

30 HELPFUL JAPAN TRAVEL TIPS

1. English Signage:

Many foreigners worry about traveling around Japan on their own because they cannot read Japanese. This is NOT A PROBLEM, especially in the big cities. In Tokyo, most of the subway stations have signs in English and Japanese. Most trains even have onboard LCD displays indicating the upcoming stop in Japanese and in English. On the bullet trains, announcements will be made in English (as well as Japanese and Chinese). In Kyoto, the buses announce the stops in English and offer LCD displays. Finally, you will see a more English signs than you expect, just because the Japanese find it very cool to use English in signs and brochures. Often, a brochure will be written in English on the outside but pay attention; the inside can be completely written in Japanese.

2. Safe and Clean:

A. Among the Lowest Crime Rate in the World: Japan is extremely safe, with one of the lowest crime rates in the world. You can walk alone on the streets and not be afraid. The country is also hospitable, clean, prompt, polite, efficient, and friendly. Many foreigners have wonderful stories of returned lost wallets. Hopefully, you will not have to report such an incident to the police, but if you do, you will find a "Koban" or Police Box at most train stations and major city intersections.

B. Emergency Numbers:

The police emergency number is: 110.

Police general information in English is 03-6501-0110.

Fire/ambulance 119

The Japan Helpline 0570-000-911 - <http://www.jhelp.com/> (24-hour nonprofit emergency assistance service)

Medical information service (Himawari) 03-5285-8181, Mon.–Fri. (9:00 am–8:00 pm)

- When making phone calls from an international telephone, first dial "+", then country-code "81," then skip the "0" and dial the rest of the number.

C. Safe and Pure Drinking Water: Japan's tap water is not only safe to drink, in many areas it is fresh mountain or spring water, rivaling your bottled water from home. Tap water is offered free of charge in restaurants. If you don't receive it automatically, just ask!

D. Trash/Recycling: Despite being so clean, trash cans are a rarity. You will find them by vending machines (especially in the subway), in convenience stores, and by food stands. **Japanese people don't eat and walk at the same time.** That's considered super rude! So, the moment you walk away from some place that sells food, you will not find a trash can. Thus, it's a good idea to carry a plastic bag to store your trash until you find a garbage can, which will almost always also be by recycling bins – trash, paper, bottles/cans.

3. Money:

A. Paper Money: Most places accept large Japanese bills, because people are expected to carry cash, and the ATMs usually offer-up the cash in large denominations. If you take out 30,000 yen, which is the maximum daily withdrawal from the ATM, you will probably get three 10,000-yen notes (like \$100 bills) or two 10,000 yen notes plus two 5,000-yen notes (like \$50 bills). The most common note is the 1,000 yen (like \$10 bills), but you usually won't get that from the ATM.

B. Bring a Coin Purse: You will receive and need to use a lot of 100- and 500-yen coins. The denominations are ¥500 (\$5), ¥100 (\$1), ¥50 (50¢), ¥10 (10¢), ¥1 (1¢)

C. Credit cards: Major department stores, shops in malls, high-end or chain restaurants, tourist shops in large cities, and most taxis take credit cards. Specialty shops, small boutiques, privately run facilities, small restaurants (especially in outside the major cities) do not accept credit cards.

D. ATMs: Most Japanese ATMs do not accept international debit cards. Those that do are: "Seven Bank," which has ATMs operated by the 7-11 Convenience Store, and ATMs at the Post Office. Usually the post office ATMs are in a vestibule out front, accessible with your bank card, so you can still use them, even when the post office is closed. However, these areas may also permanently lock at a certain hour (midnight?) until the next morning.

E. Airport Currency Exchange (Best place to exchange money):

Narita: https://www.narita-airport.jp/en/service/svc_11

Haneda: <http://www.haneda-airport.jp/inter/en/premises/service/bank.html>

Kansai: <https://www.kansai-airport.or.jp/en/service/money/03.html>

F. IC Cards: Suica & PASMO: Both work the same way, only Suica is sold by Japan Railways "JR" and PASMO is sold by the subway lines. They can be used in MOST (but not all) places in Japan.

- Note, there is a ¥500 deposit on the card. You can get this back at the end, if you return the card to the ticket machine on your last day. Or, you can keep it as a souvenir and use it if you ever go to Japan again, since the card is good for ten years! (You can always mail them to Marian as a gift when you get back 😊). You can use the IC card: for local trains, subways, buses and to pay for taxi fares and to purchase items from convenience stores and vending machines.

G. Taxes:

• **Consumption Tax:**

- Japan levies an 8% consumption tax on all sales bills. This tax is expected to be raised to 10% on October 1, 2019.
- If you are shopping at a tax-free store, the consumption tax will be refunded if your purchase is greater than 5,000 yen and you file your tax exemption application on the same day. The tax-free member establishment will handle the refund for you. More info: <https://tax-freeshop.into.go.jp/eng/shopping-guide.php>

- **Departure Tax:** As of January 7, 2019, Japan now charges a ¥1,000 international tourist departure tax: <https://bit.ly/2SoQxqb>.

4. Tipping:

- A. You Do Not need to TIP cab drivers, porters, or waiters. In most establishments where foreigners would stay, a service charge will be added to your bill.
- B. You CAN, however, tip your tour guide (about \$10 per day) and the Head Maid at a ryokan (Japanese-style inn), especially if special requests are made. Present the Head Maid with an envelope containing 3,000 to 5,000 yen in cash (10-15% of the cost of the room night) AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR STAY.
- C. There is also something call **orei**, which literally means “honorable respect.” This is a monetary “gift” which you present in an envelope to a very important host, when you have been given a private, not-usually-for-tourists experience. Examples include: The head temple priest or nun, who offers you a behind the scenes tour of his/her quarters or a well-respected craftsperson (especially if he/she is a “living treasure”), who shows you his/her studio and demonstrates his/her craft. You will usually get instructions from your tour arranger explaining how much to give, but usually it is 10,000 yen, presented in an envelope in cash at the beginning or end of your experience. (Your arranger will explain if it’s the beginning or end.)

5. Travel Information:

Upon Arrival at Narita, Haneda or Kansai International Airports, visit the Tourist Information Center (TIC) for free advice, brochures, maps, and information for last minute details on your trip.

- A. **Narita TIC** is located on the arrival floor in both Terminal 1 (<https://livejapan.com/en/in-tokyo/in-pref-chiba/in-narita/spot-lj0000062/>, Tel: +81-476-30-3383) & Terminal 2 (<https://livejapan.com/en/in-tokyo/in-pref-chiba/in-narita/spot-lj0000063/>, Tel: +81-476-34-5877) at Narita Airport and is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week.
- B. **Haneda TIC** – Located a 2 min walk from the Domestic Terminal station on Tokyo Monorail: 〒144-0041 Haneda Airport International Terminal 2F, 2-6-5 Hanedakuko, Ota-ku, Tokyo [[MAP](#)] (東京都大田区羽田空港2-6-5 羽田空港国際線旅客ターミナルビル2階) <https://tic.jnto.go.jp/detail.php?id=1083>, Tel: +81-3-6428-0653, haneda-branch@tokyo-tourism.jp, open 24 hrs. – This facility specifically provides information on Tokyo: <http://www.gotokyo.org/jp/tourists/info/center/>
- C. **Kansai Airport TIC** <https://www.tourist-information-center.jp/kansai/en/kix/> <https://www.facebook.com/ktickix/posts/795012417510437>
First FI Terminal 1: Central 1F, Term 1 Bldg, 1 Senshu-kuko-naka, Tajiri-cho, Sennan-gun; Tel: +81-72-456-6160; open 7 am-10 pm.

Terminal 2: Term 2 Bldg., 14 Senshu-kuko-naka, Tajiri-cho, Sennan-gun; Tel: +81-72-456-8630; open 11:30 am to 7:30 pm.

D. Other TIC Locations: There are also more than 800 certified tourist information centers around Japan: <https://www.japan.travel/en/plan/tic/>

- The **Kyoto TIC** is on the 2nd Fl of the Kyoto Station Bldg, Tel: +81- 75-343-0548: <https://tic.jnto.go.jp/detail.php?id=1219>; open 8:30 am to 7:00 pm
- In **Tokyo, JNTO** (Japan National Tourism Organization) runs a TIC location on the 1st Fl of the Shin-Tokyo Bldg.,3-3-1, Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo on the Marunouchi-Naka Dori Street side; +81-3-3201-3331; open 9:00 am to 5 pm
- Also In **Tokyo, TCVB** (Tokyo Convention & Visitors Bureau) operates an info center in west Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building (Main Building No.1, 1F), 2-8-1 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 3-5321-3077; info@tokyo-tourism.jp; open 9:30 am to 6 pm
- In **Metro Tokyo**, Japan Railways East Operates **JR Travel Service Centers** https://www.jreast.co.jp/e/customer_support/service_center.html - Here is where you validate your Japan Rail Exchange orders into an actual dated Rail Pass and where you reserve trains and book seat assignments
 - **Narita Airport** - downstairs in terminals 1 (8:15 am to 7 pm) and 2 & 3 (8:15 am to 8 pm)
 - **Haneda Airport:** By the Tokyo Monorail - 6:45 am to 6:30 pm. https://www.jreast.co.jp/e/customer_support/service_center_haneda.html
 - **Tokyo Station:** 7:30 am to 8:30 pm https://www.jreast.co.jp/e/customer_support/service_center_tokyo.html
 - **Shinjuku Station:** Two Locations: (1) South Exit 8 am to 7 pm; (2) East Exit 9 am to 7 pm weekdays; 8 am to 6 pm weekends & holidays. https://www.jreast.co.jp/e/customer_support/service_center_shinjuku.html
 - **Shibuya Station:** 10 am to 6:30 pm https://www.jreast.co.jp/e/customer_support/service_center_shibuya.html
 - **Ikebukuro Station:** 9 am to 6 pm https://www.jreast.co.jp/e/customer_support/service_center_ikebukuro.html
 - **Ueno Station:** 8:30 am to 7 pm weekdays; 8:30 am to 6 pm wknds & hol. https://www.jreast.co.jp/e/customer_support/service_center_ueno.html

E. Downloadable Brochures from JNTO:

[https://www.jnto.go.jp/brochures/eng/index.php?publisher\[\]=1&jnto_category\[\]=103](https://www.jnto.go.jp/brochures/eng/index.php?publisher[]=1&jnto_category[]=103)

F. Other Online Resources – Not from the national or local tourism boards:

- <http://www.japan-guide.com/>
- <https://en.japantravel.com/>
- <https://www.tripsavvy.com/japan-4138866>
- <https://www.frommers.com/destinations/japan>
- <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/japan>
- <https://metropolisjapan.com/>
- Tokyo: <http://www.tokyonoticeboard.co.jp/>, <https://www.timeout.com/tokyo>
- Kansai: <https://www.kansaiscene.com/>

- Kyoto: <https://www.insidekyoto.com/>, <http://www.kyotoguide.com/>
- Fukuoka: <http://www.fukuoka-now.com/>
- Kanazawa: <https://www.insidekyoto.com/things-to-do-in-kanazawa>

G. Current Japan News:

- The Japan Times: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/>
- The Asahi Shimbun: <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/>
- Kyodo News: <https://english.kyodonews.net/news>
- Nikkei Asian Review: <https://asia.nikkei.com/>
- NHK World: <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/>
- Yomiuri Shimbun: <http://the-japan-news.com/>
- News On Japan: <http://www.newsonjapan.com/>

H. **Studying Japanese and culture in Japan:** <https://www.yamasa.org/en/index.html> - This is a great affordable language and cultural immersion school in Central Japan (1/2 hour by train from Nagoya). It's for those 17 and older. My daughter went there two summers – first for three weeks and then for three months.

6. **Accommodations:** Japan offers a wide variety of accommodations from budget to ultra-luxurious, from traditional to contemporary style. In addition to 4-and-5-Star Western-style hotels, there are other types of lodging to be familiar with.

A. Types of lodging (other than 4-and-5-Star standard Western-style hotels):

- **Youth hostels:** <http://www.jyh.or.jp/e/index.php> - Japan Youth Hostels Inc. (Affiliated with Hostel International)
- **Capsule hotels:** https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2025_capsule_hotels.html, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/geoffreymorrison/2016/07/24/what-its-like-to-stay-at-a-japanese-capsule-hotel/#61851f2e1448>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNhBiw9pgUo>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qRhxKH3imQ&vl=en>
- **Minshuku:** Family operated Japanese-style b&bs: <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2026.html>
- **Pensions:** Western-style, family operated b&bs: https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2025_pension.html
- **Guest houses:** A guesthouse (or "gaijin house", meaning "foreigner house") is an inexpensive type of accommodation for foreigners, who stay in Japan for one month or longer and who want to avoid the hassle and the expense of renting and furnishing a [conventional apartment](#). Some guesthouses also offer weekly contracts: <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2032.html>
- **Ryokan:** Ryokan are Japanese style inns found throughout the country, especially in [hot spring](#) resorts: <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2029.html>. More than just a

place to sleep, ryokan are an opportunity to experience the traditional Japanese lifestyle and hospitality, incorporating elements such as [tatami-mat](#) floors, [futon](#) beds, Japanese style baths and local [cuisine](#). Some are very expensive and extremely luxurious. Others are inexpensive and run-down.

- **Business Hotels:** small, economical, no-frills western-style rooms; typically ¥5,000 - ¥10,000 per night single to ¥7,000 - ¥12,000 twin/double. Rooms are clean with attached bath and amenities but often have well-used furniture and allow smoking: https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2025_business_hotels.html
- **Machiya-stays:** These are traditional merchant style houses that have been modernized with contemporary amenities. This type of accommodation is popular in Kyoto, Nara, and Kanazawa: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOxRkK-iB40>, <https://www.kanazawa-machiya-inn.com/about/features/>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cwxf33AxWgA>, <https://www.kyoto-stay.jp/en/aboutus/>, <https://matcha-jp.com/en/983>. The machiya can be pricey, but some are available for less through Airbnb: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fqgah1HdRc>
- **Temple-stays *Shukubo*:** [Buddhist temples](#) that provide non-practicing tourists and visiting pilgrims overnight accommodation within their grounds. This is an excellent chance to experience the simple, austere lifestyle of [Buddhist](#) monks, while staying at a functioning temple. In addition, visitors are usually invited to watch or participate in activities such as: morning prayers, copying sutra, and meditation. This type of accommodation is popular in Mt. Koya but also available in Kyoto: https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2025_temple_lodgings.html

B. Booking Accommodations: For booking regular hotels and ryokan, the best value online search engine in [Agoda.com](#). However, if you cannot find availability on Agoda (or other sites) it does not mean that there are not available rooms. Often, the major Japanese travel agencies block the rooms for their own clients. So, if you encounter a no-rooms available situation at your preferred lodging establishment, it's best to contact Marian, who will liaise directly with her contacts in Japan to try and get the room(s) for you. Marian can also arrange best prices at some of the upscale ryokan and machiya.

7. Rail Passes and Trains:

There are numerous private train lines around Japan and quite a few of them have local passes for foreigners (More details below). However, there is only one train system that covers the whole country, and that is Japan Railways or "JR."

All the regional JR companies come together when purchasing a nationwide JR Rail Pass, officially termed the **All-Japan Rail Pass**.

A. JR Pass specifications:

- The All Japan Rail Pass is available in 7, 14, and 21-day variations. Each duration is consecutive, meaning the pass is good for exactly 7, 14, or 21 days from the date of

activation. You cannot “start-and-stop” the pass even if you have days when you won’t be using it.

- Note: Some of the regional JR passes offer a “Flexi-Pass” option to select your dates of use within a specified period.
- The All Japan Rail Pass is only available to non-Japanese residents. You must show your international or non-resident passport, and your passport name must match the rail pass exactly.
- It is one of the best bargains for traveling in Japan.
 - As an example: a regular round-trip train ticket from Narita Airport to Tokyo (about \$30 each way) and then from Tokyo to Kyoto (about \$130 each way) costs more than an entire Seven Day Rail Pass (currently about \$260).
- The All Japan Rail Pass is accepted on all "Japan Railway" operated trains, most buses, and one ferry (in Hiroshima area to Miyajima), including all Shinkansen "Bullet" trains EXCEPT the Nozomi Super Express.
 - In other words, you can take the Shinkansen bullet train, but when traveling on the Tokaido Shinkansen line, west from Tokyo to Kyoto or Osaka, you must take either *Hikari* or *Kodama* Shinkansen lines, not *Nozomi*. (Hikari and Kodama are bullet trains, but they make more stops than Nozomi.)
- The pass covers both the ticket price itself as well as any reserved seat fees!

B. Purchasing a JR Rail Pass: The JR rail passes – both “All Japan” and “Regional” (See below) – can now be purchased in Japan by showing your non-resident passport at one of the JR Travel Service Centers. (Locations in metropolitan Tokyo are mentioned in 5-D above.) However, I always think it’s best to purchase the pass in advance through a Japanese travel agent abroad, mostly because of the **Price**. The price of the rail passes is set in yen.

Here are current yen rates:

Type:	Green		Ordinary	
Duration	Adult	Child	Adult	Child
7-day	38,880 YEN	19,440 YEN	29,110 YEN	14,550 YEN
14-day	62,950 YEN	31,470 YEN	46,390 YEN	23,190 YEN
21-day	81,870 YEN	40,930 YEN	59,350 YEN	29,670 YEN

The US Dollar price varies depending upon the exchange rate. Certain travel companies offer a better exchange rate than others. I always find that NTA America [formerly Nippon Travel Agency America] (www.ntaamerica.com) has the best rate – better than the other US sales outlets and better than your exchange rate if purchased the pass in yen in Japan.

- **First Class:** The “Green” car is kind of like “first class,” and “Ordinary” would like an ordinary Amtrak train, but nicer.

- **Child Passes:** Children 6 to 11 years old qualify for the child pass. Under 6 travel free, 12 and over must purchase and adult pass.
- **Exchange Orders:** When you initially purchase a rail pass, you are purchasing an exchange order that will be converted into rail pass upon activation. The exchange order is only good for three months, so do not purchase your rail pass more than two months prior to use.

C. Reserved Seats: Even on the bullet trains, when you use a rail pass, you do not need to pay to reserve a seat. However, if you want to sit in a reserved car, you do need to make a seat reservation on a particular train. If you are not sure which train you want to take and if it is not a peak time period, it is often best just to get to the station early and plan to sit in the non-reserved car. On the Hikari Shinkansen, these are cars 1 through 5. An added advantage is in the non-reserved car is, if you take a three-seat row, you and your companion can usually sit in the window and aisle, leaving the middle seat unoccupied.

D. Using the Rail Pass: Since you cannot put the rail pass through the turnstiles, when you use the rail pass – whether it’s for a local train or Shinkansen – you need to show the pass to the attendant on either side of the row of turnstiles. Assuming the dates on your pass are valid, he or she will let you pass. This works the same for both entering and exiting the train operating area.

E. Regional JR Passes: The JR system is broken up into individual regional train companies, each selling regional rail passes. These regional passes can be more cost effective than the full “All Japan” Rail Pass if you are traveling only within that region of Japan.

- **JR East:** <https://www.jreast.co.jp/e/> - They have an information office in New York City which you call can with questions: (212) 332-8688. They publish downloadable guides and train maps for the Tokyo Metropolitan region and northeastern Japan: <https://www.jreast.co.jp/e/downloads/index.html>

They offer several different JR East passes:

- Standard JR East train pass: https://www.jreast.co.jp/e/eastpass_t/
 - JR East + Southern Hokkaido: <http://www.jreasthokkaido.com/e/>
 - JR East Nagano & Niigata areas: https://www.jreast.co.jp/e/eastpass_n/
 - JR Tokyo Wide Pass: <https://www.jreast.co.jp/e/tokyowidepass/> - In general this pass is for JR trains in the Tokyo Metropolitan region; however, they run promotions during off-peak periods, allowing the pass wider coverage, such as to Gala Yuzawa ski resort in Niigata Pref: <https://gala.co.jp/winter/english/>
 - Hokuriku Arch Pass: Osaka-Hokuriku-Tokyo: <http://hokuriku-arch-pass.com/en/>
- **JR Central:** <https://global.jr-central.co.jp/en/> - They have an information office in Washington DC which you can call with questions: (202) 429-1900
 - Alpine-Takayama-Matsumoto Tourist Pass: <http://touristpass.jp/en/alpine/>
 - Covers all transportation in the Tateyama-Kurbe Alpine Route: <https://www.japan.travel/en/spot/1353>
 - **JR West:** <https://www.westjr.co.jp/global/en/>, <https://www.facebook.com/jrwest/en/>
There are nine different Kansai area passes depending upon the number of days needed and cities to be visited: <http://www.westjr.co.jp/global/en/ticket/pass/>

- **JR Kyushu:** <http://www.jrkyushu.co.jp/english/>
 - Three Kyushu Passes: <http://www.jrkyushu.co.jp/english/railpass/railpass.html>
- All Kyushu, Southern Kyushu, Northern Kyushu passes.
- **JR Shikoku:** <http://shikoku-railwaytrip.com/railpass.html> (All Shikoku Rail Pass)
- **JR Hokkaido,** <http://www2.irhokkaido.co.jp/global/english/ticket/railpass/index.html>,
<https://www.facebook.com/jrwest.en/>

F. Train Schedules and routing: *HyperDia* <http://www.hyperdia.com/> is an extremely useful tool for figuring out train schedules, routing, and pricing. Remember, however, if you are using a rail pass, you must un-click “Nozomi” under the search options. You must also be careful to make sure you are maximizing JR operated trains and not other local train lines. HyperDia even has an app, so you can use it on the go:

- <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/hyperdia-by-voice/id379001449?mt=8>
- https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.hyperdia.android.activity&hl=en_US

H. Other Discounts Available with the Japan Rail Pass:

- 10% discount on Japan Railway Group owned hotels, such as Metropolitan Hotels, Associa Hotels, Granvia Hotels, Clemment Hotels, Blossom Hotels, JR East Hotel Mets Group, and more.
- Complimentary travel on some JR buses
- Complimentary travel on the 10-minute ferry from Miyajimaguchi to Miyajima.

I. Train Punctuality -- Trains almost ALWAYS depart ON TIME. DON'T BE LATE.

J. Purchasing Train Tickets without a Rail Pass:

This **video** is extremely helpful: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAUfF8UVAAdI>

- **Credit Card Ticket Purchases:** Nowadays most train ticket vending machines accept credit cards or IC Cards (see 3 above) for ticket purchases. Some single ticket purchases do not accept credit cards, but then you can just purchase an IC card and use the extra money on the card for something else.
- **Purchasing Shinkansen tickets without a rail pass:** Most upscale hotels will purchase the tickets for you for a small service charge, which can save you a lot of time.
- **Purchasing Subway Tickets:** Most Tokyo subways are not part of the Japan Rail system, and thus, are not covered by the Japan Rail Pass. However, subways are not expensive. Charges are by distance, with the following most common charges: ¥170, ¥200, ¥240, ¥280, or ¥300. Signs at most stations are in Japanese and English, except as you go out to the most remote suburban regions. If you are not sure how much to pay, you can purchase the minimal fee, and then add on fare at the end of your journey. Receipts are available by pushing the “receipt” button.
- **Tokyo Subway Line Connections:** Tokyo has 13 subway lines run by two different companies: Toei Subways and Tokyo Metro. Thus, not all subway lines are connected. If

you must switch subway lines in the middle of your journey, you may have to buy a NEW TICKET.

- **Greater Tokyo Pass:** As of April 1, 2018, a new 3-Day Greater Tokyo Pass was initiated. This pass covers unlimited rides for three days on the following rail lines in Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, and Saitama Prefectures: Odakyu, Keio, Keikyu, Keisei, Seibu, Sotetsu, Tokyu, Tokyo Metro, Toei (not including Nippori), Tobu (not including Tobu to/in Tochigi Pref), Minatomirai, Yokohama Municipal Subway, as well as 52 bus lines.
 - This pass might not be the best deal, because: there is an additional fee for limited express trains and reserved seats; it's only good for three days (unlikely to be used more than from the airport to your Tokyo hotel on the first day and does not include the limousine bus); the pass costs ¥7,200 (more than the likely spend on unreserved seating), and most travelers do not take advantage of public buses in Tokyo.
 - https://www.kotsu.metro.tokyo.jp/eng/news/2018/20180301_7807.html

8. Flight Passes – Discount Intra-Japan Flights Only for Foreigners:

Many people don't realize the great distance occupied by the islands of Japan. Okinawa is situated on the same latitude as Miami, Florida, while Hokkaido Island occupies the same latitude as Quebec, Canada. Therefore, if you wish to travel from Tokyo to Okinawa, for example, it will be necessary to purchase a domestic flight (2 hours) within Japan. In addition, it is often worthwhile to fly from Itami, Osaka Airport, which is Kyoto's closest airport directly to your international flight at Narita, in order to save time, connecting hassle, and even money.

As it turns out, both Japan Airlines and ANA have one-leg-minimum flight passes that are available only to foreign passport holders. Just book your international ticket, and then once, you have the ticket number, you can then add on a domestic leg for only \$98 (at the current exchange rate). For more details check out:

JAL's Japan Explorer Pass: https://www.world.jal.co.jp/world/en/japan_explorer_pass/lp/

ANA's Experience Japan Fare: https://www.ana.co.jp/en/us/promotions/share/experience_ip/

You can take advantage of these fares regardless which airline you fly internationally. You do not have to be flying on the same alliance carrier (a previous requirement when these fares were originally introduced).

9. Buying Discount Airline Tickets to Japan

NTA: <https://www.ntaamerica.com/airline-tickets/>

HIS: <https://flights.hisgo.com/us/?lang=en>

IACE: <https://www.iace-usa.com/en/flight>

AMNET: <http://www.travelwithamnet.com/air-tickets/>

JTB: <https://www.jtbusa.com/>

[ChinaTour.com](#): I purchased a round-trip ticket from them in August 2018 for November 2018 travel, which flew through Beijing (PEK) to Narita (NRT) round-trip for only \$436!

10. Airport Arrival and Transferring Downtown:

Narita Airport (NRT) is located about 100 km or 60 miles East of Tokyo in Chiba Prefecture: <https://www.narita-airport.jp/en/>

Haneda Airport (HND) is located within Tokyo City in Ota Ward, between 20 and 23 km to Tokyo or Shinjuku Stations respectively: <http://www.haneda-airport.jp/inter/en/>

Kansai Airport (KIX), situated on a manmade island in Osaka Bay, is located 50 km or 31 miles from Osaka City: <https://www.kansai-airport.or.jp/en/>

Itami Airport (ITM) is the domestic Osaka airport. It is the closest airport to Kyoto. I often recommend flying from Itami to Narita to connect with Tokyo international flights on the way home.

There is free wifi at: the airports, on the limousine buses, and the Narita Express train.

Getting from Haneda, Narita, and Kansai Airports to downtown Tokyo, Osaka or Kyoto does not have to be difficult or expensive.

- A. If you have an activated Japan Rail Pass, your pass covers the cost of the *Narita Express* (N'EX) and *Haruka Limited Express* trains from Narita and Kansai Airports respectively. Simply go directly to the JR station located at the airport, validate your pass, and proceed to your destination. The Narita Express takes one hour from Narita to Tokyo Station. The Haruka Express takes 1-hour to Shin-Osaka Station and 1 hr-15 min to travel the additional two-station-stops to Kyoto Station.
- B. If you do not have a Japan Rail Pass, you can pay for the Narita or Haruka Express trains, about \$30. Or, you can take a comfortable and convenient **airport limousine bus** directly from the airport to your hotel in Tokyo or to Tokyo, Osaka, or Kyoto Station for about \$30 one way from NRT & KIX or about \$9 from HND or \$13 from ITM. The orange-colored limousine bus kiosks are easily identifiable with English signage on the airport arrival floors. There are separate buses operating from NRT & HND to different areas of Tokyo and from KIX to Osaka, Kyoto, and Kobe. Please also check these websites for schedules:
 - Tokyo area: <https://www.limousinebus.co.jp/en/>,
 - Kansai area (KIX): <http://www.kate.co.jp/en/>,
 - Itami/Osaka - Kyoto: https://www.okkbus.co.jp/en/timetable/K/#one_way
- C. **Ride Share Vans:**
 - **Green Tomato** from Narita to Tokyo and Yokohama: <https://www.greentomato-j.com/eng/>
 - **MK Taxi** "Skygate" shared vans in Kansai: <http://www.mk-group.co.jp/english/>, http://www.mk-group.co.jp/english/shuttle_kyoto.html - About \$40 per person from KIX to your hotel in Kyoto; \$25 per person from Itami (domestic airport) to your hotel in Kyoto.

11. Taxis: Japan has 260,000 taxis nationwide (35,000 in Tokyo alone).

- A. How Do You Know It's a Taxi?** A Japanese taxi cab can be identified by a distinctive company symbol or taxi crest (<https://binged.it/2MKQ5dU>) displayed on the roof and illuminated at night.
- B. Hailing a Taxi:** Taxis can be hailed on the street, from virtually anywhere you like, at most times and in most areas. However, some areas, like Ginza in Tokyo, do not allow taxis to stop anywhere but taxi stands, requiring passengers to line up at a taxi stand. Taxi stands are also the rule at railway and subway stations and major hotels in Tokyo and can be especially crowded on Friday and Saturday nights, especially after the trains have stopped running, meaning quite a long wait. You should take the taxi waiting at the very front of the line.
- **TAKKUN - Taxi Hailing app for Tokyo:** This is the official app of the Tokyo Taxi Association, which uses GPS to allow you to flag down a nearby taxi from your phone! <http://takkun.taxi-tokyo.or.jp/en/>
- C. How to Know if the Taxi is Available:** In Japanese, taxi is タクシー written in katakana characters. A vacant taxi displays the sign 空車 (*kuusha* or "empty car") in **red** in the front window. An occupied taxi display is 賃走 (*chinso* or "running a fare") in **green** or **blue**. In other words, if **red**: the taxi will **stop** to pick up passengers, and **green** or **blue**: the taxi will **not stop**. (See crest image link above.)
This, of course, is the opposite of what you might expect!
- D. Paying:** As I mentioned earlier you don't have to tip a taxi driver (will be confusing/embarrassing). You can pay most taxis by credit card and even SUICA/PASMO, but please check with the driver first. Just show him your card and he will say yes/no. Also, let the driver know in advance if you only have large bills, in case he does not have change.
- E. Phone Charging:** Often the cabs have chargers for your phone (both iPhone & Android), and if not but you have your own cord, they will usually let you plug-in.
- F. Drivers do not usually speak and may not read English well:** It's always a good idea to have the address written out for the driver in Japanese, as they may not read English or understand your English pronunciation. Having an app like Google Translate's audio feature (<https://translate.google.com/>) on your phone will be helpful. If you don't have an address, it may help to show the driver on a map, either a paper map or one on your phone if you have wifi.
- G. Aesthetics:** The taxis are very clean and usually have lace seat covers and many drivers wear white gloves.
- H. Taxi Doors:** The rear taxi doors open and close automatically, controlled by the driver. Don't open or close them yourself.
- I. Meters:** All taxi cabs have meters, and drivers are generally honest, so it is unlikely you will ever be cheated. Note: Most taxi companies charge a nighttime surcharge. In Tokyo, it's 20% from 10-11 pm and 30% from 11 pm-5 am. In Kyoto, it's 20% 11 pm-5 am.

- J. Receipts:** If you would like a receipt for your ride Say "Re-Sheet-Tó Kudasai" (Please give me a receipt.) and they should understand what you want.
- K. Taxis in Tokyo:** Taxi fares in Tokyo used to be outrageous, but the prices have dropped considerably, and rates are now comparable with taxis in NY and other first world cities. The starting fare is ¥430 yen as of Jan. 30, 2017. Prior to that date, the starting fare was ¥730! You can approximately calculate your taxi fare in advance with this website: <https://www.taxi-calculator.com/taxi-fare-tokyo/361>.
- L. Taxis in Kyoto:** In Kyoto, as of April 2018, the starting fare for the first 1.2 kilometers ranges from ¥410 to ¥450 for standard taxis. But after the first 1.2 km, fares can quickly jump, as ¥80 is added for each additional 255 to 280 meters. Fare calculator: <https://www.taxifarefinder.com/main.php?city=Kyoto-Japan&lang=en>
- M. Taxis in Kanazawa:** The base fare for a small (standard) taxi in Kanazawa is ¥690 and this goes up by ¥80 for every 277 meters. It will probably cost you under ¥1000 to get from Kanazawa Station to any of the city's main locations.
- N. Taxis in Hiroshima:** The base fare for a taxi in Hiroshima is btwn ¥580 and ¥640.
- O. Taxis in Smaller Cities:** The starting fare is around ¥500 yen. After that it costs up to ¥90 for every further increment of distance traveled: which, depending on the city or region, ranges between about 250 and 300 meters.
- P. "Waiting" Fare:** There is the **waiting fare** which is charged instead of the distance fare whenever the speed of the taxi drops below 10km/h (6 mph), such as in heavy traffic or if the passenger makes the taxi wait: 90 yen per 1:45 min in Tokyo and slightly less for similar lengths of time in other areas.

12. Renting a Car:

I do not recommend renting a car for travel to or within big cities, because:

- A.** Trains are faster (the Shinkansen "Bullet" train runs at 180 miles an hour), more comfortable, and much more efficient.
- B.** You must obtain an international driving permit before you go. This can be obtained from your local AAA office in the USA: <https://www.aaa.com/vacation/idpf.html>
- C.** Gasoline is expensive; highway tolls can be double or even triple what we are used to in the USA, and you will no doubt encounter traffic.
- D.** Transportation moves ON THE LEFT in Japan. That is, the Japanese drive on the "British side" of the road, so you need to make turns from the opposite lane and look "the other way" before entering an intersection.
- E.** Rental car fees run between \$80-\$100 a day, plus insurance.

- F. Because of these difficulties, many travelers ask about renting a car WITH DRIVER. This may be convenient but be advised that Japanese salaries are among the highest in the world. A car with driver can easily cost \$700 per day, depending upon the region.
- G. The Japan Automobile Federation (AF) offers information on local attractions to see by car: <http://www.jaf.or.jp/e/local-attractions/>. They also publish an English guide to driving in Japan called "Rules of the Road." This is available in both print and digital format: <http://www.jaf.or.jp/e/road.htm>
- H. It seems that only Nissan rental car offers English GPS. However, be careful, even this GPS only has instructions in English. The map is still in Japanese! This usage video is quite helpful: <https://youtu.be/l2j90OtpvQI>

13. Electricity: Japanese electrical outlets are 100v 50Hz AC. Ours are 110v and 60Hz AC. So, North American devices work in Japan, albeit they may run a little bit more slowly. Note: you can plug your electronic device directly into the wall, provided you have a two-prong device. The reason is, Japanese outlets only have two holes (image: <https://sumo-wifi.com/img/outlet.jpg>), and sometimes our electronics have three prongs. Additionally, Japanese hotels do not always have outlets located in convenient locations. For example, I like to sit on my bed with my laptop on my lap and work. But there are not always outlets near the bed. Usually the outlets are by the desk. So, if you are like me, bring the following:

- A. An adapter that will convert your device from 3-prong to 2-prong (https://www.parts-express.com/Data/Default/Images/Catalog/Original/110-211_ALT_0.jpg, [https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/51v6Pii5LyL.SX425.Pbundle-2_TopRight,0,0_SX425SY415SH20 .jpg](https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/51v6Pii5LyL.SX425.Pbundle-2_TopRight,0,0_SX425SY415SH20.jpg))
- B. An extension cord.

14. Luggage:

- A. **Luggage Storage:** The train and bus stations have safe, coin lockers that can hold even large luggage. There are some lockers that are even much larger than ones in this photo: <https://netmobius.freetls.fastly.net/images-stn-shinjuku/39-Coin3a.jpg>. Priced by size [¥300-¥700](#).
- B. **Luggage Sending:** Yamato Transport provides a luggage sending service called Takkyubin or Ta-Q-Bin between accommodations, as well as to/from the airports in Japan. You just go down to the bell desk of your hotel early in the morning and tell them you want to send your luggage to your next hotel. If you are staying in a small guest house or Airbnb, you may need to go to the nearest convenience store (7-11, Lawsons, Family Mart, etc.) to ship your luggage. **Instructions ...**
 - Fill out the form and pay \$17-\$19 per suitcase. The price is determined mostly by size but somewhat by weight.

- You may have to pay in cash (yen) on the spot when sending. Although a few hotels will allow you to pay upon pick-up, they do not accept credit cards.
- They will wrap your luggage in plastic and take very good care of it. It makes traveling so much less burdensome.
- To most destinations within Honshu, the luggage takes 24 hours to arrive. However, it will take longer if you are shipping from longer distances, such as from Okinawa or Hokkaido.
- There is a surcharge for sending luggage to and from the airport.
- This website, including embedded video, explains how the luggage sending service works <http://www.global-yamato.com/en/hands-free-travel/>

C. Overnight Bag: Because overnight Ta-Q-Bin leaves you without your luggage for 24 hours, always make sure to have an extra overnight bag/backpack for your clothes and essentials for 24 hours. The backpack will also be convenient for the train (so no carrying luggage up and down the stairs, escalators, etc.), and when you are biking, or just touring/hiking.

15. Gifts: Japan is a gift-giving culture. Therefore, I recommend that you bring gifts for some of the guides, specialists, and artisans. When it comes to artisans, purchasing their work is not obligatory, but if you like it and the price is right for you, they will certainly welcome a purchase. A few of the guides are volunteer “Goodwill Guides,” and they would welcome your gift warmly. When you give a gift, please put it into a bag. You can purchase inexpensive bags at the dollar store. To clarify, the gifts do not have to be expensive. They just need to be local and packaged nicely. I have gone down to Chinatown in NYC and purchased a dozen toy NYC yellow taxi cabs. Then, I wrapped them in tissue paper and presented them in a nice gift bag. Other gifts include: candy, any local non-perishable food product (such as local coffee), local team baseball caps, t-shirts, socks. Sometimes I go to our local WholeFoods and buy New Jersey-made soaps or hand lotion. Again, the key is it should be local from your home town or region. Think maple syrup candy from Vermont. The gifts should be foldable or small, so that you can put one into the overnight bag, and then forward the other ones on with the sending luggage. You don’t have to put them into the gift bag until you present the gift. Usually, you give the gift at the end of the meeting, before you depart or while you are having tea after a tour.

16. Tour Guides:

Many first-timers to Japan, and even those who frequent the country but do not speak the language, inquire about hiring a guide.

A. Licensed guides are extremely knowledgeable, having studied for years and passed exams on all areas of Japan, not just one local region. Because of their expertise, they usually charge \$300-\$350 per 8-hour day, for up to 6 guests or \$150-\$200 for a half-day. For a full-day tour, you are expected to pay for their lunch. Some specialty-focused guides, who also make private arrangements/appointments, may charge \$500 per day. Please keep in mind that these rates are per group and not per person, so it is much more cost effective, if you are not traveling alone, to book your own guide, rather than a pre-planned tour offered by companies such as [Viator](#), where you need to pay per person.

- B. The Japan Guide Association** is the second oldest non-profit association in Japan (second only to the Japan Hot springs Association). JGA provides information on hiring a licensed guides: https://www.jga21c.or.jp/en/index_e.html. This is the JGA search engine for finding a licensed guide in regions throughout the country: <https://www.guidesearch.info/search>. Some JGA also offer **pre-planned walking tour itineraries** that are charged per person, with rates varying by the number of guests in your group. Guests can pre-pay online to reserve: https://www.jga21c.or.jp/en/wts_e.html.
- C. Triplelights** is another company that provides information on private tour guides, charging by the hour: <https://triplelights.com/japan/tokyo/guides>. You can find the guides' profiles and email them questions before booking.
- D. Chrisrowthorn.com:** A very good company that provides guides in Kyoto, Tokyo, Kanazawa, and Hiroshima is <http://www.chrisrowthorn.com/>. Chris was a contributor to Lonely Planet Japan and the Author for Lonely Planet Kyoto for about 20 years. He lives in Kyoto. Review from the Washington Post: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/04/AR2008010401756_pf.html
- E. Paying Guides in Cash:** Sometimes licensed guides do not accept advance payment, and you need to pay them in cash on the tour day. The good thing is, in this case, there is no tax charged. The bad thing is, it means you must carry a lot of cash (yen). You will present the cash at either the beginning or the end of the tour (as they request), and it must be in an unsealed envelope (so they can check if they want). You can get envelopes from the hotel front desk (or they may be in the desk in your room).
*See **orei** under “**Tipping**” above.
- F. Volunteer Goodwill Guides:**
If you do not need very detailed historical information and are looking more for a bilingual resident to show you around, you can sign up for an SGG “Systemized Goodwill Guide”! There is a plethora of SGG guide groups in Japan. Some offer set tour courses for popular routes or specific major attractions; others will you at your own request. In the Furano Ski area of Hokkaido, there is even an SGG guide service for the ski slopes, which claims they are “the best way of getting to know the vast range of slopes at Furano Ski Area.” They will take you on runs suiting your ability, whether you are a skier or a snowboarder! In most cases, appointments must be made at least two weeks (sometimes three weeks) and no more than two months in advance. Usual guiding hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Guides can meet you at your hotel, your arrival train station or other pre-arranged meeting location. Travelers are expected to pay the guide's local transportation fee (including to and from his/her home), any site admission costs, and an inexpensive lunch (if a full day tour). The guides are usually retired folks or university students:
<https://www.japan.travel/en/plan/list-of-volunteer-guides/>
- G. Business and Personal Cards:** Everyone in Japan exchanges **meishi** or name cards. It is not only business etiquette; it is a matter of politeness, and you should not travel without a name card to give to someone you meet. The cards are considered an extension of the yourself and should be treated with honor and respect. When you present someone with

your card, you should make sure it is upright, facing them. Hold it with two hands and try to deliver your card underneath the card you are receiving, demonstrating your deference to the other person. After receiving the card, you should examine it, and repeat the person's name. If you then sit down for a meeting or to share a friendly cup of tea or coffee, place the card in front of you, so that you can refer to it. Do not simply put it away in your pocket. Keep your cards in an attractive card holder that reflects their importance. Finally, if you can have your cards printed in Japanese on the reverse or with some Japanese on the front that will be very impressive.

17. Wifi:

- A. A number of tourist locations offer free 2-hour (or so)-use free Wifi Passcodes for foreigners. Look for a symbol like these (below), and ask for the code:



- B. Now the limousine buses from the airports, the Narita Express train, and finally (as of September 2018) the Tokaido Shinkansen from Tokyo to Kyoto and Osaka offer free wifi. In May 2019, JR East will launch free wifi on its [Tohoku Shinkansen](#) (Tokyo-Sendai-Morioka), [Hokuriku Shinkansen](#) (Tokyo-Nagano-Kanazawa) and Akita Shinkansen. Little by little all Shinkansen trains will be equipped with wifi.
- C. For Wifi throughout the country, it's best to purchase a wifi device, which can be shipped to your hotel. I always recommend getting one with 4AU, otherwise it usually doesn't work well, especially when you go out of major cities. I can arrange the best value devices.

18. Useful Apps:

- **JNTO's Official App:** <https://www.jnto.go.jp/smartapp/eng/> - Free
- **Tokyo Art Beat:** <https://www.tokyoartbeat.com/apps/index.en> - \$USD 2.79
Displays information on gallery events, installations and other cultural exhibitions. It includes: locations, operating hours and exhibition time frame. The map feature identifies nearby openings, or you can browse events by area.
- **Tabimori:** <https://bit.ly/2DpUtg4> – Free
A “do-it-all” app, developed by Narita International Airport Corporation, is a one-stop shop for everything you need to know when visiting Japan. It offers: cultural information, weather updates, a currency converter, phrasebook and a translator, flight info and even a pre-order option for the duty-free shops.
- **Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka City Guides by Lonely Planet** - Free
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.lonelyplanet.guides&hl=en_US,

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/guides-by-lonely-planet/id1045791869?mt=8>

Offline access to recommendations on things to see, where to eat, sleep, shop, and play, with curated special interest info (exp. modern art), currency converter, transport info, and 'near me' functionality.

- **Tokyo Metro Subway Map and Route Planner** - Free
<https://www.tokyometro.jp/en/tips/app/index.html>
- **Tokyo Handy Guide. Official App from TCVB** – Free
<http://www.metro.tokyo.jp/ENGLISH/TOPICS/2016/160128.htm>
- **Kyoto Official Guide.** App from Kyoto City Tourism – Free
https://kyoto.travel/en/traveller_kit/mobile_apps
- **Time Out Tokyo Map Viewer** – Free but select add-ons
<https://appadvice.com/app/time-out-tokyo-map-viewer/672524650>
Find your way around and find things to do!
- **Navitime:** Basic service is free, but alternative routes and turn by turn directions incur a charge. Explanation and introduction to Tokyo's transportation system.
https://www.navitime.co.jp/pcstorage/html/japan_travel/english/
- **TAKKUN** Taxi Hailing app for Tokyo – See “Taxis section” above.
<http://takkun.taxi-tokyo.or.jp/en/>
- **HyperDia** for transportation planning – See “Trains section” above.
- **Guru Navi** – Free
Restaurant finder app for Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, and more. Search by location, type of cuisine, smoking/non-smoking, more.
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/gurunavi-japan-restaurant-guide/id430795962?mt=8>
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=jp.co.gnavi.frg.activity&hl=en_US
- **Sushi Dictionary** – Free
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/sushi-dictionary/id891614860?mt=8>
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.jingumae.sushidictionary&hl=en_US
... Interpretation of any Japanese restaurant sushi option

19. Senior Discounts: Since quite a few tourist venues offer discounts for those over 60 or 65, if you fall into this category, please carry your passport with you to show proof of age. Also, always bring your rail pass.

20. Museum and Regional Tourist Discount “Welcome” Passes

A. Museum Discount Passes:

- **Tokyo Grutto Pass:** Available April to January of the following year annually at the sales counter of 92 participating facilities, discounts or free admission:
<https://www.rekibun.or.jp/en/grutto/>. Fee to purchase is announced every April.
- **Kansai Grutto Pass** (Kyoto, Osaka, and some other areas in Western Japan): For only 1,000 yen, it provides free or discounted admission to more than 50 museums and galleries in the Kansai region. It is available annually from April through February of the following year and is valid for one entry to each participating museum. The pass expires three months from its first use or on March 31, whichever occurs first. It

can be purchased at any of the participating institutions: <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3962.html>, <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e4017.html>

- **Kansai Museum 3 Day Free Admission Pass 18:** Once the pass is purchased for ¥800 at participating institutions, users can enter and re-enter the 18 participating museums in Kansai for free. (The free entrance may not include special exhibitions.) <http://www.news.popineo.com/news/2016/201999/>

B. Regional “Welcome Cards”

Numerous cities and regions around Japan offer discount coupon booklets or welcome cards. It’s best to stop into the local tourist office upon arriving at a new city or town to pick these up.

- For example, Tochigi City, a lovely historic Edo-era town, just an hour north of Tokyo on the Tobu limited express line, offers a free One-Day Citizen Passport. It can be obtained at the Tochigi Station Tourist Information Center. Show it to any of the 40 supporting facilities and take advantage of discounts and other special offerings: <https://www.prlog.org/12698753-one-day-citizen-passport-brings-historic-edo-era-tochigi-city-to-life.html>

21. Walking/Biking Outside -- What to Bring:

- A. Knitted Gloves with Grippy Rubber Palms (<https://bit.ly/2PMB9OC>, <https://bit.ly/2xuCBh7>)
- B. Rain Poncho (one that folds up into a pouch is good)
- C. Comfortable Walking Shoes/Sneakers
- D. Small fold-up umbrella (for walking/hiking, not biking)
- E. Sweatshirt with hoodie
- F. Baseball cap or visor
- G. Sunglasses
- H. Sunscreen (in season)

22. Elevators, Escalators & Stairs:

Almost all train stations have at least one escalator and one elevator, but you may need to walk all the way to the end of the platform.

- **Standing/Walking:** In Tokyo and the *Kanto* region of Metropolitan Tokyo, people stand on the left side, and leave the right side open. In Kyoto, Osaka and the *Kansai* region of Western Japan, people stand on the right side, and leave the left side open. When walking in general, on the street, walk to the left.

23. Bathing and Baths:

Bathing in Japan has a 1,000-year history. To truly experience Japanese culture, you must take a bath. You can bathe at a city bathhouse called *sentō* -- meaning the water is usually just hot tap water and not from natural mineral-rich springs. You can also soak in the comfort of your own *ryokan*, which may or may not offer a therapeutic sulfur or alkaline *ofuro* hot tub -- depends upon the location. However, perhaps the best water immersion experience is at one of Japan's ubiquitous natural hot spring spas called *onsen*. They exist in the mountains and

on the sea coast, amongst the snow in Nagano and in the sulfur springs of Beppu on Southern Kyushu Island.

Rules: There are many rules to follow when taking a bath. Most importantly:

- A. Go into the bath without your clothes on (no bathing suits).
- B. The bath is meant for soaking and relaxing; not cleaning. Always wash yourself thoroughly BEFORE going into the *ofuro* bath.
- C. If there is even just one other person in the area, photography and video are forbidden.

Procedure and Facilities:

- A. There are separate bathing facilities for men and women.
- B. The outdoor *ofuro*, referred to as *roten-buro*, often have breathtaking views.
- C. In Kagoshima, on southern Kyushu Island, they even feature unique volcanic black sand bathing!
- D. Usually it's best to go into the indoor tub first and then work your way outdoors, as your body adjusts to the temperature.

Most upscale spas have pre-and-post bath washing areas that include:

- A. A wooden (sometimes plastic) stool to sit on.
- B. A wooden bucket to dump water of varying temperatures over your head
- C. A shower massage
- D. A scrub brush for your body and sometimes a foot scrubber
- E. A selection of liquid cleansing products: shampoo, conditioner, liquid soap, body lotion, and facial washes, moisturizers and serums. Even if the products' ingredients are in Japanese, they usually will display the name of product in English
- F. An approximately 20-inch long, narrow hand towel that you can use to cover a bit of your private parts as you lower yourself into the soaking pool. While in the pool, you can wear the towel on your head.
- G. A *yukata* robe to put on after your bath, which you can also wear to breakfast and dinner at a traditional ryokan resort. which you can wear throughout the ryokan.
 - Put the yukata on left-over-right. The opposite direction means you are dead!
- H. **More information:** <https://matcha-jp.com/en/2534>
- I. **Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufplqhi0BZo>

24. Restrooms & Toilets:

A. Asian Style Toilets ...

- Depending upon where you travel in Japan you may encounter a traditional "Asian-style," in-the-floor toilet. These can be found in public restrooms in shopping malls, train stations (and on trains), rural tourist sites, and in small town *minshuku* (family run inns – See "Accommodations").
- To use them, stand facing the hump.
- In a location with several ground-level toilet stalls, there is usually one Western toilet as indicated by image on the stall door. If there is a queue, line up by stall.

- On the Shinkansen go for the handicapped stall. This is always a Western-style toilet. In public restrooms, you may need to be prepared with a travel pack of tissues. These packages are often handed out free (with advertisements on the reverse) as you walk along major thoroughfares in the large cities, such as Tokyo and Osaka.
- So, you don't make a mistake and walk into the wrong door, especially when traveling in rural areas, refer to these Kanji for



B. High-Tech Toilets:

On the other hand, Japan is recognized for its extremely high-tech toilets. In 4-and-5-Star hotels and *ryokans* (high-end Japanese inns), in restaurants, at museums, and even highway rest stops, you will find toilets with heated seats -- a blessing on a cool, autumn day -- along with an array of other buttons that spray water to wash you, air to dry you, noise – to cover the embarrassment of your own noises. There is a good chance you will miss these toilets when you return to the USA: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-srZtwRMzC8>.

25. Eating and Drinking Etiquette and Resources:

- Soup:** You will not consume soup with a spoon. You will use your chopsticks for the meat and vegetable toppings and for the hot noodles – slurping them loudly to cool them off. You will then drink the soup by bringing the bowl to your mouth.
- Sushi:** When eating sushi, try not to soak your rice in the soy sauce. Dip the top portion -- with the fish -- into the sauce and put the sushi into your mouth with the fish top facing down upon your tongue, so you can savor the flavor
 - <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/sushi-youre-eating-wrong-175752027.html>
- Rice:** The Japanese don't pour sauces onto their rice. Leave any sauces in their serving dish and dip your food in lightly. When you have finished eating your rice, put the chopsticks down along the side of your plate. Usually chopstick holders are provided. **DO NOT PLACE YOUR CHOPSICKS STRAIGHT UP IN THE RICE.** This is how rice is served to the dead.
- Drinking:**
 - **Pouring Drinks:** If you're eating with other people, don't pour your own drink. Fill your neighbor's glass and wait for him or her to reciprocate. If you are dining with a group of people, wait for all drinks to be poured. There will likely be a toast with the word *kampai* or cheers!

- **Drinking Age:** The legal drinking (and smoking) age in Japan is 20 years old, but Japanese typically drink beer and sake with a meal as a family or group.
- **Drinks Tourism:** Drinks, like food have become huge tourism draws. Including:
 - **Tea** -- tea plantations, tea tastings & shopping, tea ceremonies
 - **Whisky** – distillery tours, famous and hidden whisky bars, meeting bartender/mixologists
 - **Wine** – touring the wine regions in Yamanashi - famous for its historic *Koshu* grape, Nagano, Ashikaga, and now Hokkaido; attending wine festivals, especially the *Koshu Nouveau celebrations*.
 - **Saké** -- touring *shuzo* (saké breweries), visiting saké museums, attending sake tastings/pairing events, enjoying sakés at select saké bars.
 - **Shochu** – touring distilleries and meeting distillers, shochu bars, tastings, food pairings
 - **Beer** – craft beer bars, brewery tours, beer tastings and pairings -- especially of those beers brewed with unique Japanese ingredients.

E. Food and Drink Resources:

- A Taste of Culture: <http://www.tasteofculture.com/>
- Bento.com: <https://bento.com/> -- Restaurant guide to Tokyo, Kyoto, Nara, Kanazawa
- Tokyo Food File: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/column/tokyo-food-file/page/2/>
- Kyoto Foodie: <http://kyotofoodie.com/>
- Japan food guide: <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e620.html>
- Tokyo food guide: <https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3075.html>
- Eater.com - 38 Essential Osaka Restaurants: <https://www.eater.com/maps/best-osaka-restaurants-japan-38>
- Gurunavi: <https://gurunavi.com/> -- Restaurant search engine - (App also available, see “Apps section”)
- There are also great food tours in various cities and regions, which Marian can advise you on.

26. Shoes and Socks: You will be doing a lot of “taking shoes off.”

Shoes are considered dirty, and you will take them off when you enter most private inside spaces. Whenever there is a “step up,” especially on to polished wooden floors or “tatami” (straw mats), take off your shoes. Many restaurants, temples, hot spring spas, and Japanese *ryokan* (traditional accommodations) will provide a shoe cupboard for you to place your shoes into. Then, you will be expected to walk on the tatami mat or wood in your socks, or special slippers will be provided.

A. Slipper Socks: Most facilities provide slippers for you to walk on wooden floor, but they usually do not fit properly. You may want to bring a couple of pairs of slipper-socks (with the grip bottoms), and when you get to the facility, show them and ask if you can wear them instead. I especially find the provided slippers dangerous when ascending or descending the stairs, as they fall off my feet. I end up taking them off until I reach the next floor. The slipper socks would avoid this problem.

- B. Holes in Socks:** You may be invited to a tea ceremony or other cultural experience taking place on tatami-mat flooring. In this case, you will take off your shoes and walk on the tatami in your socks. Please make sure that there are no holes in your socks. Otherwise both you and your hosts will be embarrassed.
- C. Restroom Slippers:** When using the restroom in a place where you have already taken off your shoes, there will be SPECIAL RESTROOM SLIPPERS to put on inside the toilet area. These slippers are to be left in the restroom when you are finished. **DO NOT WEAR** these slippers out of the restroom into the common area!

27. Additional Points of Etiquette:

As a foreigner, having a generally courteous demeanor will cover a multitude of sins, but beyond food etiquette here are a couple of additional points:

- A. Blowing Your Nose:** Blowing your nose in public places -- such as restaurants, the theater or on a group tour is considered rude. Try to sniffle until you get to a restroom.
- B. Surgical Masks:** When traveling around Japan you may encounter people with their nose and mouth covered by a surgical mask. No, they are not trying to protect themselves from the city air. (Actually, Japan's air quality is the highest in Asia). They are protecting themselves from pollen if they have hay fever and protecting others from their germs if they have a cold. This is especially considerate on crowded subways.
- C. Bowing:** Bowing should become a habit -- for greeting people, thanking people, and saying goodbye.
- D. Waving:** When you are leaving always wave and keep waving until you don't see your host anymore. They will do the same.

28. Sitting on the Floor:

If you'll be visiting someone's home, attending a tea ceremony or dining in an upscale Japanese restaurant, you'll want to practice SITTING ON THE FLOOR before you leave. The proper way to sit is with your knees tucked under your thighs. But, since many Americans find this difficult and even painful, it is acceptable to sit cross-legged "Indian-style". However, it is NOT acceptable to sit with your legs stretched out in front of you.

- 29. Any Use of the Japanese Language is Much Appreciated by Locals:** The best way to ask a question in English is to PRINT IT CLEARLY. Students in Japan study English for at least six years, but few master conversational English, and many Japanese are too shy or embarrassed to try to speak English. When asking for help in English, try to start with a student or a business person. It will also help if you have a small phrase book. The Japan National Tourist Organization publishes a free pocket language phrase book called "The Tourist Language Handbook," which you can download from this link:
<https://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/touristhandbook/eng.pdf>

Helpful Words: *Ohayo Gozaimas* (Good Morning), *Konichiwa* (Good Afternoon-Hello in the afternoon), *Konbanwa* (Good Evening when you are arriving in the evening), *Oyasumi*

(Good Night when you are going home to bed), **Sumi-ma-sen** (Excuse Me or Sorry), **Mizu** (Water), **Kudasai** (Please -- So, if you wanted to say "Could I please have some water, you would say "*Mizu Kudasai.*") , **Chata-mah-tay** (Just a minute), **Arigato Gozaimas** (Thank you very much), **Eki** (Station – So, if you want Tokyo Station, you said "**Tokyo Eki**"), **Des** (This is -- So, if you want to find out if you are standing in Tokyo Station you would ask, "**Tokyo Eki Des?**") Also, a bento box that is served on a train is called an **Eki-ben**.

30. Names and Salutations: Any names that end in "ko," like: *Ritsuko, Aiko, Keiko, Hiroko, Mitsuko* are female names. A name ending in "to" or "ro" is a male name, such as *Haruto, Kaito, Hayato* or *Yuichiro, Katsuro, or Genichiro*. But sometimes names are shortened, and then it becomes difficult to tell. For example, *Masa* and *Kaz* are usually boy's names, but they are shortened from something else, such as *Masahito* or *Kazunori*. Thus, they could also be a girl's name, shortened from *Masako* or *Kazuko*. The name *Yuki* is usually a girl's name, but it could be a boy's name shortened from *Yukihiro* or *Yukinori*. The "ri" ending is usually for boys, but the name *Yukari* is a girl's name! If you are unsure, or if you want to be polite, start by addressing the person by his/her **last name**, followed by "san." Such as: *Saito-san, Kawaguchi-san, Atagi-san*. If they want to be called by their first name, they will correct you. They will also likely initially call you by your **first name** followed by "san," because they know Americans like to be addressed by their first name, but they still want to show respect. Therefore, I am forever "Marian-san." Another important thing, I can never call myself "Marian-san," as that would be giving myself an honor, and be very pretentious and rude. Finally, if you really want to be polite when addressing someone of extreme importance, you can use the extension "sama" instead of san. You would also use "sama" when initiating an important letter. Instead of saying "Dear Marian," you would say "Marian-sama."