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International Professional Positions – Adjusting to the Japanese Culture

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Starting a new professional position in a foreign country offers some exciting and wonderful new prospects, as well as many challenging ones. Unique experiences, the opportunity to learn about and become intimately familiar with a new culture, the chance to learn a new language, and, of course, the opportunity to pursue research opportunities not available in the US, are all positive aspects of deciding to join a foreign research institute. Adjusting to a new culture, and particularly a new workplace culture, can be very difficult, however. I will relay my experiences as a postdoc, and then an assistant professor, at one of the leading research institutes in Japan. Having lived and worked there for over two and a half years, I have discovered both the positive (ramen and “onsen” – outdoor public bath) and negative (“karoushi” – death from overwork) sides of this major life decision. I hope to answer questions prospective foreign researchers may have about the difficult and very rewarding prospect of joining a foreign research institute.