



A Handy Guide to Traveling around Japan

Everything you need to make the most of your trip

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Welcome to Japan!

Japan is rapidly becoming one of the most talked-about tourist destinations in the world, and it's not hard to understand why. From the futuristic neon lights of Tokyo to the age old traditions of the rural countryside, Japan has something to offer everyone, and enough amazing experiences to keep you busy for several lifetimes.

As you prepare for your trip, it's easy to get swept up in the excitement of travel as you scroll through endless blogs and watch hours' worth of videos available online. Soon, you'll find yourself listing all of the best restaurants, activities and locations that you want to visit during your stay. With so much to plan and so many activities to fit into a handful of days, trying to remember the important, practical plans that you need to make can quickly fade into the background, simply forgotten until it's all too late.

Luckily, Heartland JAPAN have put together this simple guide to help you remember everything that you need to pack, plan and prepare before you fly to Japan on your upcoming holiday. We recommend that you take a few minutes to look over everything written here and check that your preparations are complete before you go back to googling the best location to take a stunning picture of Mt Fuji for Instagram.

Have a fantastic time in Japan - we can't wait to welcome you to the best country on Earth!



Before You Fly

Passports, Visas, insurance and more

Passport

If you're starting your trip outside of Japan, then it's vital that you remember to bring your passport to the airport with you!

While there is no minimum period of time that you need to have remaining on your passport, it's vital that it will be valid for the entire length of your stay, and won't expire before you return to your home country.

Under Japanese law, you must carry your passport (or Residence Card, if you are a resident) with you at all times during your stay.

Visa

Before flying to Japan, you must consult your closest Japanese Embassy (or check their website) to find out whether or not you require a visa and apply for one if necessary (please be aware that Heartland JAPAN can not assist you in obtaining a Visa).

For visitors travelling from 68 countries (including the United States of America, Great Britain, Australia and Canada), there is no need to apply for a visa before your trip.

Upon landing at your arrival airport, you will receive a stamp in your passport that allows you to stay in Japan for up to 90 days (depending on nationality) as a tourist.

NOTE: You must have at least one free page in your passport to receive your entry/exit stamps upon arrival and departure, and you may be asked to show a return ticket for your flight home to prove that you do not intend to stay longer than the 90 days allowed by your tourist visa. It is illegal to engage in any paid work while in Japan on a tourist visa.

Health and Vaccinations

Before your visit, it is your responsibility to contact your doctor and ask about any vaccinations that you may require before flying to Japan.

Some common medications are illegal in Japan, including medicine that contains Codeine, Actifed, Sudafed, Pseudoephedrine and Vicks inhalers. Other medication, including medication prescribed for some mental health issues such as ADHD, may be heavily restricted or forbidden regardless of whether or not you bring a doctor's note.

We recommend that you check with your closest embassy for more information.

When travelling, you should always bring a copy of your prescriptions for necessary medicine, in case you run out of it or your suitcase is lost/delayed.



Insurance

While Japanese residents are entitled to reduced-cost health care under the country's National Health Insurance scheme, visitors are expected to pay the full cost for any medical treatment received. Heartland JAPAN highly recommend that you arrange health and travel insurance before your trip.



Staying Connected

Internet, ATMs and appliances

Electrical Appliances

Japan uses the Type A (US) plug with two pins and a voltage of 100v 50/60mhz. Visitors coming from countries that do not use Type A plugs are advised to purchase and bring a converter/adaptor for any appliances that they plan to use during their stay.

NOTE: Depending on the voltage capacity of an appliance, you may find that it either does not work or charges inefficiently in Japan.

Mobile Phones

Most smartphones will work in Japan, but you may find that your service provider charges a high charge for messaging, calls and data abroad, or that you struggle to receive service in rural areas.

Short-term SIM cards (available in packages from 7 days to 30 days) are available for tourists to purchase and use at most arrival airports, or at certain convenience stores or electronic stores across Japan. These cards provide a reasonable data allowance (many can be topped up) that will allow you to stay connected during your trip.

Internet

WiFi is included as part of your room cost at many hotels, but can not always be guaranteed. If the area you are in does not provide a public WiFi service (usually only provided in large cities), then you may be able to access it at some cafes, convenience stores or metro stations.

If being able to connect to WiFi is important to you, it is possible to rent a portable WiFi package at your arrival airport, or at some electronics/mobile phone stores.

Credit Cards and Cash

Japan is still very much a cash-based society, and you will find shops or cafes that do not accept card payments across Japan, including in major cities. It is recommended that you carry money with you at all times, and you can withdraw more money at Post Office ATMs or using the ATM at your closest Seven-Eleven convenience store (other ATMS will accept international cards, but Seven-Eleven and the Post Office are considered to provide the most reliable service, with English-language support available).

NOTE: Before travelling to Japan, you should notify your bank of your intention to go abroad. If you do not notify your bank, they may put restrictions or locks on your account, assuming that transactions made in Japan are fraudulent.



Sticking to the Rules

Important laws, expectations and manners

Age Limits

It is forbidden for anyone under the age of 20 to purchase and/or consume Alcohol and Tobacco in Japan, regardless of whether they are accompanied by a parent, guardian or other adult.

Drug Laws

The Japanese law regarding drugs is considered to be one of the strictest in the world, and tourists are not exempt from the severe punishments associated with possessing or using illegal substances.

While you may have permission to use some substances (such as medical marijuana, adderall or Valium) in your own country, this does not mean that you can use them in Japan, and you will face punishment regardless of their legality in your home country. Additionally, some medicines and substances that you can purchase over-the-counter in your home country are illegal or highly restricted in Japan. It is vital that you take the time to research this before travelling to Japan with any medicines or other substances.

Tattoos

While tattoos are considered normal and artistic in most Western countries, many people in Japan still associate them with criminals and suspicious people. For this reason, many onsen hot springs and public baths, as well as gyms and swimming pools (including many sports facilities within hotels) have strict regulations regarding allowing people with tattoos to use their facilities, regardless of whether you're a Japanese national or a foreigner.

If you are able to cover your tattoos using a bandage or long-sleeved shirt/swimsuit, then that may be enough to meet the regulations of the facility that you wish to access. However, wearing a swimsuit is forbidden in many hot springs and public baths, so it is best to do some research before you go.

A list of tattoo-friendly spas, onsen, baths, gyms and pools can be found here: <https://tattoo-friendly.jp/>

Public Transport

Public transport plays a major role in the lives of most Japanese citizens, with the cost and inconvenience levels associated with owning a car so high. If you attempt to ride a train or subway during the so-called "rush hour" when most people are commuting to or from work, then you may find yourself somewhat overwhelmed by the cramped



conditions that you will find yourself in. If you suffer from claustrophobia or dislike strangers touching you, then you may wish to avoid the peak commuting times. When using public transport, it's important to behave in a way that does not inconvenience others. You should queue up for trains at one of the designated spots along the platform, and wait for passengers to get off the train before boarding. While it is okay to browse the internet or listen to music using headphones, you should avoid making phone calls or allowing your phone to make noise while riding the train. There are also certain areas of the carriage with priority seating for the elderly and disabled, and in these areas you should not use your phone in case it interferes with any medical equipment that priority passengers may use.



Living in Japan

Tips to help navigate daily life

Dining Manners

Before eating a meal in Japan, it's normal to toast with an alcoholic beverage, such as beer. If you don't drink, then you can toast and then simply leave the drink, as this is the politest option. When toasting in Japan, you say 'kanpai'.

When you're about to start eating a meal, it's customary to say 'itadakimasu' before you begin. When the meal is finished, it's polite to say 'gochisou sama deshita'. When eating rice, you should avoid sticking your chopsticks into the rice bowl vertically at any point. You should also never pass food chopstick to chopstick. These two actions are associated with Buddhist funeral rituals. Japanese people usually consider spearing food or pointing with chopsticks to be rude, but they are normally quite understanding when it comes to foreigners who are not used to eating without a knife and fork, so don't worry too much about manners while trying to eat particularly slippery or hard-to-grasp morsels.

When drinking alcohol, it's considered polite to fill or refill your companions' glasses. Give it a shot, and you will find that they respond by filling your glass in return.

House Manners

In Japan, shoes are never worn indoors. For that reason, when entering a house or ryokan (traditional inn), you will be expected to remove your shoes at the entrance. Often, there will also be slippers provided for you to wear. If a room contains a tatami (straw mat) floor, then you should not wear your slippers. There will be a space to leave your slippers outside the door of the room.

Additionally, when going to the bathroom, you will often find special slippers available at the entrance. Switch to those slippers while using the bathroom, then change back to your original slippers when you leave.

Bathing Manners

When using a public bath, you must always shower and wash before entering. Shower units will be available next to the bath. This is often also the case before entering the bath in a Japanese home. Make sure to rinse all soap and shampoo before entering the bath.

When it's time to get out of the bath, you should rinse yourself one more time before leaving.



Miscellaneous Manners

A few final tips

- Eating in public is generally frowned upon in Japan. While eating near food stalls and at festivals/events is perfectly normal and encouraged, you should avoid eating in the street, while walking or on public transport/coaches/trains.
- Pointing is considered rude in Japan. If you wish to indicate someone, gently gesture in their direction with your palm facing upwards.
- When riding on an escalator, stand single file to the left. This keeps the right side clear for anyone who is in a hurry and wishes to walk up the escalator steps rather than stand.
- On rainy days, umbrella stands will be provided at the entrance of most shops and buildings for you to use. In some cafes and shops, plastic bags may be provided instead. Simply slip your umbrella into the bag before carrying it inside.
- When visiting a Japanese home, it's customary to provide a small gift. Something edible is usually the best choice, and you can find pre-packed sweets or biscuit boxes in most shopping malls, supermarkets or convenience stores.
- When visiting a home, company or establishment, it's usually best to wait for someone to show you where to sit before you sit down.
- If you wish to blow your nose, it's best to go to the bathroom to do so. If this isn't possible, make sure to face away from the people near you before you do so.