of Japanese and Western styles. Some of them have a garden.

There are several rental houses designed especially for non-Japanese' but not many.

## **2. Typical housing size and floor plan**

The area is indicated in square meters (m<sup>2</sup>) as well as original Japanese units, "jo" and "tsubo." One *jo* means one *tatami* mat, and is roughly 180 cm x 90 cm. ("Tatami" is a unique Japanese floor covering). One *tsubo* is 182 cm x 182 cm or about 3.3m<sup>2</sup> and equals approximately two *jo*. There are Japanese-style and Western-style rooms. A Japanese-style room has *tatami* mats and a Western-style room has flooring or a carpeted floor. Below is a typical Japanese housing floor plan.

### **• K, DK, LDK**

K means kitchen, D means dining room and L means living room. K means only a kitchen and DK means a dining room plus kitchen, and LDK means a room which has the function of a living room as well as dining room and kitchen. Therefore, 2DK means a house which has two rooms in addition to a room having the function of kitchen and dining room.

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- **UB**

UB means unit bath (unified formation bathroom), which includes bathtub, toilet and washbowl.

- ***Oshiire*** (closet)

This means a storage space in a Japanese-style room.

- **PS**

This means a pipe space containing drainpipes and wiring conduits.

- **MB**

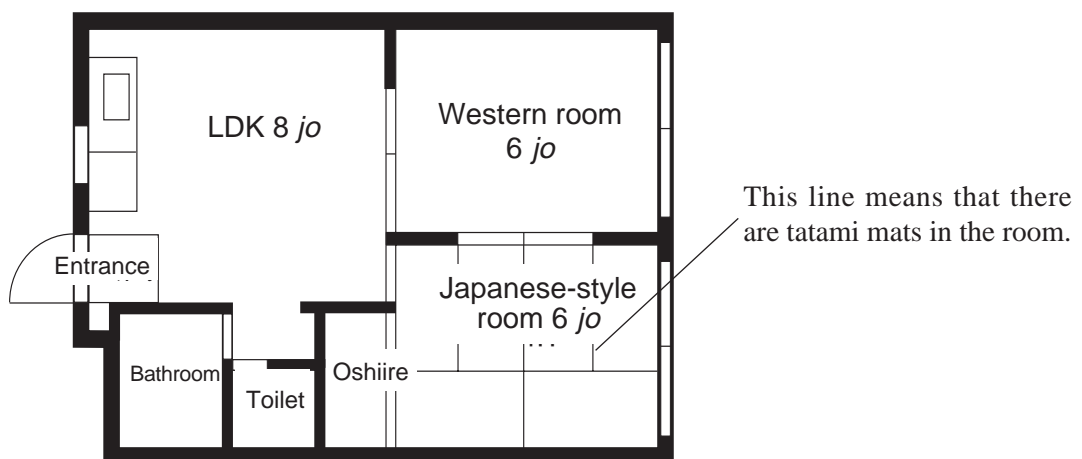
This means the meter box for water and gas.

- ***Air-con***

**a) Floor plan for rental apartments**

(Example)

- This is 2LDK.

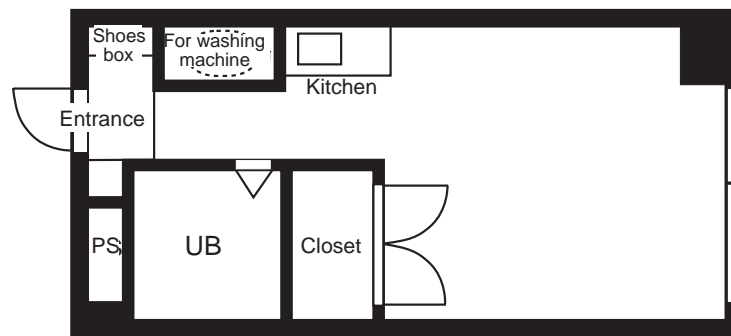


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**b) Floor plan for *One-room Mansions* (one-room apartments)**

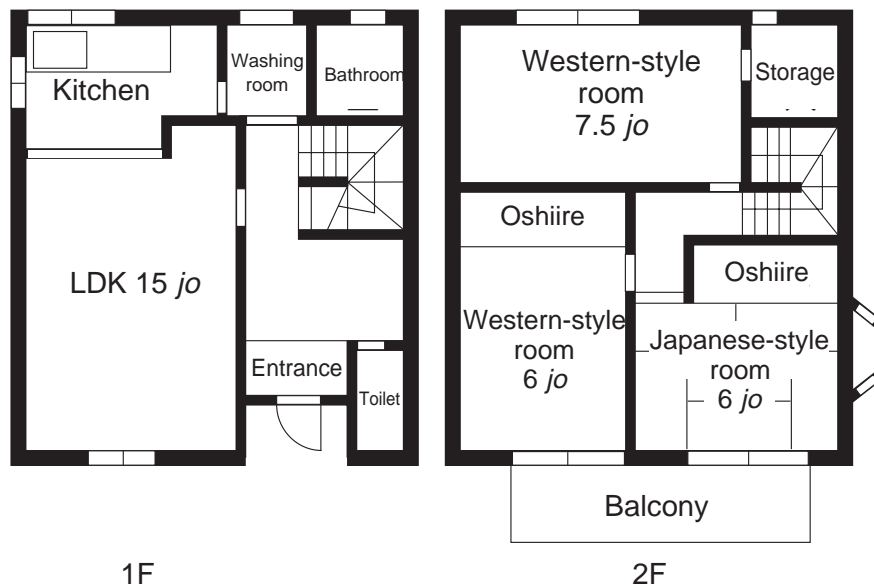
**(Example)**

This is private rental housing mainly for people living alone. Facilities are compact and there is one room which can be used as a living room. The kitchenette is very small, so that elaborate cooking is not possible. Some of them don't have any space for a washing machine inside the room.



**c) Floor plan for detached houses (Example)**

- Most detached houses in modern Japan have both Japanese and Western-style rooms.
- Some of them have a garden and a parking space.



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### 3. Customs regarding Japanese housing

#### a) Shoes

In Japanese housing, there is an area for removing shoes before stepping up into the main entrance. Japanese people sit on the floor and sleep on a *futon* on the *tatami*, the Japanese traditional floor mats, so stepping on them with shoes on is not allowed. If you enter a room wearing shoes and dirt the mats, you might have to pay repair costs.

#### b) Bathroom

In Japan bathing is not only washing the body but also a chance to relax while soaking in the bathtub. Recently bathrooms consisting of a Western-style bath with toilet have become popular, but the Japanese traditional bathroom is separate from the toilet and has a space to wash the body outside the bathtub. Bathtubs are mainly made of plastic or stainless steel. If you live with a Japanese family, you must keep the water in the bathtub as clean as possible because the rest of the family will take turns to use the water after you. Do not use soap in a Japanese-style bathtub. The water is heated mainly by gas.

#### c) *Tatami* mats

*Tatami* mats are a traditional floor covering of straw sewn to make a mat about 5.5 cm thick and bound by woven rush. One *tatami* mat (*jo*) is also the unit used to indicate the size of a room. New *tatami* is green and the *tatami* mats are changed every few years or whenever moving house.

#### d) *Futon* (thick bedquilt), bed and *oshiire* (closet)

In a Japanese house, generally the *futon* is rolled out every night and folded away in the *oshiire* every morning. During the daytime, the *futon* is kept inside the *oshiire*. In this way, a single room can be used for various purposes. If a bed is placed on the *tatami* mats, they are dented and damaged, so it is recommended to put boards under the legs of the bed.

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**e) City gas and propane gas**

Electricity or gas is provided for the stove and bath. There are two types of gas: city gas (coal gas), led to each household from gas company tanks, and propane gas, provided by dealers in the form of cylinders. City gas is managed by Tokyo Gas Co., Ltd. and propane gas is managed by individual dealers. Gas cookers etc. should be supplied by tenants.

**f) Water supply and drainage**

Almost all areas of Kanagawa Prefecture have water supply facilities. You can drink the tap water. In most cases there is a drainage or a water purification tank. The drainage system is not suitable for a disposer.

**g) Toilet**

The Japanese-style toilet has a cover (dome) at the front. When the toilet is shared with other tenants, separate toilet slippers should be used.

**h) *Fusuma* and *shoji***

These are unique Japanese sliding doors to separate rooms. *Fusuma* is a wooden frame with *fusuma* paper pasted on both sides. *Shoji* is a latticed wooden frame with *shoji* paper windows. It is possible to make a room bigger by removing *fusuma* to connect the rooms. *Fusuma* pasting should be done by a specialist but when *shoji* paper is torn, you can buy *shoji* paper and repair it yourself.

**i) Air conditioning / heating**

Some housing has air conditioning/heating but in most cases, tenants have to buy their own. Fuel for heating includes electricity, gas, and kerosene. Sometimes the use of kerosene is prohibited.

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## **4. Common problems and how to troubleshoot**

### **a) Remove footwear**

Do not enter a house with shoes on. Be sure to remove shoes at the entrance.

### **b) Deposit**

Most of the problems related to renting involve the deposit. In Japan when you rent a house, you have to pay a deposit to the house owner. This deposit is given to the house owner and returned without any interest when the lease is cancelled. However, repair costs are deducted, so the deposit is usually not returned in full. As the specific agreement of the rent is contained in the rental housing contract, please check the contract thoroughly and don't break it. As for the other expenses when making a contract, please refer to page 39.

### **c) Number of residents**

The number of residents is confirmed when the contract is made. Additional residents are not allowed.

### **d) Noise**

Do not make loud noises late at night. In apartments, the sound echoes more than you think. As the sound of running a large amount of water also bothers neighbors, try not to run a bath or do washing late at night.

### **e) Pets**

There are almost no apartments allowing pets other than small birds and goldfish. If you do find one where you can keep pets, please follow the rules.

### **f) Kitchen**

If you cook with a large amount of oil, clean the area soon after by wiping the sink and cooking area. The ventilation fan should also be cleaned regularly.



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**g) Putting out the garbage**

Garbage is collected by the municipal government. The collection point, date, and method are determined in each area. There are areas where flammable garbage and nonflammable garbage should be separated. As for large garbage items, there are areas where the collection date is already determined, or you can sometimes arrange to have them picked up. Please consult your neighbors or the municipal government.

**h) Long-term absence**

When you are not at home for a long time, you should notify the house owner. Rent must be paid even when you are away.

**i) Remodeling of the room**

If you want to remodel a room, such as by putting a nail into a pole or attaching a hook to the wall for holding clothes, you should first consult owner. It is assumed that you will leave the room in the condition it was in when you rented it. If you remodel the room and it cannot be returned to its original state, your deposit will not be returned, or additional payments may be required.