

City of Contrasts Has Something for Everyone

Lawyer and American Chamber of Commerce in Japan Chairman Jay Ponazecki reflects on her life in the city and highlights the appeal of the bustling metropolis.

Jay Ponazecki's first experience in Japan came as an exchange student from the New York area attending the Kitakamakura Girls' High School in Kanagawa prefecture. One of her first duties was to give a speech before about 500 fellow students and teachers, and she could be forgiven for feeling a bit apprehensive. "But when I walked onto the stage, I saw the sea of smiling faces and felt all the warm energy," she says, "I knew from that moment that the experience would be okay, and my nervousness was gone."

After studying law at the New York University School of Law, Ponazecki spent ten years as a business lawyer in New York, two of them seconded to a Japanese law firm. In 1997 she joined the Tokyo office of Morrison & Foerster LLP, where she spent nearly 20 years specializing in international business transactions. She was head of the firm's Life Sciences and Privacy Practice Groups in Asia.

She has served in a number of leadership roles with the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ), including as President, and was appointed to serve as Chairman in 2016 and 2017. "Many of our members have lived and worked in Japan for decades and are experts in their respective fields," she says. "We hold over 500 events each year, encouraging networking and information sharing as well as offering a robust advocacy program focusing on specific issues."

Ponazecki's appreciation of what Tokyo has to offer makes her an ideal advisor for others wanting to assimilate into the city's cultural, business and lifestyle environments. "Tokyo is very much a global city, so moving here was almost a seamless transition," she says. "And there are so many excellent opportunities here to grow professionally and personally."

For the business person, she elaborates on the wide array of attractive features that make Tokyo a good fit, with the people at the top. "Japan is a country of extremely hospitable, culturally sophisticated, highly educated, hard-working and industrious people with whom it is really our privilege to be able to work

day-in and day-out," she says. "It is also the third-largest economy in the world, with many opportunities in consumer and business-to-business markets. Then there is Tokyo's mature financial and investment market that, along with many well-established legal and regulatory frameworks, provides predictability and outlets to resolve most issues that arise."

She recommends an adventurous attitude for those living here. "Time goes by very fast, so learn as much as you can about what's available," Ponazecki says. "Then make time to do things, or you'll just end up living the same way you lived at home." Social media, while making communications with friends and family back home easier, can—she believes—offer a different kind of challenge. "Don't let these connections with your previous life hold you too tightly, and prevent you from enjoying all that is around you," she says.

She counts Tokyo's contrasts as a big part of its charm. "I really like how there are very modern areas with a global vibe such as Omotesando, while other areas like Asakusa and Nezu have retained the feel of old Tokyo," Ponazecki says. "You can find everything from all over the world," she continues. "There are musicians, businesses, culinary, art and architectural styles from all over the world. There is an exciting and creative energy in the city."

Ponazecki has a great fondness for the outdoors, and has a number of favorite spots: "A lawyer is, in some way, an artist with words," she says. "So I try when I'm not working to enjoy things without words. One thing I'd recommend is to walk across the Rainbow Bridge in the summertime at dusk, when you can really appreciate the scale, beauty and diversity of Tokyo."

She has a story to tell about Tokyo that illustrates just how special the city is. She was riding in a taxi during a heavy rainstorm, and when the taxi arrived at her destination, the driver asked her if she had an umbrella. "When I said no," she says, "he gave me an umbrella and asked me to give an umbrella to the driver the next time I rode in a taxi from the same fleet. Things like this happen all the time in Tokyo."



A Tokyoite from New York:
ACCJ Chairman Jay Ponazecki