

# **Playing live in Japan: A new opportunity**

## **Introduction**

The last two decades have seen a dramatic shift in the music business all over the world and Japan is no different to any other country in this regard. In fact, in many ways, it has been affected more by the digital revolution and the decline of physical sales than others in that it's once thriving live circuit for new bands has disappeared entirely, the established promoters only booking guarantee ticket-selling bands that have a track record or newer bands that have significant label backing. Moreover, the decline of international artists music sales in Japan from some 30%+ in the 1980's to less than 10% in the last decade has naturally led Japanese labels and promoters to focus more on their own artists above international acts to try and sustain their market. It is both a frustration and a conundrum that in the era when self-promotion via the internet and recording costs to bands has become cheaper, the Japanese live circuit has become harder and harder to break into. UPP-tone is now going to give you that opportunity.

## **The Live House circuit in Japan**

Every major city and most small towns have what are known as Live Houses. These are small venues that vary in size and typically have a capacity of between 100 and 300 people although some are larger going up to 600, these larger ones are more like clubs in the USA, UK and Europe, the smaller ones are where the action is though. Open seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year, each Live House will have three or four bands on every night and there are over 100 of them in Metropolitan area of Tokyo alone. By several accounts, there are an estimated 300 in the greater Tokyo area and hundreds more around the country. All in all, that is a lot of people going out every night to listen to a lot of live music and it should be emphasized that these are not bars that put on bands; these are specifically places for bands to play with a bar – the music is the attraction.

## **Introducing your partner: UPP Tone**

At the start of 2019, not many people in the music business in Japan had heard of UPP-tone for one very good reason – they had only existed a few months. Throughout that year though they built a reputation as one of the best promoters in Japan not by putting on extravagant shows but by treating the bands with the care and respect they deserve. Harping back to the good old days where music took precedence over money, the team at UPP-tone put first and foremost their desire to see some of their favourite NWOBHM bands play in Japan. As it turns out, they unwittingly hit on winning formulae

and were very successful both in terms of organization and treatment of the bands and the promotion; they also won the respect of the paying audience for their sold-out shows. Overseas, the word spread very quickly around the music business and the grapevine is such that bands are now contacting UPP-tone directly asking them to organize shows in Japan. With inroads and contacts to all the appropriate media and key areas of the Japanese music business, a love for the music itself (don't be surprised if you see the staff bopping up and down in the front row of your gig!) and a team that includes Japanese and international staff that have been touring the world with bands for forty years, there is no organization better suited to get you a foothold in Japan.

### **What can we do for you?**

Lots. For a start, we can make sure everybody in Japan knows who you are and that you are coming.

#### **Biography**

One of the many mistakes bands make is that they assume all Japanese people can read and understand at least the basics of English when in fact they can't. A basic 300 – 500 word biography written in Japanese sent to the correct media will go a lot further than any social media in English in Japan (by the way, Google Translate doesn't work well translating into Japanese) and besides that, biographies are written in a different style and format to Western ones; we can format that for you.

#### **Flyers**

As prominent as the Japanese Social Media is, the main source of advertising for the Live Houses are the internal flyers. Every night, every person who goes to a Live House is given a fistful of flyers advertising the upcoming shows within that Live House and others in the area; they are usually read on the train on the way home. We will design and distribute these flyers at the appropriate time and in the appropriate areas.

#### **Social Media**

The Japanese Social Media differs in some ways to how it works in the Western world. Primarily, Japanese people are very private and do not add people they don't know so building up a fan base for a band unknown in Japan can be difficult from outside Japan. Our already established Social Media sites are trusted by our audience and hence we can reach a lot of potential fans for you. Also, there are Japanese Social Media platforms that are more popular in Japan than the more familiar ones (Line for example has an estimated 700 million users but is practically unknown outside Asia) and of course the preferred language on those is Japanese.

## **Mainstream Media and other places**

In Japan, the Mainstream Media is still more important than Social Media. Music magazines, radio, TV and media personnel all carry more clout than any Social Media platform and we provide notices and gig listings to all the relevant magazines. BAYFM is the major radio station that promotes our shows and their DJs are some of the most respected music critics in Japan. We are also constantly in contact with the leading freelance music writers in Japan who also run their own websites. We will ensure they are invited to your shows and our ever-growing list of Rock Bars in Japan will be supplied and updated with your whereabouts and activities. This of course will all be done in Japanese for the Japanese publications and English for the few English publications here.

## **Concerts and after care**

Our staff will be available to you for the duration of your trip. We will organise ground travel for you, secure the venues, make sure the correct power supplies/adaptors are available, book rehearsal rooms if you want them and in short, be on hand to offer any advice for the gigs you may want and of course be available for the shows. Whilst you're in Japan, you may want to stay over a few days more and do some sightseeing and we can work out the best travel routes for you, book traditional Japanese experiences, recommend the best shopping places for your interests and hobbies, check restaurants for vegetarian, vegan, gluten and allergy options and pretty much anything else and after you have left Japan, we will forward any follow-up requests by the media or fans to you.

## **That all sounds good, what do bands have to pay?**

As with any gigs these days for bands without major deals, there are costs involved to bands and we realize that playing in Japan while prestigious can be out of reach to some but having said that, many bands are already coming here under their own steam without any support. This is all well and good but to get noticed, you need people on the ground here helping you out and this is the reason we have set up the UPP-tone agency. We'll come back to UPP-tone later but for now, here are your financial responsibilities.

## **Airfares**

Whilst this may seem a bit daunting to you, it's your only major expense and remember that we are investing just as much financially in time and office services as you are.

## **Accommodation**

You are welcome to stay anywhere you choose of course but we have arranged an

astonishingly cheap rate at Mendips, a Guest House specifically for musicians. Please see the website below and let us know if you want us to book it. If however you prefer elsewhere, we are happy to advise you of other accommodation.

[www.mendipstachikawa.com](http://www.mendipstachikawa.com)

### **Meals**

You are responsible for your meals throughout.

### **What does UPP-tone do?**

We book and pay for the venue in advance and also provide ground (internal) transportation from the airport to hotel and hotel to gigs. We have offices, staff and overheads that we fund which we use to promote your band and we regard this as a partnership, in effect, working for you. We will design the flyers and distribute them at no cost to you and not only that, we are more than happy to introduce you to any of the media here that show an interest in your band and make your own contacts. You take it from there in the future. We can also advertise and sell your merchandise on our online shop. We want no commission from merchandise or CD sales, no services fee and no down payment or deposit. Should any of our staff be called out to do anything for you, we don't charge for any expenses or time it takes. The only way we get any financial reward from this is if you sell tickets on the door otherwise we lose so the harder we work for you, the better off we all are.

### **Why is UPP-tone different to other small businesses in Japan doing the same?**

That's easy – care, experience and proven track record. The shows we put on in our debut year were so successful we had a return booking rate of 75% of those artists within one month of them completing their shows. We will apply that same business model to your band as we do the full-time professional ones giving you the respect you deserve through making the effort to come here and between the staff members, we have an extensive knowledge of the Japanese music market and have decades of experience working with some of the biggest acts touring today right down to the bands just starting out. Along with that, we are a registered company with an office in Japan (many other 'agents' don't) and we have both international and Japanese staff. We don't cherry pick either. If you want to really come and play, no matter what your status, we will endeavour to get you a gig here and work just as hard for you as anyone else. As stated before, our love is the music, not the financial reward and that's the way it should be. Right?

## FAQs

### **Where will you book us**

Within the greater Tokyo area.

### **If we want to book shows, how far in advance do we have to notify you?**

Generally speaking, 4-5 months.

### **What would you need from us and in what time frame?**

As a very rough guide, before the show:

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| Agreement made between band and UPP-tone         | 4 months (16 weeks) |
| UPP-tone book venue                              | 4 months (16 weeks) |
| Band send bio, PV and promo photos to UPP-tone   | 3 months (12weeks)  |
| Translations done by UPP-tone                    | 10 weeks            |
| Concert announcements from UPP-tone              | 9 weeks             |
| Promotion material sent out by UPP-tone to media | 8 weeks             |
| Digital media promotion by UPP-tone              | 8 ~ 2 weeks         |
| Video drops from band members                    | 6 weeks             |
| Band arrival in Japan                            | 2 days              |
| Gig  |                     |

We would supply you with a concert schedule checklist.

### **Do you have a draft contract between a band and UPP-tone in English we can see?**

Yes we do. Please contact us at the email address below and we will send you one.

### **What about backline, lights and P.A.?**

All in house and supplied for you at no extra cost. We can't be specific on rigs but we can guarantee well maintained amps, cabs, power supply and drum kit. Bring your guitars, effects and sticks and you're ready to go. You don't even need cables.

### **Can we sell merchandise?**

Yes and we can also manufacture for you as well if you wish to save bringing your stock or shipping costs.

### **Can we ship merchandise to you?**

You can but it's best to bring your own as customs will charge an importation fee for anything shipped.

### **Can you manufacture merchandise for us in Japan?**

Yes we can but there are additional costs involved that we cover. The simple mathematics are that we would manufacture for you and the income is split 50/50 between UPP-tone and yourselves.

**Do the venues take a merchandise commission?**

No they don't.

**Can we sell CDs at the gigs?**

Yes.

**Can you help us get a record deal?**

By a large, Japanese labels do not give record deals to international acts; instead they will license your product for release. We can't actually get you a licensing deal but we can introduce you to labels who may be interested in your recordings.

**Do you work with any PR companies?**

No. we do everything ourselves to minimise costs to you.

**Can you distribute promotional CDs and promotional videos to the media for us?**

Yes – that's part of what we do for you.

**Can you book advertising in music magazines for us?**

Yes we can but it will of course be an additional cost to you. Please contact us for rates.

**Do we need an entertainment visa?**

No you don't. We will provide you with a 'Letter of Introduction' from our company stating you are here for promotional purposes only that you can present at immigration if required.

**Will somebody meet us at the airport?**

Yes and we provide all transport costs from the airport to accommodation and the venues we book.

**What are the ticket prices?**

That depends on which day you are playing (weekends are more expensive), the location around the city and the size but generally speaking, 3,000 – 4,000 JPY.

**Do we get a percentage of the ticket money?**

After the cost of the venue hire has been recouped by UPP-tone, the remaining ticket sales money will be split 50/50 between yourselves and UPP-tone. Again this reiterates

our dedication to making your shows profitable...if we can't sell enough tickets to cover the venue hire, we lose, not you.

**Will we have support bands?**

Yes. We will book appropriate bands for you.

**Can we book additional shows other than the ones UPP-tone will book for us?**

Yes. However, UPP-tone would not provide ground transportation and cannot make any financial arrangements on your behalf for those shows. We would of course still include them in any advertising and promotion we send out.

**If we wanted to do our own Japanese release with an obi and Japanese insert, can you translate the lyrics and write the Japanese text for us?**

Yes we can but at an additional cost depending on how long you want the text to be and how many sets of lyrics you have. We only use professional music translators who have been translating lyrics and articles for music magazines as well as interpreting interviews for mainstream media for almost forty years so they know what everyone is writing and talking about.

Lyrics per song: 3,000 JPY

Standard text length for Japanese insert: 30,000 JPY

**Can you register our songs with JASRAC to receive performance royalties?**

Yes we can although it is not generally necessary for concerts.

**Are there any caveats?**

Only that Japan is a very drug-intolerant country. Whereas places like Canada and some states in the USA have legalised cannabis, in Japan any possession by a foreigner carries a very hefty prison sentence (this is the country that put Paul McCartney in jail for ten days so think what they would do to you) and you wouldn't be allowed back for at least ten years so if you are a recreational user where you live, just make sure you and your equipment isn't transporting anything unawares as in the event that you are caught, neither we or your embassy would be able to help you.

**Summing up**

We know this would be a financial commitment from you and it is with that thought in mind that we go into this. As stated before, we only make money from the ticket sales so it is in our best interests and yours to make sure we get the people through the door and we will do our utmost to make sure that happens. There are no guarantees of course as there are anywhere else in the world but what you will gain from this is a

company that can put you in touch with the companies that can help you further your career in Japan eliminating the guess work, problems at gigs and the language barrier.

If you're interested and would like more information about anything above, no matter how small, please contact our staff member:

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