

Queer/Trans Life in Japan 2014



Stonewall Japan

“Stonewall Japan” was created in the early 90’s as a resource for queer/trans JETs. “Stonewall” refers to the 1969 riot in New York City, which is often cited as the beginning of the modern queer/trans rights movement in America. Stonewall is now an international symbol for queer/trans rights.

Stonewall Japan is an AJET special interest group for the purpose of bringing together queer/trans people and their allies. Stonewall offers queer/trans English-speakers in Japan the opportunity to connect and receive support from the JET / English-speaking community; we provide updates about events in your area as well as maintain online platforms for sharing experiences and fostering mutual learning.

Please note that in this hand-out we use the word “queer**” as a reclaimed umbrella term to represent the sexual minority community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, and many more). It is **not meant to offend**, but rather to more fully encompass the community without the inherent limitations of an acronym. It is also important to note that the word “queer” is an incredibly Western way of thinking about (sexual) identity, so “queer” in quotations is a convenient term, but a term that **may or may not work in Japan**(ese culture). **Trans(gender)** is also an umbrella term for non-cisgender identities (genderqueer, two spirit, pre-op/post-op, and many more) that is used throughout this resource that has similar limitations to the word “queer.”*

Connect with local and national social events hosted by Stonewall Japan through the following:

Website: stonewall.ajet.net

E-mail: stonewallsig@ajet.net

Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/363276580456886/> (search for “Stonewall Japan”)

Twitter Account: @StonewallJapan

A Bit About Being “Queer/trans” in Japan

Though originally widely accepted before Western influence, same-sex relations in Japan are now seen through quite a different lens¹. Most Japanese aren’t aware of the “queer” community, and those that are, are often dismissive. Being queer, being trans, and cross-dressing—though completely separate concepts—tend to be lumped together and thought of as one identity by most Japanese people. This is often because there is a large visibility of gay and transgender celebrities in Japanese media (primarily comedians).

Being “queer” is not illegal, but legal protections for sexual orientation are rare or non-existent. Both workplace and residential discrimination can, and sometimes do, occur. Recently, employment discrimination has become illegal in Tokyo and a few other cities. Sex changes are legally recognized, though same-sex partnerships are not. The activism that has spawned has primarily been a result of the international (Western) feminist movement².

¹ Pflugfelder, Gregory “Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950. University of California Press 2007.

² Shigematsu, Setsu “Scream from the Shadows: The Women’s Liberation Movement in Japan” University of Minnesota 2012

Within the “queer” and “trans communities” themselves, there are often many subgroups based on other facets of identity. This is known as “compartmentalization,” and you can see this most clearly in Tokyo’s gay district Nichome. Bars and clubs are often “known” for certain types of subgroups such as “guys who like foreign guys,” “guys in to jocks” “girls in to femmes” and kink communities. This might be a different style of community than your home country.



Coming Out

Choosing to come out or not is a hard choice for anyone, but the position of the JET participant presents its own unique challenges. The best advice is the simplest—do what’s best for you. Many JETs come out to their fellow JETs and close Japanese friends, but are more cautious with co-workers. Some never come out to anyone, and others are completely out to everyone in their life here in Japan. Make the decision based on how comfortable you feel in your everyday life and at your workplace.

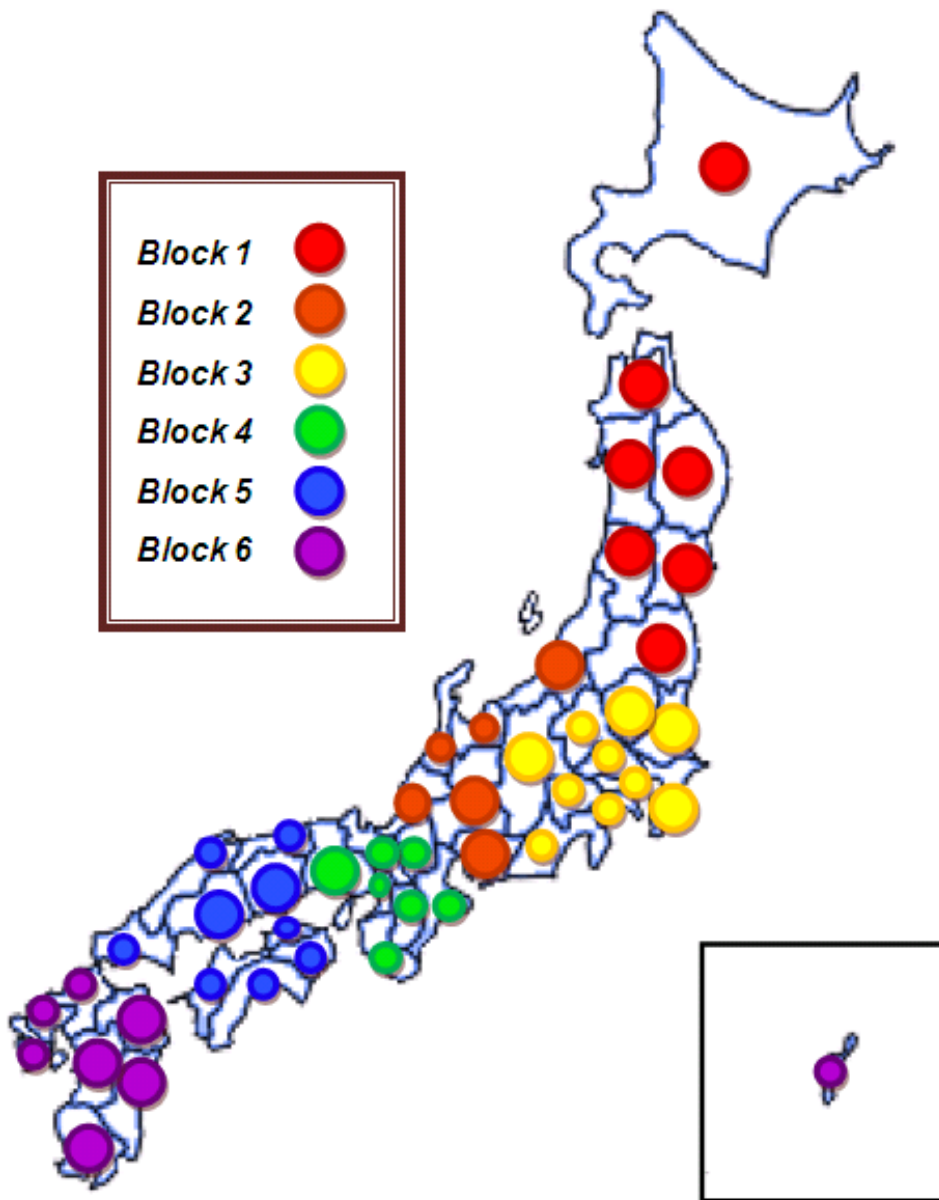
Most Japanese people don’t talk about their personal lives at work. Sexual identity may fall in to the category of “too much information” for the Japanese workplace, so it’s important to keep that in mind. Coming out could cause issues with co-workers, parents, or friends who don’t know how to feel about “queer” people. It could also cause unnecessary stereotyping, and might further “Other” or “foreign’nize” you. The important question to ask yourself when deciding on coming out is **how important is your queerness to you?** And is it worth risking **possible** ostracization and friction with your workplace? As JETs, we can be role models for our students and share our culture with others. Our queerness can be an important aspect of our culture and sense of self too. Many queer/trans JETs gain fulfillment through sharing their experience as queer/trans individuals. It’s important to make the choice that is best for you after a lot of thought, consideration, and observation of your surroundings.

Building Community

Like most places, Japan has a “queer/trans” community: it’s just that you might have to do a bit more searching for it than you might be used to. Major cities (Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Fukuoka, and Sapporo) will generally have some sort of “scene,” i.e. some bars and maybe a dance club or two. Modern resources (the Internet and smart phone applications) will help you greatly – find one or two places online, then ask the people you meet there about the rest! Asking senpai-JETs in your area—that you trust and identify as allies—is also an excellent way to get connected.

Stonewall strives to create community with monthly events, meet-ups, and newsletters. Stonewall utilizes the Block System. We have split up the country in to 6 blocks, and assigned a Block Leader for each area. Your Block Leader would be the best resource to get you connected to your specific area. Please find your prefecture / area on the map attached and contact your block representative directly for more specific information about your region.





Block 1 Rep (Hokkaido, Aomori, Iwate, Akita, Miyagi, Yamagata, Fukushima)
stonewallblock1@gmail.com Caroline Noel and Cat Dinh

Block 2 Rep (Niigata, Toyama, Ishikawa, Fukui, Gifu, Aichi)
stonewallblock2@gmail.com TBA

Block 3 Rep (Tochigi, Gunma, Nagano, Chiba, Tokyo, Kanagawa, Shizuoka, Yamanashi, Ibaraki, Saitama)
stonewallblock3@gmail.com Cameron

Block 4 Rep (Shiga, Kyoto, Hyogo, Mie, Osaka, Nara, Wakayama)
stonewallblock4@gmail.com Susannah and Louis Williams

Block 5 Rep (Tottori, Shimane, Okayama, Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Tokushima, Kagawa, Ehime, Kochi)
stonewallblock5@gmail.com Karmen Rabe and Kalia Earsley
 [Honshu]

Block 6 Rep (Fukuoka, Saga, Nagasaki, Oita, Kumamoto, Miyazaki, Kagoshima, Okinawa)
stonewallblock6@gmail.com Karmen Rabe and Kalia Earsley [Okinawa]

Resources

We have a lot of resources on the stonewall website (<http://stonewall.ajet.net/>). However, we know that most JETs will not have Internet for quite a while. Here is a list of important phone numbers, upcoming events, and a few essential websites. For more resources, please check out our website and contact your block representatives!

Phone Numbers:

Tokyo English Lifeline Lifeline (TELL):	03-5774-0992
Tokyo English Lifeline (TELL) Counselling:	03-4550-1146
AIDS helpline:	0120-04-8840
HIV & Human Rights English Information	03-5259-0256 (Tokyo – Saturdays 11am-2pm) 07-2043-4105 (Osaka – Saturdays 1pm-6pm)
Suicide Hotline	(English services in Tokyo) 03-5286-9090 (Osaka) 06- 4395-4343
AJET Peer Support Group	050-5534-5566 8pm-7am everyday



Events:

Tokyo Rainbow Pride	http://tokyorainbowpride.com/en/parade
Kansai Rainbow Pride	http://blog.kansaiparade.org/
Kansai Queer Film Festival	http://kansai-qff.org/index_en.html
Tokyo International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival	http://tokyo-lgff.org/2013/

Websites with further resources:

Stonewall Japan	http://stonewall.ajet.net/
LGBT Resources	http://www.being-a-broad.com/2011/07/lgbt-in-tokyo/
Kanto Dyke Weekend	http://dykeweekend.wordpress.com/
Tokyo Nichome Event Guide (Japanese)	http://www.2chopo.com/
Lesbian Life in Japan (Blog)	http://lesbianjapan.wordpress.com/
Utopia-Asia (Gay men's resources in Asia)	http://www.utopia-asia.com/tipsjapn.htm
List of Gay bars in Shibuya (Tokyo)	http://keivi.com/

