



(U//FOUO) SID Around the World: Misawa and Tokyo

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(U//FOUO) Here's another look at locations around the world that are home to NSA SIGINTers. Today we look at Japan: Misawa, near the northern tip of Honshu, and Tokyo, 425 miles south.

(U) Japan is a country of interesting contradictions. The people have a strong connection with nature and tradition, but also have a fascination with technology and Western culture. Despite having one of the oldest cultures in the world, the Japanese seem very innocent and naive. The balance that the Japanese people have found between these seeming contradictions make the country very much worth visiting.



(U//FOUO) My family and I are now in Misawa for our second tour in Japan, having been at the NSA/CSS Representative Japan (NCRJ) at Yokota Air Base, just outside Tokyo from 1999 to 2002. We thoroughly enjoyed the Tokyo area while at NCRJ. Tokyo is one of the world's largest metropolises, but is also probably the safest. The dining, museums, and shopping in Tokyo are hard to surpass. Misawa, by contrast, is a quiet country town without the night life associated with a large city, but makes up for it with a wealth of available outdoor activities. The shopping opportunities around Misawa are also not comparable to those in Tokyo.



(U) At Yokota, most of the personnel lived on base, where housing was generally larger than that available off base, but also had to do without off-base benefits like a broadband Internet connection. At Misawa, all of the civilian personnel live off base, where the houses are larger, generally have two car garages, usually have air conditioning, and have access to a gigabit-fiber optic Internet connection. The U.S. bases in Japan now have DSL for on-base residents.

(U) But despite the obvious differences, Misawa and Tokyo have much in common. It is usually easy to get around, but it is frequently difficult to go short distances quickly. In Tokyo, the reason it frequently took so long to go short distances was the traffic. Around Misawa, the reason is usually because the roads have to bypass something, like a field, farm, or temple. The quickest way to get somewhere in Tokyo is usually to take the train. In Misawa, the trains and buses are not always the quickest means to get around as they do not run as often as those in Tokyo. Longer distances are generally quicker to traverse because of expressways, the Shinkansen (bullet train) or airplanes, but can usually cost a great deal due to tolls or ticket fares. Driving somewhere in Japan has an additional complication: parking is always in short supply and is practically non-existent in Tokyo.

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(U) The language barrier is also not as much of a hinderance that many people believe that it should be. Most Japanese people know at least a little English (it is a standard course of study in Japanese junior high and high schools), but are probably not comfortable using it. If you do not speak Japanese, but are willing to at least learn and use a little, a native Japanese speaker will be more willing to use the little English that they know to help you. We have had several discussions with Japanese students on trains or at train stations who want to work on their English. Many Americans frequently get jobs tutoring English.

(U) As I mentioned before, the Japanese are also fascinated with Western culture. Tokyo Tower is extremely similar to the Eiffel Tower, and there is a replica of the Statue of Liberty near Misawa. McDonalds and Starbucks seem to be everywhere, but have a distinctly Japanese twist -- where else can you get a Shrimpburger happy meal? The Japanese fascination with technology is best seen in the ubiquitous cell phones (keitai denwa) capable of two-way live video teleconferencing and Internet web browsing or the very common vehicle GPS navigation systems ("Navi"), a must for driving in Tokyo, by the way.

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