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# Working in Japan as an Actuary

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In this interview, I invite Mac Kurata, an actuarial recruiter specializing in the Japanese and Australian markets, to share his experience of working in Japan as an actuary.

## What are the advantages of working in Japan?

- Getting to know one of the most sophisticated markets in Asia.
- Earning a good salary and experiencing the various cultural aspects of the country--the food, the history and the language.

## What are the disadvantages?

It is difficult to get by in Japan without knowing the language.

## What are the challenges of getting a job in Japan?

Conveying a positive impression to interviewers by telephone can be a challenge for candidates not based in

Japan. The Japanese market is unique and it is not always easy for foreigners to understand the dynamics. I would certainly recommend using a native Japanese recruiter who is very familiar with local market and who is well connected with senior actuarial /management. Often, job descriptions are not available and recruiters have good insight into the market.

## Must a candidate speak Japanese?

It is definitely an advantage to speak Japanese, although many actuarial positions often focus more on the 'technical' skills rather than language skills.

## Where are you seeing the greatest demand for actuaries in Japan?

- Junior level pricing roles
- Senior level valuation roles
- ALM/investment related (nontraditional) roles

**Are there companies you are aware of who are seeking employees to move from abroad?**

The companies in Japan are not explicitly looking for employees from abroad, but they are certainly open to them for some senior level roles.

**How can a U.S./Canadian actuary working in a Japan keep up with exams?**

You can work in Japan using SOA, IOA or IAA qualifications as a company can register you as a “student actuary” in the Japanese actuarial association.

**How does the Japanese work culture differ from North America in your eyes?**

In general, there is a still ‘longer working hours’ culture, but it is not as demanding as some other markets in Asia-Pacific markets such as Hong Kong and mainland China.

**How do the salaries and cost of living compare to that of actuaries in North America?**

Salaries in Tokyo compare favorably with the United States, and the income tax is lower. The cost of living is usually considered to be very high, but this isn’t strictly true as people can easily choose more inexpensive options. There are also many conveniences and healthy lifestyle options as well.

**What are the key attributes an actuary or actuarial student would need to work in Japan?**

Technical skills are expected, but an open attitude to learning the language and the culture is an enormous advantage. Obviously, practical experience within the Japanese market would be highly advantageous as well.

**How is the job market for entry-level actuaries?**

The market for entry level is strong—many jobs are widely available in the market and, especially if you are bilingual, there will be even more opportunities to explore.

**What is the best thing about working in Japan?**

Cultural experience: Japanese food, great nature and environment with convenient transportation, safety and cleanliness. The beach and mountains are within an hour or two by train from Tokyo. ☆