

Gifts

You will want to bring some gifts to Japan.

Keep in mind that truly it is the "thought that counts". You don't need to spend a lot of money or bring something big. (You might not have room in your suitcase, anyway!) Many delegates find that they can make gifts, or that their friends and family and even local businesses and organizations have new, unused items to contribute.

Most delegates will bring a gift for each host family member and a family gift such as a photo book showing scenes of Alaska. In addition to that, they will bring other items such as small boxes or bags of cookies and candy, a favorite CD, magazines, a toy or game or a favorite snack that they will bring out later during the exchange for the family to share. If you plan to bring a DVD, keep in mind that Japan is not in the same region as the USA and the DVD will have to be "region free" to play on their player.

The information sheet that you will receive from your host family may give you ideas about things that they might like. You might see that the younger brother likes soccer or baseball and bring an item with name of your local or state team. You might read that the grandfather likes to fish and bring an item from your local tackle shop. Or you might see that they wear hats, and bring a cap with the name of your town on it. Ask your own family members for suggestions. If your host has a seven year old brother, you can ask a seven year old that you know for ideas. But it's ok if the items that you bring are more general, such as caps, pens, food, etc.

Japanese homes are small and lack extra storage room, so it's ok to bring items that can be consumed, like food, or which are small in size. For example, if you make pottery, bring one or two small dishes rather than a large one. If someone likes Legos, bring one of the small or medium-sized sets.

Your host family would enjoy items that are unique to you and to your town or Alaska. They may be items that have the name and logo/symbol of your city, state or school, or items from your 4-H club. Homemade foods sometimes don't make it through customs, so it's best to bring something

made for sale in a store. Specialty food products are nice, as long as they don't contain meat, which won't make it through customs. Commercially-packed smoked salmon and fish jerky are ok. If your local products are liquid, such as goats' milk lotion, for example, be sure and pack them in a ziploc bag and don't carry them on the plane if they are larger than 2 oz in size. Put them in your suitcase. There may be other products unique to your area, such as a special tool, kitchen item, etc. No knives or ulus in your carry-on, of course.

If your town has a tourist area, or a section of Wal-Mart or another store that has a tourist department, look for items with the name or symbols of Alaska (moose, bears, aurora, etc.) or your city on them. You may also find items with business, school, organization or 4-H logos for sale in shops or as a fundraiser by local organizations. Some of these items may even be free. In Fairbanks, we often see new items with local designs on them at second-hand shops and garage sales. Possible items would be: socks, kitchen towels, pot holders, small kitchen items, tote bags, bandannas, stationery items like note cards and note pads, caps (medium or large, or adjustable), t-shirts (buy adult small or medium for women and medium for men). These stores often also sell small photo books or postcards of your area and specialty food items.

You or a family member may wish to make something for your host family. Handmade items are appreciated in Japan. Possible ideas: Christmas ornament or window ornament, note cards illustrated with your photos or drawings, simple necklaces, cloth tote bags, small pots or wooden dishes, wood carvings, pins and brooches (many Japanese don't have pierced earrings and earrings aren't allowed at school), small sculptures, quilted items, small wall hangings, placemats, coasters, hand-painted t-shirts, items you made in 4-H, keychains, knitting/crochet/weaving, small paintings or drawings, metalwork, leatherwork, something personalized with their name.

In addition to bringing a gift for each member of your host family, please plan on bringing something for your host's Labo tutor, the leader of their Labo Party. This could be the book that you plan to read to the Labo Party members, such as *The Little Red Hen*, *The Three Little Pigs*, *The Billy Goats Gruff*, or another short picture book with lots of repetition. And bring stickers, pins, pencils or candy (Jolly Ranchers or other hard candy which won't melt in the heat) or other small items to share at a club meeting. This will be a good ice-breaker and they will appreciate the gifts.

TSA won't allow wrapped gifts in luggage, so bring some paper gift bags to use when you arrive in Japan. You can also use reuseable shopping bags as gift bags.

Japan is a gift-giving culture. Be prepared to have some small gifts to give people who help you. This might be the neighbor who takes you shopping, or another Labo family who takes you sightseeing. A good way to be always ready for these situations is to carry a ziploc bag of pins, postcards or other small items in whatever you use as a day bag--the purse, messenger bag or backpack that you carry on day trips so you can have your camera, etc. with you. The postcards can feature 4-H or be photos of your state or town. If you do some shopping around, you should be able to find a shop that sells them for between 5 to 10 for \$1.00. In Fairbanks, the Wal-Mart store usually has a rack of 8 or 10 for \$1.00 cards next to the rack of more expensive ones. You may find that your local Visitor's Bureau or Chamber of Commerce has pins or postcards that they can give to you. They may also have free maps, so be sure and get one or more Alaska maps while you are there, and perhaps some brochures to use in your photo album. And don't forget your Legislators, if you haven't already asked for Alaska pins. Your state legislators may have a local office in your town. Each legislator is allowed a certain number of Alaska pins to give to their constituents. (That's YOU!) They have several designs, including the Alaska flag. As soon as you can (before they run out of pins), contact each of your representatives in the Alaska legislature and request some pins to take to Japan. You can give these to your host family, members of your Labo club (called Labo Party), to your Lodge mates at Labo Camp and to other people that you meet.

When you go to Labo Camp, there will be an International Bazaar to raise money for a charity. Each camper brings small non-food items to contribute to the sale and the items from the USA are very popular. They can have English writing or a flag on them or be an interesting design or cute. The items usually sell for the equivalent of 15 cents to a dollar. You can bring several of the same item or an assortment of small items such as stickers, pins, pencils, pennies glued on a card, bookmarks or keychains which have nice pictures and/or English writing on them and are under a dollar in value. You can make these, if you want. Many delegates bring items that are in good condition that they or friends have found at garage sales or already have around the house. If your school has book fairs, sometimes there are leftover bookmarks illustrated with book characters. Your local librarian

may be able to give you bookmarks, as well. The Fairbanks library sometimes has a basketful of new-looking bookmarks that people have left in books.

Keep in mind that you can only bring one suitcase and a carry-on and that you will be responsible for carrying everything yourself, so size and weight are important factors. Your host family will probably send you home with some gifts, so you will want to have room in your suitcase to bring home those gifts and your purchases. (Of course, anything you bring to Japan as a gift won't be in your bag on the way home.)