

ALLURING ASIA



DESTINATION JAPAN

TRAVELER'S GUIDE





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Thank you.

POPULATION

Japan has a population of 128 million. Making it the world's tenth most populated country. Its size can be attributed to fast growth rates experienced during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

TIME

Japan Standard Time is 9 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT +9). US Eastern Standard Time + 13 hours. US Pacific Standard Time + 16 hours.

VISAS

Passport and onward/return ticket required. Visa not required for tourist/commercial business stay of up to 90 days.

INSURANCE

You should consider the benefits of travel insurance as part of your Japan travel planning. Plans may include valuable medical expense coverage, trip interruption, medical emergency assistance and treatment services, evacuation and more.

HISTORY

Traditional Japanese legend maintains that Japan was founded in 600 BC by the Emperor Jimmu a direct descendant of the sun goddess and ancestor of the present ruling imperial family. About AD 405 the Japanese court officially adopted the Chinese writing system. During the sixth century Buddhism was introduced. These two events revolutionized Japanese culture and marked the beginning of a long period of Chinese cultural influence. From the establishment of the first fixed capital at Nara in 710 until 1867 the emperors of the Yamato dynasty were the nominal rulers but actual power was usually held by powerful court himajin regents or "shoguns" (military governors).

During the early part of the 17th century Japan's shogunate suspected that foreign traders and missionaries were actually forerunners of a military conquest by European powers. This caused the shogunate to place foreigners under progressively tighter restrictions. Ultimately Japan forced all foreigners to leave and barred all relations with the outside world except for severely restricted commercial contacts with Dutch and Chinese merchants at Nagasaki. This isolation lasted for 200 years until Commodore Matthew Perry of the U.S. Navy forced the opening of Japan to the West with the Convention of Kanagawa in 1854.

Within several years renewed contact with the West profoundly altered Japanese society. The shogunate was forced to resign and the emperor was restored to power. The "Meiji restoration" of 1868 initiated many reforms. The feudal system was abolished and numerous Western institutions were adopted including a Western legal system and constitutional government along quasi-parliamentary lines.

In 1898 the last of the "unequal treaties" with Western powers was removed signaling Japan's new status among the nations of the world. In a few decades by creating modern social educational economic military and industrial systems the Emperor Meiji's "controlled revolution" had transformed a feudal and isolated state into a world power.

Wars With China and Russia

Japanese leaders of the late 19th century regarded the Korean Peninsula as a "dagger pointed at the heart of Japan." It was over Korea that Japan became involved in war with the Chinese Empire in 1894-95 and with Russia in 1904-05. The war with China established Japan's dominant interest in Korea while giving it the Pescadores Islands and Formosa (now Taiwan). After Japan defeated Russia in 1905 the resulting Treaty of Portsmouth awarded Japan certain rights in Manchuria and in southern Sakhalin which Russia had received in 1875 in exchange for the Kurile Islands. Both wars gave Japan a free hand in Korea which it formally annexed in 1910.



World War I to 1952

World War I permitted Japan which fought on the side of the victorious Allies to expand its influence in Asia and its territorial holdings in the Pacific. The postwar era brought Japan unprecedented prosperity. Japan went to the peace conference at Versailles in 1919 as one of the great military and industrial powers of the world and received official recognition as one of the "Big Five" of the new international order. It joined the League of Nations and received a mandate over Pacific islands north of the equator formerly held by Germany.

During the 1920s Japan progressed toward a democratic system of government. However parliamentary government was not rooted deeply enough to withstand the economic and political pressures of the 1930s during which military leaders became increasingly influential.

Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and set up the state of Manchukuo. In 1933 Japan resigned from the League of Nations. The Japanese invasion of China in 1937 followed Japan's signing the "anti-Comintern pact" with Nazi Germany the previous year and was part of a chain of developments culminating in the Japanese attack on the United States at Pearl Harbor Hawaii on December 7 1941.

After almost 4 years of war resulting in the loss of 3 million Japanese lives and including the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki Japan signed an instrument of surrender on the U.S.S. Missouri in

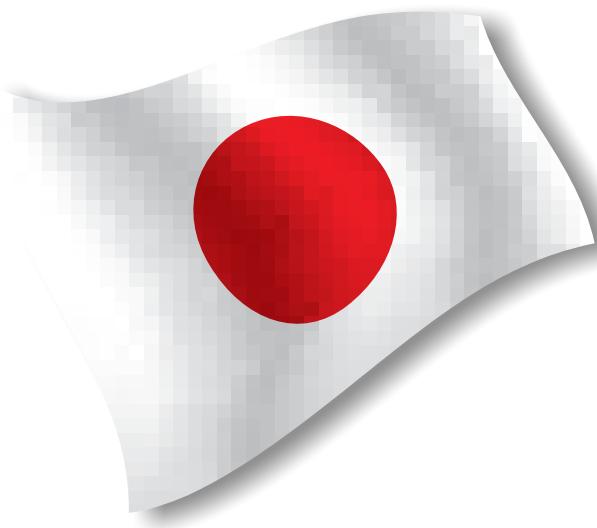
Tokyo Harbor on September 2 1945. As a result of World War II Japan lost all of its overseas possessions and retained only the home islands. Manchukuo was dissolved and Manchuria was returned to China; Japan renounced all claims to Formosa; Korea was granted independence; southern Sakhalin and the Kuriles were occupied by the U.S.S.R.; and the United States became the sole administering authority of the Ryukyu Bonin and Volcano Islands. The 1972 reversion of Okinawa completed the United States' return of control of these islands to Japan.

After the war Japan was placed under international control of the Allies through the Supreme Commander General Douglas MacArthur. U.S. objectives were to ensure that Japan would become a peaceful nation and to establish democratic self-government supported by the freely expressed will of the people. Political economic and social reforms were introduced such as a freely elected Japanese Diet (legislature). The country's Constitution took effect on May 3 1947. The April 28 1952 Treaty of Peace with Japan afforded a progressive and orderly transition to the restoration of full sovereignty from the stringent controls immediately following the surrender.

Recent Political Developments

The post-World War II years saw tremendous economic growth in Japan with the political system dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). That total domination lasted until the Diet Lower House elections on July 18 1993. The LDP in power since the mid-1950s failed to win a majority and saw the end of its four-decade rule. A coalition of new parties and existing opposition parties formed a governing majority and elected a new Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa in August 1993. His government's major legislative objective was political reform consisting of a package of new political financing restrictions and major changes in the electoral system. The coalition succeeded in passing landmark political reform legislation in January 1994.

Under the 1994 legislation the lower house electoral system was changed to one in which 300 members are elected in single-member districts and another 200 members on proportional slates in 11 regions. The new electoral system also reduced the number of seats in overrepresented rural areas and shifted them to some urban areas.



RELIGION

Shinto and Buddhism are Japan's two major religions. They have co-existed for several centuries and have even complemented each other to a certain degree. Most Japanese consider themselves Buddhist, Shintoist or both.

Religion does not play a big role in the everyday life of most Japanese people today. The average person typically follows the religious rituals at ceremonies like birth, weddings and funerals may visit a shrine or temple on New Year and participates at local festivals (matsuri), most of which have a religious background.



In April 1999 Prime Minister Hosokawa resigned. Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata formed the successor coalition government Japan's first minority government in almost 40 years. Prime Minister Hata resigned less than 2 months later. Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama formed the next government in June 1994 a coalition of his Japan Socialist Party (JSP) the LDP and the small Sakigake Party. The advent of a coalition containing the JSP and LDP shocked many observers because of their previously fierce rivalry. Prime Minister Murayama served from June 1994 to January 1996. He was succeeded by Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto who served from January 1996 to July 1998. Prime Minister Hashimoto headed a loose coalition of three parties until the July 1998 Upper House election when the two smaller parties cut ties with the LDP.

Hashimoto resigned due to a poor electoral showing by the LDP in those Upper House elections. He was succeeded as party president of the LDP and Prime Minister by Keizo Obuchi who took office on July 30 1998.

GOVERNMENT

Officially, Japan is a constitutional monarchy with the emperor as the head of state. Like the British queen, the emperor is basically a figurehead but one who receives a great deal of respect. Elected officials are considered to be erai (great, worthy of respect) and it is much more common than in Europe or the US for electoral seats to be 'inherited' by family members. The power of rural politicians tends to rest in their ability to satisfy their constituents by bringing infrastructure projects - roads, bridges, bullet train lines etc - to their region. The impression you get is that city dwellers tend to stay away from the ballot box in favor of interest groups and citizens' movements. Political news often dominates TV and newspapers but most Japanese do not get directly involved in politics and there seems to be a general sense of apathy towards the subject.





HEALTH

We recommend seeing your health-care provider for needed vaccines, medications, and information about how to protect yourself from illness and injury while traveling at least 4-6 weeks before your departure.

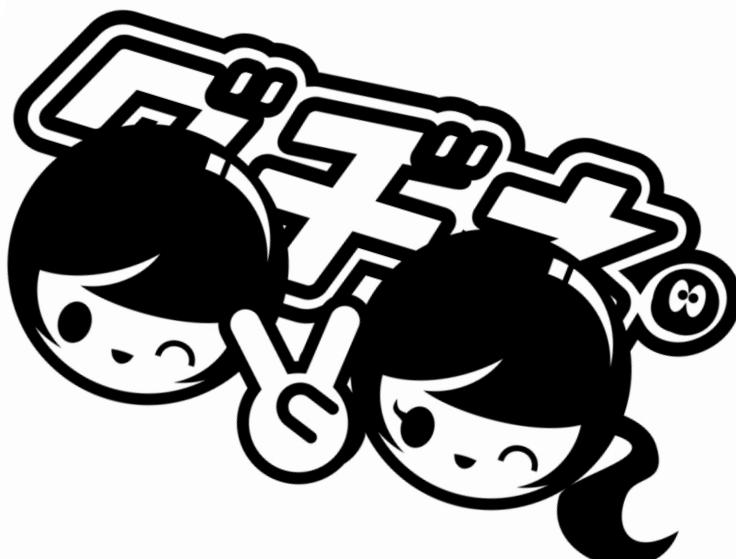
If your travel plans will take you to more than one country during a single trip, be sure to let your health-care provider know so that you can receive the appropriate vaccinations and information for all of your destinations. Long-term travelers, such as those who plan to work or study abroad, may also need additional vaccinations as required by their employer or school.

LANGUAGE

Japanese language is the certified language of Japan. It has two forms, namely hyojungo or standard Japanese and kyotsugo or the common language. The former is mostly used in schools, television and in official communications. It is further sub-divided into bungo or "literary language," and kogo or "oral language". The distinction is basically in the rules of grammar and variance in vocabulary. Kogo has been used as the leading method of talking and lettering by the people of Japan since the Second World War.

COMMON PHRASES

English	Japanese
Hello	Konnichiwa
How are you?	O genki desu ka?
Thank you	Arigato gozaimasu
You're welcome	Do itashimashite
Goodbye	Sayonara
Please	Onegai shimasu
I'm sorry	Gomen
What is your name?	O namae wa?
My name is _____	_____ Desu
Yes	High
No	EE-eh
Where is the toilet?	Otearai wa doko desu ka?
How do I get to _____?	Wa dochira desu ka/
Water	Mizu
How much is?	Ikura desuka?



CLIMATE

Except for the Hokkaido area and the subtropical Okinawa region, the weather is mostly temperate, with four seasons. Winters are cool and sunny in the south, cold and sunny around Tokyo (which occasionally has snow), and very cold around Hokkaido, which is covered in snow for up to four months a year. Summer, between June and September, ranges from warm to very hot, while spring and autumn are generally mild throughout the country. Rain falls throughout the year but June and early July is the main rainy season. Hokkaido, however, is much drier than the Tokyo area. Rainfall is intermittent with sunshine. Typhoons are only likely to occur in September or October but rarely last more than a day.

AVERAGE TEMPERATURE & RAINFALL

Tokyo	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	1.9	2.9	4.0	5.3	5.2	7.2	5.7	5.8	8.5	8.7	4.0	2.4
Min Temp (F)	30	32	37	48	57	64	72	73	68	55	45	36
Max Temp (F)	48	50	55	64	72	77	84	88	81	70	61	54

Osaka	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	1.7	2.3	3.8	5.0	4.8	7.6	7.0	4.6	6.7	4.8	3.2	2.0
Min Temp (F)	34	34	39	48	57	66	73	75	68	55	45	37
Max Temp (F)	48	50	55	66	75	81	88	91	84	73	63	54

Hiroshima	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	1.8	2.8	4.2	6.2	6.1	9.8	9.8	4.6	8.5	4.8	2.6	2.0
Min Temp (F)	32	32	37	46	55	64	72	73	66	54	45	36
Max Temp (F)	48	50	55	64	72	77	84	88	81	73	64	54

Sapporo	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	4.4	3.3	2.6	2.6	2.3	2.6	3.9	4.2	5.7	4.4	4.4	4.1
Min Temp (F)	10	12	19	32	39	50	57	61	52	39	28	18
Max Temp (F)	28	30	36	52	61	70	75	79	72	61	46	34

Okinawa	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	4.5	4.2	6.4	6.0	9.6	10	7.5	7.0	6.6	5.9	4.6	4.8
Min Temp (F)	56	57	60	65	70	75	79	78	77	72	66	60
Max Temp (F)	65	66	69	75	79	83	88	87	85	81	75	69



THE LAND

A modern country with a rich heritage, Japan has long been popular with travelers. There are four main islands which make up Japan: From the north to the south: Hokkaido, Honshu the main island, Shikoku, and Kyushu. More than 4,000 smaller islands surround these four main islands. Japan is divided into 47 Prefectures.

Japan is separated from the Asian mainland by 160km (100 miles) of sea. About 70 per cent of the country is covered by hills and mountains, a number of which are active or dormant volcanoes. A series of mountain ranges runs from northern Hokkaido to southern Kyushu. The Japanese Alps (the most prominent range) run in a north-south direction through central Honshu. The highest mountain is Mount Fuji at 3,776m (12,388ft). Lowlands and plains are small and scattered, mostly lying along the coast and composed of alluvial lowlands and diluvial uplands. The coastline is very long in relation to the land area, and has very varied features. The deeply indented bays with good natural harbors tend to be adjacent to mountainous terrain.

THE PEOPLE

Japan is an urban society with about only 5% of the labor force engaged in agriculture. Many farmers supplement their income with part-time jobs in nearby towns and cities. About 80 million of the urban population is heavily concentrated on the Pacific shore of Honshu. Metropolitan Tokyo-Yokohama, with 35,000,000 people, is the world's most populous city. Japan faces the same problems that confront urban industrialized societies throughout the world: over-crowded cities and congested highways.



CHANGING MONEY

All banks in Japan displaying an AUTHORIZED FOREIGN EXCHANGE sign can exchange currency and traveler's checks, with exchange rates usually displayed at the appropriate foreign-exchange counter. Banks are generally open Monday through Friday from 9am to 3pm, though business hours for exchanging foreign currency usually don't begin until 10:30 or 11am (be prepared for a long wait; you'll be asked to sit down as your order is processed). More convenient -- and quicker -- are Travelex foreign-exchange kiosks, with locations in several cities in Japan, including Tokyo, Kyoto, Nagoya, Osaka, and Sapporo.

If you need to exchange money outside banking hours, inquire at your hotel. Likewise, large department stores also offer exchange services and are often open until 7:30 or 8pm. Note, however, that hotels and department stores may charge a handling fee, offer a slightly less favorable exchange rate, and require a passport for all transactions.

CREDIT CARDS

American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard, Visa and other major credit cards are widely accepted in towns. ATMs are widely available although many do not accept foreign credit or debit cards, and are harder to find outside of towns. They are generally open Mon-Fri 0700-2300, Sat-Sun 0900-1900, though some only operate during normal banking hours and on Saturday mornings. Citibank machines accept foreign credit cards and are often open 24 hours. Traveler's checks can be exchanged at most major banks, larger hotels and some duty free shops. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travelers are advised to take traveler's checks in Japanese Yen or US dollars. Note: Japan has a strong cash culture, and it is usual to see people carrying large amounts of cash with them because of the low crime rate.



CURRENCY

Japanese Yen (JPY; symbol ¥). Notes are in denominations of ¥10,000, 5,000, 2,000 and 1,000. Coins are in denominations of ¥500, 100, 50, 10, 5 and 1.

Banks are open from 09:00am to 03:00 pm Monday to Friday (closed on Sat, Sun and national holidays). There are Citibank locations in the larger centers for those people using the *PLUS* system but be warned, the Japanese banking system is not always as advanced as other industrialized countries.

TIPPING

Service charges of 10% are added to bills in most leading hotels and restaurants. Where it is not included, a tip of 10-15% of the bill would be appropriate.

Airport porter/hotel bellboy:

\$1.00 - \$ 2.00 US per bag.

Your tour guide:

\$10.00 - \$ 12.00 US per person per day.

Driverassistants:

\$ 6.00 - \$ 7.00 US per person per day.

Japan has a 5% consumer tax. If you eat at expensive restaurants and stay in top-end accommodation, you will encounter a service charge which varies from 10% to 15%.



TAXI

Anywhere in the world even a savvy traveler can be taken advantage of by a taxi driver and Japan is no exception. To avoid problems it is wise to never accept a ride with anyone who does not have a working meter and a displayed license. One way to have a good Taxi experience is to ask your hotel where to find a legitimate taxi. You may be able to get a business card of a reputable taxi driver that you can either call when needed or arrange to pick you up at a predetermined time and place.

SAFETY & CRIME

Crime in Japan is lower than in many other first world countries. While crime is still infrequent, the past decade has seen increasing crime. There are controversies regarding crimes committed by non-ethnic Japanese people and misconduct by police in reporting crime statistics.



ETIQUETTE

Japanese manners and customs are vastly different from those of Western people. A strict code of behavior and politeness is recognized and followed by almost all Japanese. However, they are aware of the difference between themselves and the West and therefore do not expect visitors to be familiar with all their customs but expect them to behave formally and politely. A straightforward refusal does not form part of Japanese etiquette. A vague 'yes' does not really mean 'yes' but the visitor may be comforted to know that confusion caused by non-committal replies occurs between the Japanese themselves.

Entertaining guests at home is not as customary as in the West, as it is an enterprise not taken lightly and the full red-carpet treatment is given. Japanese men are also sensitive lest their wives be embarrassed and feel that their hospitality is inadequate by Western standards; for instance, by the inconvenience to a foreign guest of the custom of sitting on the floor.

Bowing is the customary greeting but handshaking is becoming more common for business meetings with Westerners. The honorific suffix "san" should be used when addressing all men and women; for instance Mr. Yamada would be addressed as Yamada-san. When entering a Japanese home or restaurant it is customary to remove shoes. Table manners are very important, although the Japanese host will be very tolerant towards a visitor. However, it is best if visitors familiarize themselves with basic table etiquette and use chopsticks. It is customary for a guest to bring a small gift when visiting someone's home. Exchange of gifts is also a common business practice and may take the form of souvenir items such as company pens, ties or high-quality spirits. Smoking is only restricted where notified.

PHOTOGRAPHS

It is polite to ask permission before taking photographs, Some people may take offense.

DRUGS

Illegal drugs - The simple answer - don't.

Prescription drugs - It is recommended to travel with prescriptions for any drugs you are required to travel with for your personal health.

Note: Some drugs available by prescription in the US are illegal in other countries. Check the US Department of State Consular Information for the country(s) you intend to visit or the embassy or consulate for that country(s). If your medication is not allowed in the country you will be visiting, ask your health-care provider to write a letter on office stationery stating the medication has been prescribed for you.

COMMUNICATIONS

Telephone

Japan is a leader in mobile phone technology and usage. In addition to calling, email and messaging, mobile phones are packed with features such as internet browsers, games, cameras, televisions, electronic wallets/train passes, gps/navigation and music players. Because of these features, mobile phones have become an important and integral part of everyday life.

The biggest Japanese mobile phone companies are NTT Docomo, au by KDDI, and Softbank (formerly Vodafone, and before that J-phone). There are also a few smaller carriers, some of which provided specialized services such as prepaid service and mobile internet.

Mobile Telephone

Due to different technologies, mobile phones from your home country may not work in Japan. Most importantly, there is no GSM network in Japan, so GSM-only phones do not work. The following are needed for a handset to work in Japan:

For Voice - The handset must be compatible with a Japanese mobile phone network (typically 3G UMTS 2100 MHz or 3G CDMA2000 800 MHz). Compatible handsets may be used via international roaming (check with your home provider for details) or a rental or prepaid SIM card from a Japanese carrier (unlocked handsets only). Alternatively, phones with wireless network (WIFI) connectivity can use internet based telephone services (voip), such as Skype, when connected to a WIFI network.

For Data - Phones that work in Japan for voice (see above) can also receive and send data (such as e-mails and web content) via international roaming or a rental/prepaid SIM card, but note that the cost for data transfer can easily skyrocket without an appropriate data plan. Alternatively, phones with wireless network (WIFI) connectivity can take advantage of the numerous paid and free wifi hotspots found around the country.



Renting is the most economical way for the average traveler to get a phone, and typically requires a picture ID and a credit card. Many companies have kiosks at the airports, while other companies will mail a phone to your hotel or to your home. You can return the phones at the airport or through the mail depending on the company.

The fees for rental phones vary and usually consist of the rental fee (typically 250-1000 yen per day) plus a usage fee (typically 70-200 yen per minute domestic outgoing, incoming calls are free). All of the companies at the airports have same day rentals, while some companies offer discounts for advanced reservations.

Internet

Many hotels in Japan offer free internet in their guest rooms. A few hotels, typically the higher end Western chains, charge for internet access based on 24 hour periods. Access is typically provided as wired internet via LAN cable, but wireless networks are also common. At older hotels you may have to borrow and install some hardware in order to set up a network in your room. Many hotels also provide wireless internet or public computers in their lobby or business center.

Free public Wi-Fi is not commonly available in Japan; however, some restaurants, bars, and shops provide free wireless internet access to their customers.

WHAT TO PACK

Lightweight cottons and linens are required throughout summer in most areas. Light- to medium weights during spring and autumn; medium- to heavyweights for winter months, according to region. Much warmer clothes will be needed in the mountains all year round. There is much less rainfall than in Western Europe.

While visiting temples and other religious places, you will need to dress conservatively. Slacks are more appropriate for men; and longer - length skirts are more appropriate for women. Shoulders must also be covered when inside religious buildings. Please keep in mind that shoes must be removed when entering temples. It is, therefore, suggested that you carry a pair of socks to wear inside religious buildings.

Other items include Lip balm, Sun Block/ Hat/ Sunglasses, A warm jacket, Rain poncho, Sneakers or a good pair of walking shoes, mosquito repellent, camera and batteries.

ELECTRICITY

100V 50Hz Japanese-style plug with two parallel flat blades. In any country where electricity is 220V AC, note that this is enough to fry any 120V North American appliance. Americans should buy an adapter (which changes the shape of the plug) and a converter (which changes the voltage). Don't make the mistake of using only an adapter (unless appliance instructions explicitly state otherwise).

Post

Post offices provide a range of postal services including the shipping of post cards, letters, parcels and registered mail as well as savings and insurance services. Door-to-door delivery services, known as takuhaibin are also provided by various companies other than the post office.

Small post offices are open Monday to Friday from 9:00 to 17:00 and are closed on weekends and national holidays. Larger offices are opened on weekdays until 19:00 and may also open on Saturdays and Sundays. Most post offices are equipped with international automated teller machines (ATM'S) Mailboxes are red.

Media

Television is the main form of media today in Japan and a staple in almost all homes. Newspapers, Magazines, and Radio the older generations still like. However internet is fast becoming the primary source of information and generally through cell phones.



SHOPPING

A blend of Oriental goods and Western sales techniques confronts the shopper, particularly at the big department stores, which are more like exhibitions than shops. Special purchases include kimonos, mingei (local crafts including kites and folk toys); Kyoto silks, fans, screens, dolls; religious articles such as Shinto and Buddhist artifacts; paper lanterns; lacquer ware; hi-fi equipment, cameras, televisions and other electronic equipment. Bargaining is not usual. Shopping hours: 10:00am - 7:00pm /8:00pm every day of the week and on public holidays.

Purchase of Tax-Free Articles

When you purchase articles at specified "tax-free" shops, consumption tax on those articles may be exempted on condition that they are taken out of Japan. When you purchase tax-free articles, you will be required to present your passport at the shop and you will receive a card entitled " Record of Purchase of Consumption-Tax-Exempt for Export," which will be attached to your passport. Articles purchased tax free will be checked with the card by a Customs officer, who will collect the card at the time of your departure from Japan.

Words of Wisdom-Buyer Beware

Bring your purchases home with you. Unless you are prepared to wait a prolonged period of time, do not have it shipped -- not even by air freight.

Do not purchase expensive goods of supposed high quality unless you are absolutely sure of what you are buying.

Unless you are an expert in gems, antiques, artifacts, etc., you should not assume that it is of the highest quality or value.

Always take the time to read the charge slips for credit card purchases before you sign them. This may seem obvious; but in the excitement of making a foreign purchase, travelers sometimes overlook this and are unpleasantly surprised when they return home and are billed by the credit card company. Taking a few moments to review the charge slip before signing it (and computing the exchange rate to be sure you are charged the right amount) can save you headaches later.

CUSTOMS

Clothes, toiletries, and other personal effects for your personal use, as well as portable professional equipment that will be used during your stay in Japan, are all free of duty and/or tax, if they are considered quantitatively appropriate and are not for sale.

There are limits, Alcoholic Beverages 3 bottles, Cigars 100, Cigarettes 400,or 500 Grams of loose tobacco. Perfume 2 ounces



Alluring
ASIA

FOOD

Japanese cuisine, now popular in the West, involves very sensitive flavors, fresh crisp vegetables and an absence of richness. The best place to try sushi is a Kaiten Sushi Bar, where many varieties pass the customer on a conveyor belt allowing complete choice over which delicacies to try, at more reasonable prices than a traditional Sushi Bar. Fine Oriental food (Korean - very hot - and Chinese) is served in restaurants. An amazing number and variety of international restaurants are also available, catering for every possible taste and budget, from French and Italian to Chinese, Indian and Thai. Western dishes in expensive places are good, but cheaper restaurants may be disappointing. The Japanese are very fond of original Scotch whisky, but this is both very expensive and highly sought after, therefore Japanese versions of this drink are often served.

Things to know: Restaurants have table service and in some places it is customary to remove footwear. Waiter service is common in bars. There are no licensing hours. Drinking is subject to long-standing rituals of politeness. The hostess will pour a drink for the visitor, and will insist on the visitor's glass being full. It is also appreciated if the visitor pours drinks for the host, but it is bad manners for a visitor to pour one for himself

National specialties:

Teriyaki (marinated beef/chicken/fish seared on a hot plate).

Sukiyaki (thin slices of beef, tofu and vegetables cooked in soy sauce and then dipped in egg).

Tempura (deep fried seafood and vegetables).

Sushi (slices of raw seafood placed on light and vinegary rice balls - very tasty and refreshing).

Sashimi (slices of raw seafood dipped in soy sauce).



DRINKS

Green tea is by far the most popular beverage amongst the Japanese. The quality of the tea varies greatly from houjicha (a common brown-colored tea) to matcha (a bitter green tea used in tea ceremonies).

WATER

Tap water is safe to drink throughout Japan, but you should avoid drinking directly from streams or rivers. It's also not a good idea to walk barefoot through flooded paddy fields, due to the danger of water-borne parasites.

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

When drinking alcoholic beverages, it is customary to serve one another, rather than serving yourself. You should periodically check your friends' glasses, and replenish them before they are empty. Likewise, if someone wants to serve you, you should drink to make room in your glass if it is full, hold it up for the person while they pour, and then take at least one drink before putting the glass down. These customs apply to everyone in your party even if they are not drinking alcohol.

At the beginning of a meal or drinking party you should not start drinking until everybody at the table is served and the glasses are raised for a toast, which is usually "kampai". Other toasts are acceptable, but avoid using "chin chin" when making a toast, since in Japanese this expression refers to the male genitalia.

While it is considered bad manners to become obviously drunk in some formal restaurants for example in restaurants that serve kaiseki ryori (Japanese haute cuisine), the same is not true for other types of restaurants such as izakaya, as long as you do not bother other guests.



Drinking plays an important role in Japanese society. Drinking parties, typically held at restaurants and izakaya, are a common activity that are used to strengthen both social and business ties. A large variety of alcoholic beverages can be found in Japan. Some of the most popular ones are:

Beer

Beer is the most popular alcoholic drink in Japan. The leading breweries are Asahi, Kirin, Suntory and Sapporo. The art of brewing beer was imported in the early Meiji Period from Germany as a development project for the northern island of Hokkaido.

Happoshu

Happoshu (lit. "sparkling alcohol", also known as low-malt beer) is a relatively recent invention by Japanese brewing companies. It has a similar flavor and alcohol content as beer, but it is made with less malt, which gives it a different, lighter taste. Also due to the lower malt content, happoshu is taxed differently than beer and is consequently sold at a lower price.

Third beer

"Third beer" (also known as "Shin Janru" or "New Genre") is the most recent development in the Japanese beer industry. In order to counter tax changes that reclassified the malt content of beer and subsequently raised the price of happoshu, this beer-like beverage contains no malt, instead using pea, soya, or wheat spirits.

Rice Wine (nihonshu or sake)

Commonly called sake outside of Japan, nihonshu or sake (note that "sake" is also the general Japanese term for alcohol) is brewed using rice, water and white koji mold as the main ingredients. Besides major brands, there are countless local rice wines (jizake). The alcohol content of nihonshu is typically about 10-20%. It is drunk either hot or cold, and it is usually filtered although unfiltered nihonshu (nigorizake) is also popular.

Shochu, Awamori

Shochu is a distilled spirit with an alcohol content usually between 20-40 percent. It is commonly made from rice, sweet potatoes, wheat and/or sugar cane. It is usually served mixed with water and ice, fruit juice and sparkling water, or oolong tea. Awamori is the Okinawan version of shochu. It differs in that it is made from long-grained thai-style rice instead of short-grained Japanese-style rice and uses a black koji mold indigenous to Okinawa.

Chuhai

Chuhai (the name is derived from "shochu highball") are fruit-flavored alcoholic drinks with an alcohol content that ranges between 5-8 percent. Common flavors include lemon, ume, peach, grapefruit, lime, and mikan (mandarin orange). In addition there are many seasonal flavors that come and go. Recent ones include winter pear, pineapple, and nashi (Japanese pear). They are usually shochu based, and are available in cans anywhere alcohol is sold.

Plum wine (umeshu)

Umeshu is made of Japanese plums (ume), sugar, and shochu or nihonshu. Its sweet, fruity, juice-like flavor and aroma can appeal to those who normally dislike alcohol. Commonly made at home, it is also easily found anywhere alcohol is sold. It is usually served on the rocks, mixed with soda, or as an umeshu sawa (umeshu sour).

Wine

Wine is gaining popularity in Japan, especially among women. While imported red, white, and sparkling wines from France, Italy, the United States and Australia are widely available, there also exists a sizable and increasing domestic wine industry. The most famous wine producing region within Japan is Yamanashi Prefecture.

Other liquors

Whisky is perhaps the most popular other western liquor in Japan and is often served on the rocks or mixed with water and ice. Gin and vodka based drinks are also commonly available at bars, restaurants, and izakaya.



CULTURE & THE ARTS

ART:

Japanese art covers a wide range of art styles and media, including ancient pottery, sculpture in wood and bronze, ink painting on silk and paper and more recently manga, cartoon, along with a myriad of other types of works of art. It also has a long history, ranging from the beginnings of human habitation in Japan, sometime in the 10th millennium BC, to the present.

Historically, Japan has been subject to sudden invasions of new and alien ideas followed by long periods of minimal contact with the outside world. Over time the Japanese developed the ability to absorb, imitate, and finally assimilate those elements of foreign culture that complemented their aesthetic preferences. The earliest complex art in Japan was produced in the 7th and 8th centuries AD in connection with Buddhism. In the 9th century, as the Japanese began to turn away from China and develop indigenous forms of expression, the secular arts became increasingly important; until the late 15th century, both religious and secular arts flourished. After the Onin War (1467-1477), Japan entered a period of political, social, and economic disruption that lasted for over a century. In the state that emerged under the leadership of the Tokugawa shogunate, organized religion played a much less important role in people's lives, and the arts that survived were primarily secular. Painting is the preferred artistic expression in Japan, practiced by amateurs and professionals alike. Until modern times, the Japanese wrote with a brush rather than a pen, and their familiarity with brush techniques has made them particularly sensitive to the values and aesthetics of painting. Japanese ceramics are among the finest in the world and include the earliest known artifacts of their culture. In architecture, Japanese preferences for natural materials and an interaction of interior and exterior space are clearly expressed. Today, Japan rivals most other modern nations in its contributions to modern art, fashion and architecture, with creations of a truly modern, global, and multi-cultural bent.

Dance:

There are two types of Japanese traditional dance: Odori, which originated in the Edo period, and Mai, which originated in the western part of Japan. Odori grew out of Kabuki drama and is more oriented toward male sentiments. Mai is traditionally performed in Japanese rooms instead of on the stage. It was influenced by the Noh Drama. A variation of the Mai style of Japanese dance is the Kyomai or Kyoto Style Dance. Kyomai developed in the 17th century Tokugawa cultural period. It is heavily influenced by the elegance and sophistication of the manners often associated with the Imperial Court in Kyoto.

Music:

The music scene in Japan includes a wide variety of performers in distinct traditional and modern styles. The word for music in Japanese is a combination of the Japanese words for "Sound" and "Fun, Comfort". Japan is the second largest music market in the world behind the United States. The oldest forms of Japanese music are a blend of Buddhist chanting and orchestral court music once performed at the Imperial court since the Heian period. Today, the most popular music in Japan is Traditional pop music which is enjoyed by young and old alike in countless karaoke bars throughout Japan.

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