



## USEFUL INFORMATION FOR TRIPS TO JAPAN

### AIRLINES

International: Japan is extremely well serviced by almost every major airline.

Domestic: Domestic airlines include Japan Airlines (JAL) and Air Nippon Airlines (ANA). Japan has also seen a recent surge in LCC's including Peach Airlines, Vanilla Air, Jetstar Japan Skymark, and Air Do.

### AIRPORT TAX

All airport taxes are included in the price of your ticket and do not need to be paid for at the airport.

### ARRIVAL IN JAPAN

Tokyo is one of Asia's largest air hubs, so it is very well-connected to the rest of the world. Tokyo is home to two international airports, Narita and Haneda.

Other airports in Japan that are serviced by international flights include Osaka's Kansai Airport and Nagoya's Chubu Centrair Airport.

### ARRIVAL FORMALITIES

Upon arrival in Japan, all visitors must complete an entry/exit form including a customs declaration. It is important that your copy of this form is kept safe with your passport while in Japan and is presented to the customs and immigration officials on departure.

If you have booked a Meet and Greet service with EXO Travel, our representative will be waiting in the arrivals hall holding a sign with your name on it.

### ATMs

Foreign credit, debit, and cash cards are useful for obtaining cash. However, many ATM machines are only for cards issued in Japan and do not accept foreign cards. Foreign cards can be accepted by ATMs located at Narita and Kansai international airports and at more than 24,000 post offices and Seven Eleven convenience stores throughout Japan.

For service hours and locations for ATMs at Seven Eleven:

<http://www.sevenbank.co.jp/intlcard/index2.html>.

Post offices where this service is available display the "International ATM Service" symbol (a green clover) and stickers indicating which cards are accepted. Cards from the Cirrus, Plus, Maestro and Visa Electron networks are accepted, as are Visa, MasterCard, American Express, Diners Club and JCB credit cards. VISA ELECTRON, PLUS, Maestro, Cirrus, China Unionpay, DISCOVER.

Service hours for ATMs at post offices vary depending on the location, but in general they are: Monday to Friday: 07:00 to 19:00/21:00/23:00

Saturday, Sunday and national holidays: 09:00 to 17:00

The minimum amount you can withdraw at the ATM is sometimes 10,000 JPY.

Check with your hotel or tour guide when you need to make a withdrawal.



## **BUSINESS HOURS**

Department stores and shops are open 7 days a week, often from 10:00 to 19:30 or 20:00. Museums, temples and other tourist attractions are usually open from 10am to 5pm, with entry closing 30mins before, and can have weekly closing days. Offices are generally open Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm, Post Offices 9:00 to 17:00 and Banks 9:00 to 15:00.

## **CLOTHING**

Lighter clothing is best during summer time in Japan and during winter, warmer clothes are recommended (especially if you are in the Alpine regions). If you are travelling in spring bring some warmer clothes as the temperature does drop at night.

It is not uncommon for restaurants and other venues in Japan to have a rather strict dressing policy.

Easy to slip on/slip off shoes are essential when visiting temples, staying in ryokans etc. Whilst Japan is less strict than other Buddhist countries about what to wear when visiting temples, it is always polite to cover shoulders.

## **CREDIT CARDS**

It is important to note that Japan is still very much a cash society, and credit cards are not as widely used as in some Western countries. Credit cards are mainly accepted in urban areas in top end restaurants, shops, and hotels. However, it is not advisable to rely entirely on credit cards, as inexpensive restaurants, neighborhood shops, and some Japanese Inns, especially in rural areas, often do not accept credit cards.

## **ELECTRICITY**

The electric current used throughout Japan is 100 volts, A.C. However, there are two kinds of frequencies (or cycles): 50 Hertz in eastern Japan (including Tokyo and regions northeast of the capital) and 60 Hertz in western Japan (including Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka, and other points southwest).

At major hotels, two outlets for both 110 and 220 volts are installed for electric razors, hair dryers, travel irons and other small appliances. Japan uses 2-flat-pin plugs (as in the U.S.) and cannot accommodate columnar-shaped plugs or 3-pin plugs, which will need a plug adaptor.

## **FOOD**

Japan is not just a land of sushi! Whilst fish is in abundance, Japan offers a huge variety of food types. Rice is the main staple dish, and noodles such as ramen, soba and udon with various toppings are common.

Most food is eaten with chopsticks so best get practicing as cutlery is not always available at restaurants.

## **HEALTH**

No vaccinations are required except for yellow fever if you are coming from an area where the disease is present.

## **INTERNET**

Major hotels have Business Centers with PCs connected to the Internet. Almost all hotels free LAN cable access in rooms –often free of charge- if you bring your own laptop. Japanese style *ryokan* accommodation can sometimes have wireless internet available but rarely have PCs to use.

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Western-style internet cafés are rare in Japan, due to the prevalence of internet access on mobile phones and at home. Manga Cafes (a mixture of a comic book library and internet café) are usually located near stations but require registration and staff rarely speak English.

### **LANGUAGE**

Visitors with no Japanese language knowledge can easily travel successfully throughout Japan on their own, but travelers armed with a few phrases of the local language and some tips on communicating with the Japanese will find their trip more enjoyable.

It is recommendable to have destinations like hotels, restaurants, and attractions written in Japanese so that they may be shown to taxi drivers, people on the street, and others who might provide assistance.

All Japanese learn English in school and many can listen and read better than they speak.

### **MONEY**

Japanese money is called yen, symbolized by "¥". Coins are minted in denominations of 1yen, 5yen, 10yen, 50yen, 100yen and 500yen. Notes are issued in denominations of 1,000yen, 2,000yen, 5,000yen, and 10,000yen.

Money can be exchanged at both Narita and Kansai international airports, all banks and Post Offices that display the "AUTHORIZED FOREIGN EXCHANGE" sign, hotels (for hotel guests only), and major department stores in large cities (at their customer service or money exchange window). Traveler's checks in U.S. dollars, Japanese yen, and other denominations can be exchanged for yen at the above locations, but note that a passport is required for all transactions.

Note, too, that banks in rural areas may not accept traveler's checks, and virtually no stores or restaurants do.

Exchanging money and traveler's checks at banks and post offices in Japan can be a very lengthy procedure so we do recommend the use of debit/cash cards.

### **POSTAL MAIL**

The simplest way to post mail or packages is at hotel front desks. Otherwise, postcards and stamps are available from post offices, convenience stores and kiosks at train stations all over the country.

Post offices are open Monday to Friday 09:00 to 17:00, though central post offices (often located near main train stations) have longer hours and may be open on weekends and holidays as well.

### **PUBLIC HOLIDAYS**

Government offices, banks, and most businesses are closed on Public Holidays, but most restaurants and stores remain open. Major museums remain open during most holidays, though small, privately owned museums are generally closed.

Note that the only exception to the above is during New Year's, when many restaurants, stores and museums and all offices, are closed on the first few days of the year. During that time, clients may have to dine in hotels in some destinations, though in resort areas and major tourist towns some restaurants remain open. Travelling during the following domestic peak periods can pose some difficulties, as many long-distance trains, ferries, and airlines are likely to go fully booked, not to mention hotels and other lodging, which often raise their rates in peak times.

1. New Year holiday season: December 29 to January 3, plus adjacent weekends.
  2. "Golden Week" holiday season: April 29 to May 5 and adjacent weekends.
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3. "O-Bon" festival season: One week centering on August 15.

#### **RELIGION**

Shintoism, which is indigenous to Japan, and Buddhism, which was introduced to Japan in the sixth century, are the two main religions in Japan. Many Japanese practice religions, celebrating birth and marriage in accordance with Shinto rites while following Buddhist ceremonies for funerals and memorial services. Shintoism, which originated as a way of dealing with ancient people's fears of demons and the supernatural, has no written doctrines. A Shinto place of worship is referred to as a shrine. The Buddhist place of worship is a temple. Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all by the constitution.

#### **SAFETY**

Japan is widely considered as one of the most crime-free countries. Even large cities like Tokyo and Osaka are remarkably safe. Not only are crimes against visitors almost unheard of, but even personal belongings accidentally left in trains or taxis, on park benches, or in restaurants are generally turned in to the local police station and eventually make their way back to the rightful owner.

#### **SHOPPING**

Shopping in Japan is a cornucopia of unexpected treasures, from traditional crafts to high-tech wizardry. Every region has its own local handicrafts, made with techniques passed down from generation to generation. Souvenirs to look out for in Japan include pearls, electrics and electronics, cameras, watches and clocks, bamboo ware, kimono, silk goods, pottery and lacquer ware.

Overseas visitors in Japan with temporary status who spend more than 10,001yen on any given day in one shop are entitled to a refund of the 8% consumption tax. Only department stores and specialty shops used to dealing with foreign tourists offer the refund, and clients must show their passports. No refund is granted for cosmetics, food, alcohol, cigarettes, medicine, film and batteries, which include the consumption tax in their price tag.

#### **TELEPHONE**

Phones older than 3G technology are not compatible with Japan's mobile phone system.

Mobile phones can be rented at the airport for a daily charge.

International calls can be made from hotels and public pay phones displaying an "International and Domestic Telephone" sign. These can be found at airports, hotel lobbies, and other key facilities.

#### **TIME**

Japan is GMT + 9 and does not operate on a daylight-savings system.

#### **TIPPING**

Tipping is not practiced in Japan, not even to waiters or taxi drivers.

Hotel staff accustomed to Western manners normally accept tips, but in many other cases attempts to leave a tip will cause confusion.

A 10 to 15 percent service charge is usually added to bills at higher-end hotels and restaurants. No service charge is added to bills at business hotels, pensions, *minshuku*, and other inexpensive lodgings.

Travelers can, however, tip tour guides or the head maid at a Japanese inn if special requests were made. It is best to put the money in an envelope first when doing this. Handing over a small gift is also a way to show your satisfaction.

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## TRANSPORTATION

Japan has probably the best public transportation system in the world and the majority of long distance trips are done by train, the most famous of which is the world-famous *Shinkansen* bullet train.

The Japan Rail Pass offers overseas visitors an economical, flexible, and simple-to-use advantage over regular tickets, allowing unlimited travel on a vast network of JR trains throughout Japan and comes in 7, 14 and 21 day passes.

Tokyo has an extensive metro and over ground rail system. Using a prepaid transport card (PASMO or SUICA) is the best way to get around.

Kyoto has an excellent bus network and a daily bus card will get you unlimited travel on the city buses for 1 day.

Taxis can be useful over short distances but can get very expensive, particularly in Tokyo.

## VISAS

Nationals of many countries including almost all Western countries are eligible to enter Japan for short-term stays (usually 90 days) without a visa for purposes of sightseeing and for business trips.

Nationals that do not have "Reciprocal Visa Exemption Arrangements" with Japan must obtain a visa.

To apply for a visa, the applicant must apply in person to a Japanese embassy or a consulate, usually in his or her home country.

Check the following website for more information concerning visas:

[http://www.mofa.go.jp/j\\_info/visit/visa/index.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/visa/index.html)

## WEATHER

Japan has mostly a mild climate, but since it's an archipelago stretching some 1,800 miles (3,000 km) from North to South, there are extremes in the weather, not to mention flora and scenery. The northern end of Japan is subarctic, while the southern end is subtropical.

Springtime is one of the most glorious times to visit Japan, and with good reason: that's when Japan's famous cherry trees start to bloom – blooming date will change depending on the latitude but in Tokyo and Kyoto this normally happens between late March and the first days of April.

The Japanese summer begins in mid-June, with the rainy season, which lasts about three weeks. Although it doesn't rain every day, rain can be heavy and umbrellas are necessary.

When the rainy season ends, much of Japan becomes hot and humid. Exceptions are Hokkaido (which does not have a rainy season) and mountainous regions. Seaside resorts are also popular escapes. Mt. Fuji's official climbing season runs from July 1<sup>st</sup> to August 26<sup>th</sup>.

September signals typhoon season, though storms hit Japan's coast only occasionally. October brings pleasant, crisper temperatures and magnificent fall colors ranging from crimson to gold. This is the time of harvest, as rice is cut, baled and stacked in neat rows.

Except for the extreme north, winter in Japan is not severe, especially on the Pacific coast where the climate is generally dry and the skies are often blue. The southern regions of Japan, including Kyushu, enjoy mild and even warm weather, while the northern regions like Hokkaido and the mountain ranges of central Japan become very cold with abundant snowfall. Of course, Japan's many ski resorts, do a brisk business this time

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of the year, as do the nation's thousands of hot-spring resorts, known as *onsen*.

## **WATER**

Tap water throughout Japan is safe to drink.

## **JAPAN PUBLIC HOLIDAYS**

1 January	New Year's Day
11 January	Coming of Age Day
11 February	National Foundation Day
20 March	Spring Equinox Day
29 April	Showa Day
3 May	Constitution Memorial Day
4 May	Greenery Day
5 May	Children's Day
18 July	Sea Day
11 August	Mountain Day
19 September	Respect for the Age Day
22 September	Autumnal Equinox Day
10 October	Health & Sport Day
3 November	Culture Day
23 November	Labor Thanksgiving Day
23 December	Emperor's Birthday

## **PEAK SEASONS**

- Cherry Blossom Season: late March – early April (depending on the region)
  - Golden Week: 29 April – 5 May
  - Obon Festival: 8 – 16 August (not an official public holiday; varies depending on the region)
  - Silver Week: 3rd week of September
  - Fall/Foliage Season: October – November (depending on the region)
  - End-of-the-Year and New Year Holidays: Offices, shops, and restaurants often close for a few days during the last week of the year and/or the first week of the following year.
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