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Important note: If you have never been to a tea gathering before, or if it's been a long time, don't panic. You're not expected to memorize all of this. This is just a guide to give you an idea of what to expect.

When you arrive, you'll be shown to the waiting room/area (machiai). Wait there until one of the hosts comes to invite you into the tea room.

The guests leave the machiai one by one. The first guest (shokyaku) will go first, with everyone else following. Certain people may have a predetermined seat, and they will know who they are in advance; otherwise, you may sit in any order you like.

When you get to the main tea room, the first guest will enter on his/her knees, go to the tokonoma (where the scroll is hanging), sit, and examine the scroll. The second guest waits, sitting, just outside the door. When the first guest rises, the second guest stands also. The first guest goes to sit in front of the kama (the kettle) while the second guest goes to look at the scroll. While the second guest is looking at the scroll, the first guest looks at the kettle and the arrangement of ash underneath it, then shifts position to look at the tana (the stand) and the utensils on it. Meanwhile, the third guest waits at the door. The first, second, and third guests all rise together; the first guest goes to a temporary seat until everyone has looked at the tokonoma; the second guest goes and sits in front of the kettle; the third guest goes to look at the scroll. This continues until everyone has looked at both the scroll and the kettle/tana. If there is a large number of guests, two or three people might go in at the same time and look at the items together.

Once the last person has taken their seat (at this point, the first guest will have moved into his/her position along with everyone else who was waiting), the host(s) will come in and greet everyone. After that, the laying of the charcoal begins.

During the laying of the charcoal, your job is basically to watch. At the end, you'll take a closer look at the incense container. The basic sequence of looking at a utensil is always the same: bow to the person to your left and say "osaki ni"; put the item in front of you and look at it from above; pick up the item and look at it all over; put it down and look at it from above again; pass it to the next guest.

After the laying of the charcoal, a meal will be served. When you receive the first tray or bento box, accept it in both hands and bow with it still in the air while the server bows in front of you. Then put the tray on the floor in front of you and wait until everyone else has been served before eating (always take your cue from the first guest). Any other dishes coming in will be placed in front of you. If sake is being served, when the server comes around, pick up your sake cup with both hands and hold it out in front of you. If you would rather not drink sake, let the server know and he/she will move on.

When you're finished, wipe the bottom of the all dishes with some tissues or kaishi and put the papers in the plastic baggie you brought into the room with you. Put any food that

you don't want to eat in there also. Everyone puts the lid back on the bento together (if bentos are used) and the host(s) and assistant(s) will take the dishes out of the room.

After the dishes are cleared away, sweets will be served. Eat the sweets; the person serving will let you know what to do with the dishes. Once the sweets are finished, everybody leaves the room, one by one, starting with the first guest.

Everyone goes back to the machiai and takes a break. (This is a good time to go to the bathroom or walk around.) Once everyone is ready, you will be invited back into the tea room. Enter the room the same way you did before – start by looking at the scroll, and then move to the area with the utensils. However, this time, look at the tana first, and then at the kettle.

One of the hosts will come in and begin koicha. In koicha, usually there are two bowls: half of the guests drink from the first bowl, and half drink from the second bowl. (The host will say how many people the first bowl is for.) Again, if there is a large number of guests, there may be a third or even a fourth bowl; if that is the case, the person serving will let you know how many people will be drinking from that bowl, and you can always ask if you're uncertain.

When the first guest gets the bowl, he or she will set the bowl to his/her left. Everybody bows. The first guest takes three sips, wipes the bowl where he/she drank, and then passes the bowl to the second person, hand to hand. The second person raises the bowl in thanks (the first guest bows), turns it so the front is facing away, takes three sips, wipes the bowl, turns the front back to face him/her, and passes the bowl to the third person, hand to hand. When the third person raises the bowl in thanks, the second guest bows. Continue in this way until the bowl gets to the last person to drink (for example, if the first bowl is for five people, then the fifth guest will be the last person to drink from that bowl and must finish all the tea remaining in it). After the last person drinks, he/she brings the bowl back to the first guest, and then all of the guests will look at it in order.

Meanwhile, the host will have made a second bowl of koicha for the other half of the guests. (If a third or fourth bowl is used, it will be brought in from the kitchen) When the second "first" guest (the first person to drink from the second bowl) gets the bowl, he/she will put the bowl to his/her left and then say "osaki ni" to the others, at which time everybody who will be drinking from that bowl bows. Drinking from the second bowl is the same as the first.

At the end of koicha, the tea caddy (chaire), tea scoop (chashaku) and the cover for the tea caddy (shifuku) will be passed around. (Alternatively, the hosts may choose to go straight from koicha into usucha, in which case none of the utensils will be passed around until the end. If there are a large number of guests, the host may choose to set the utensils out for the guests to look at as they leave rather than passing them.)

The sequence for looking at the utensils is the same as looking at the incense container: say "osaki ni" to the next guest, put the item in front of you; look at it from above; pick it

up and look at it more closely; put it down and look at it from above again; pass it to the next person. The last guest will return the utensils to the host. The host will come back in and answer questions, and then take the utensils out. Immediately, usucha will begin (usually done by a different person).

First, sweets are served on a tray. The first guest may pass the tray at the beginning of temae, or wait until just before tea is served. When the sweet tray comes around, take a sweet and pass the tray immediately (don't wait with the tray in front of you). The sequence for taking a sweet is as follows: Say "osaki ni" to the next guest. Raise the tray a couple of inches off the mat and lower it. Take your kaishi (sweet papers) out and put them in front of you. With your left hand resting against the side of the tray, your right hand takes a sweet. Pass the tray to the next person. Don't eat the sweet until the first guest has been served his/her tea.

In usucha, everyone drinks from their own bowl. The host will whip tea for the first and second guests, and then some tea will come out from the mizuya.

The sequence for drinking usucha is as follows: Put the bowl between you and the person to your right and say "thank you for letting me join you" ("oshoban itashimasu"). Put the bowl between you and the person to your left and say "osaki ni." Put the bowl in front of you and thank the host for making the tea (even if the host didn't actually make the tea) ("otemae chodai itashimasu"). Pick up the bowl and put it on your left palm; raise and lower it in thanks; and turn it two quarter-turns so the front is facing away from you. The whole bowl is for you, but you don't have to drink it all if you don't want to. Once you're done drinking, wipe where you drank with your thumb and forefinger, turn the bowl again so the front is facing you, and then put the bowl down and look at it more closely. When finished, put the bowl to your left, inside the line, and wait for someone to come and take it from you.

The bowls that the first and second guests drank from may be passed around. If so, look at them closely the same way you did the other objects and pass them to the next guest.

At the end, some other utensils may be passed around as well. The most important thing to remember is: **do not turn the tea container over or shake it** (it'll still have tea in it).

After usucha is over, the hosts will come back in for a final goodbye, and then everyone leaves one by one. And that's it!