

OVERSEAS TOUR WITH THE CORPS OFFERS MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

by
RASHIDA BANKS
JAPAN DISTRICT

Perhaps one of the best-kept secrets of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is its Japan District. Nestled in the Far East region of the world, some have referred to it as a “hidden jewel” in terms of the uniqueness of its mission, first-rate facilities it constructs, and the quality of life it provides to military service members, civilians, and their families stationed there.

Headquartered at Camp Zama, Japan, the district serves as the executive agent for military construction in Japan, providing comprehensive, professional quality engineering and construction services for all U.S. forces in support of peacetime and contingency operations. In addition to the host-nation and U.S. military construction (MILCON) programs, the district is a leader in providing installation support and environmental expertise to Department of Defense (DoD) customers throughout Japan.

UNIQUE MISSION

The Japan District’s unique mission is one of the things that sets it apart from other districts within the Corps.

“The mission here is not just about building facilities for our service members, civilians, and families. It’s also about increasing the security of the U.S. and strengthening the alliance with our ally Japan,” said COL John Hurley, commander of the Japan District.

Japan District differs from stateside districts in two

respects. First, it doesn’t have a “civil works” mission, i.e., congressionally funded projects and programs such as flood control, dredging, hydroelectric power, and wetlands regulation. Second, the host-nation construction program, essentially funded by the Government of Japan, provides the majority of work, and the District coordinates the design and construction of nearly 80 percent of their traditional workload.

Host-nation projects are designed and constructed in collaboration with the Japanese government. For these projects, the district provides coordination, facilitation, and oversight to ensure that the facilities meet U.S. life safety and operational criteria because they are designed for the U.S. forces and DoD agencies stationed in Japan.

To accomplish this mission, the district works closely with officials from the Government of Japan, various regional Defense Bureaus, as well as partners and customers at military installations throughout Japan.

“The quality of construction in Japan is the best in the world,” said Hurley. “Our great partnership with the Government of Japan enables us to deliver first-class facilities to military service members, civilians, and their families’ stationed here. As one of the largest providers of host-nation support in the world, the Government of Japan invests a lot into infrastructure,” continued Hurley. “It’s a shared burden to ensure that our alliance

stays strong and that service members are secure from threat.”

The district has built hundreds of construction projects, which improve the operational readiness and quality of life for the more than 100,000 military service members, civilians, and families stationed at military installations throughout Japan. District projects range from barracks, schools, medical and housing facilities to aircraft maintenance hangars and runways.

Notable projects completed by the district include the Iwakuni Runway Relocation Project, which reclaimed approximately 500 acres of land from the sea to relocate the runway at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni 1,000 meters offshore. The runway’s relocation helped to reduce noise and safety concerns, thus strengthening the positive relationship between the station and local community.

Another is the U.S. Naval Hospital in Okinawa, a 443,000-square-foot state-of-the-art medical facility, which includes 86 inpatient beds. The hospital serves a beneficiary population of 55,000 active duty personnel, their family members, civilian employees, contract personnel, and retirees. It also provides referral service for more than 188,000 beneficiaries throughout the Western Pacific.

The project delivery team (PDT) also was the recipient of the 2014 USACE PDT of the Year for Excellence Award.

“The workload is tremendous in Japan when compared to the downturn of work in the U.S., especially in the military programs,” said Andrew Constantaras, chief of Engineering and Construction Division, Japan District. “Part of the reason for that is the work we do with the Government of Japan. We have a multi-billion dollar construction program for host-nation work and a multi-billion dollar engineering program for host-nation work in Okinawa. Probably within the next five years we’ll see more than \$1.6 billion in military design and construction in Japan, which is the largest workload in the region.”

Additionally, as a result of the DoD strategy to “pivot” toward the Pacific, the U.S. appropriated military construction is substantially increasing.

The MILCON program in Japan will provide additional opportunities for project managers, designers, construction representatives, and other skill sets.

As a result of these initiatives, Hurley says the district is ramping up its presence to accommodate the increasing workload.

“There are tremendous opportunities for so many people, and we are currently recruiting a variety of disciplines,” said Hurley.

DIVERSE WORKFORCE, ENGAGING WORK

With a workforce of more than 350, half of whom are Japanese citizens, working at the Japan District provides a unique cultural experience that Constantaras says can’t be obtained at a stateside district.

“You work with a multi-ethnic cultural workforce,



◀ Bon Dancers perform during Camp Zama’s annual Bon Odori Festival. One of the benefits of working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Japan District is being able to participate in events such as this one. Hosted by the U.S. Army Garrison Japan community, the annual event draws thousands of people and includes live entertainment, music, dancing, fireworks, food booths, and games. U.S. ARMY PHOTO

It’s the unique mission, projects, and cultural cross-training which Constantaras says makes the district the perfect place for those seeking a challenge and wanting to grow professionally.

“It’s a win-win situation for everyone,” said Constantaras. “We get people who are adventurous and willing to leap into a new environment and new culture, and we send back people that are well-rounded and more capable to execute the mission in the continental United States.”

Ryan Burgstiner, a supervisory program analyst and recent hire from the Corps’ Savannah District, echoes these sentiments.

“On-the-job training is the best training, in my opinion,” said Burgstiner. “As a program analyst working in a military program, I’m sure there are a lot of similarities across the Corps. There are differences at each district, but the core principles are the same. However, once you throw in the culture along with the Government of Japan and all the military customers we serve, it creates a much more dynamic atmosphere,” said Burgstiner. “With all those variables in

which includes local nationals and Department of Army civilians, and it gives you a better perspective of how work is done in an overseas climate,” said Constantaras. “You can learn from the local nationals and local contractors about different engineering and construction methods that you may not be exposed to in the United States. So when you come here, you learn things that you can take back to your old job or to a new job in the states.”

One example of the unique types of projects constructed by the district is the Futenma Replacement Program, which involves the relocation of Marine Corps

Air Station Futenma to Camp Schwab in Okinawa.

“The project involves a massive reclamation of land as well as the building of infrastructure and facilities,” said Daryl Melton, chief of the Futenma Replacement Program Section at the district’s Okinawa Area Office. “It is comparable to building a city with its own airport and includes all the types of projects that project managers and engineers would spend a lifetime trying to gain experience on. Working with the Japan District, that same type of experience could be gained within a relatively short period of time working on unique programs like this.”





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play, and considering how complex and ever-changing it is, I know that on-the-job training here is really going to help my technical, leadership, and analytical skills for when I return back home."

Burgstiner said he took a leap of faith leaving Georgia where he has lived most of his life to move to Japan.

"I didn't know what to expect, but I came here with an open mind to try new things not only at work but outside of work," said Burgstiner. "So far, it has worked really well."

PHENOMENAL QUALITY OF LIFE

Besides offering invaluable experience and career-growth incentives, another benefit of working for the Corps in Japan is the quality of life it affords.

Keily Takehara-Sasano, a current Japan District employee, can attest to that. A military brat, Takehara-Sasano has spent most of her life in Japan. As a youth, she attended Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools and graduated from high school at Camp Zama before leaving to attend college in the United States. She eventually received a job offer with the Japan District, which brought her back to her roots at Camp Zama.

"It was nice growing up here, so I knew that it was the quality of life that I want for my family," said Takehara-Sasano. "The people are nice, and it's a safe environment. We really enjoy living here."

Quality of life is a key component of military readiness, so military installations, including those overseas, offer accommodations to ensure that families have everything they need.

This includes access to first-rate housing, medical, fitness, dining, recreational and child care facilities, and schools.


Most recently the district broke ground on the first DoDEA 21st Century School in Okinawa. Located at Kadena Air Base, the new school is one of 16 schools to be constructed under an \$868 million DoDEA program in Japan.

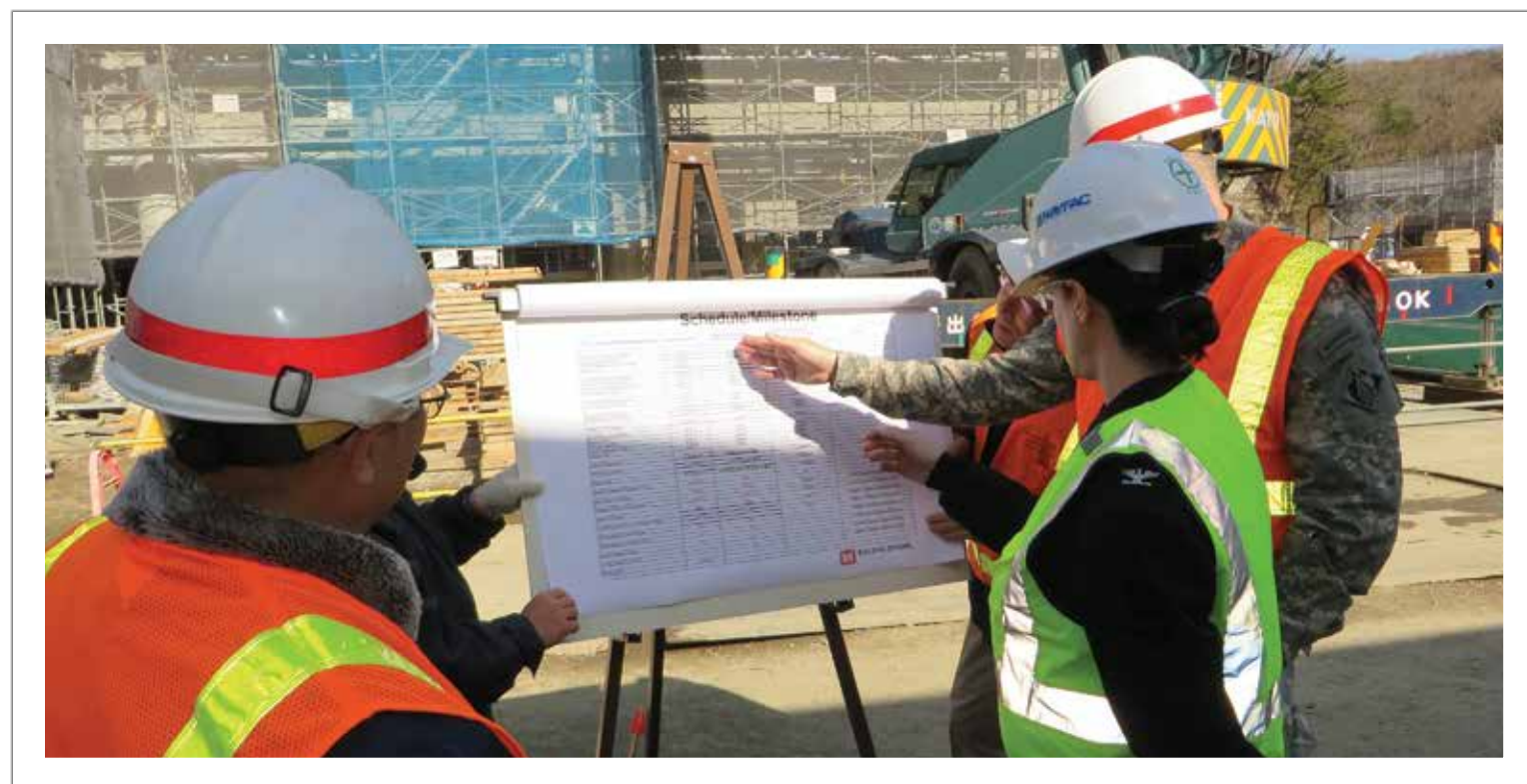
In addition to having access to first-rate facilities, there are other financial perks such as free housing, utilities, post allowance, Post Exchange, commissary, and Military Aircraft Flight privileges which Takehara-Sasano says make a tour in Japan even more appealing.

"I always encourage people to come work here," said Takehara-Sasano. "There's access to good food, shopping, road trips, free rent and utilities ... cars are cheap, you can save money ... there's nothing to lose. It's a great job and a great opportunity!"

Although headquartered at Camp Zama, Japan, the Japan District is one of the most geographically dispersed districts in the Corps, with field offices at Misawa and Yokota Air Bases, Iwakuni Marine Corps Air Station, Yokosuka and Sasebo Naval Bases, and at Camp Foster in Okinawa.

Regardless of where you work within the district, the opportunities to travel and sightsee always are available.

"One of the big draws to Japan is the location," said Constantaras. "It's central to all of Asia, so if you like to travel and visit different countries, this is an ideal jumping-off-point, and there's so much to see and do. The possibilities are endless." 



▲ Officials from the Japan District, the DoDEA, Kadena Air Base, and the contractor participate in a Japanese groundbreaking ceremony for the first DoDEA 21st Century School in Okinawa. USACE PHOTO

◀ Representatives from the Corps and Yokosuka Naval Base review progress on a construction project. USACE PHOTO

PACIFIC OCEAN DIVISION
PACIFIC REBALANCE