



Grand Tour of Japan -

5th – 20th October 2019

Tour Manager – Paul Stevenson.

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Welcome

I would like to welcome you to this adventure and our **Grand Tour of Japan**. We have a total of 39 guests within our group - many of whom we will meet in Sapporo.

My role as Tour Manager is to ensure the itinerary is delivered in the most efficient way whilst representing the group and individual needs throughout our journeys.

We will be accompanied by an English speaking guide from our partners, *Nippon Travel* who will share their local knowledge and provide assistance with travel and accommodation arrangements.

Please make a note of my phone number.

Wherever we stay, please take a hotel business card - very useful as a point of reference.

Heathrow

For those joining at London Heathrow airport I will be there to welcome you at Terminal 3 Zone C from 09:00 Saturday 5th October. We will be assisted with check in and bag drop by our Meeter and Greeter.

All ticketing is by 'e-ticket' - all you need is your passport

I would recommend you be at the boarding gate 45 minutes before our Cathay Pacific (CX252) flight which is due to depart @ 12:20.

We will not be seated together as a group. I may get a chance to speak with you during our flight to Hong Kong. If not, once we arrive in Hong Kong you should make your way to international transfers and the gate for our onward flight to Sapporo. It can be a bit of a trek and we will need to pass through security and passport control.

On arrival at Sapporo please wait for me at the carousel until I have accounted for everyone - do not continue through customs and the exit without me! I don't want to loose you at this point!

Sapporo

We will be met by our local guide who will direct us to our coach and short transfer to the Hotel JR Tower Nikko.

I have arranged an introductory group meeting @ 18:00 prior to our evening meal @ 19:00 in one of the hotel restaurants.

Additional information

- We have a full itinerary with guidance and advice from our English speaking Japanese partners, *Nippon Travel*
- The more detailed itinerary I provided earlier by email or in your envelope may be subject to change - I'll keep you informed at all times.
- The Japanese people, their history and culture are unique - we will experience aspects of these and many more fascinating things over the days and weeks to come
- Shintoism and a version of Buddhism together with historic principles of practice have established the Japanese ethos and way of life
- Japan is made up of over 6,800 islands! - we will visit three of the main four islands, Hokkaido, Honshu and Shikoku (Kyushu being the fourth and most southerly of the main islands)
- The Japanese custom of bowing is a sign of respect and curtesy at meeting and goodbyes. The lower they bow, the greater the respect. A simple nod of the head in response should suffice!

- English is not spoken widely, although hotel staff are generally conversant whilst the younger generation will speak some English. Signage is in multiple languages - including English
- The removal of shoes at sacred sights and other places of interest (including people's homes) is commonplace. Slip on shoes can be advantageous - but not compulsory!
- Toilets in Japan can be an interesting experience with heated seats and other refinements. Some public toilets are of the 'stand & squat' type.
- Japanese food is considered by many to be some of the finest (and healthiest) in the world. It is not to everyone's taste - but amongst the variety of styles and tastes there will be something, if not all, you will enjoy. Restaurants use photographs and mock up plates of food displayed in windows to assist '*Western peoples*'. Knowing the difference between 'sushi' and 'sashimi' is useful.
- We have evenings where we are free to arrange our own dining arrangements. Japanese restaurants can be expensive - but not all. Should you wish to venture out with me or with other guests within our group please let me know. (In Hiroshima the local 'Okonomiyaki' is excellent - and inexpensive). We can then share a 'collectively confused' experience - or not!
- The 'bento box' is a Japanese food tradition sold mainly at railway stations and on some trains.
- Machines dispensing hot and cold food and drink are commonplace and used extensively by local people (and '*Western peoples*' who want to try them out)
- Western credit and debit cards do not normally work in the majority of ATM's. You can use cards and access cash at ATM's in the '*7 Eleven*' convenience stores - and use cards in most restaurants and shops - but check first.
- You may be able to use your mobile phones in Japan - it depends on the phone system you use. Calls can be expensive though.
- Wifi is available in all hotels and usually free to use
- The Japanese public transport systems are some of the best in the world - the Shinkansen (bullet train) is the most famous - and efficient - of all.
- The JR Railways Group (JR) is the state owned railway. There are also private railway companies too.
- Train stations can be voluminous and very busy. It is important to stay close with the group on all rail journeys and transfers. Keep an eye out for each other. Develop a 'team effort'
- Some of our hotels have 'Onsen'. These are therapeutic hot spring baths. They are a 'must do' experience in my view. There are two things to remember. One is that bathing is in the nude (male and female are separate) - and two, no tattoos to be shown (they must be covered up).
- Japan is a safe tourist experience - the crime rate is very low. But as always be aware of your surroundings, don't leave anything unattended and beware of 'opportunists' in crowded places
- Please always be on time when requested - Japanese trains in particular wait for no one!
- As a reminder - you will need an overnight case/bag on those occasions where our main luggage is sent ahead. On those occasions we travel on trains which have limited luggage space.
- If you experience any issues which need to be resolved please let me know immediately - don't leave it too late for me to find a solution.

Finally (Japanese manners and traditions)

- Blowing your nose - and eating in public (not necessarily at the same time!) is considered rude
- There is no need to tip Japanese - it is considered degrading!
- The habit of 'slurping' noodles and other food is a sign of appreciation.
- Japanese fall asleep on trains and tend to rest their head on strangers shoulders!
- Everyone stands in line within the markings on platforms at railway stations
- A small wet cloth is provided pre meal at most restaurants to wash your hands before you eat
- Clinical masks are commonplace. Either to avoid others 'germs' or minimise spreading their own!!

Japan and the Japanese people are amazing - a totally different culture; attitude to life; wonderful locations and scenery; beautiful temples, shrines and so much more.

I look forward to our meeting and sharing with you all these wonderful experiences

Have a fabulous holiday and adventure.

Paul