

Discovering Japan, General Information.



Japan is a fascinating country with an ancient history and distinct culture, yet has one or two similarities to the UK. They are both Monarchies, drink tea and drive on the left! There aren't too many pitfalls and by and large the Japanese do not expect foreigners to behave as they do. You will not be expected to bow, though any courtesies or words of Japanese from you will be much appreciated. It is safe to drink the tap water but many visitors prefer to drink bottled water.

It is considered very impolite to blow your nose in public, sniffing is preferred! Raised voices are never a good way to resolve a problem and will cause 'loss of face'. Communicating can be a challenge but if you ask the younger generation for help they are more likely to have been taught English in school. Do make eye contact when speaking to someone or you may get ignored. In restaurants there are often pictures of dishes or plastic models that you can point to and sometimes menus are available in English.



There are many rules of etiquette when using chopsticks (hashi), an attempt to eat politely is appreciated and faux pas tend to be ignored.. Some easy to remember points are:- never stand chopsticks up in your rice bowl or pass food to someone else chopsticks to chopsticks – these are reminders of funeral rituals. Do not stab food with chopsticks, lick sauce off them or use to point with. Wasabi shouldn't be mixed with soy sauce, instead put a little wasabi on the food and dip into the sauce. Noisy eating is frowned upon with the exception of noodle eating when slurping shows appreciation to the chef! There are many more rules which our guide will be able to teach us. Above all else though, do enjoy the experience!

If using local trains you will need to buy a ticket from a machine in advance. Select the English option and follow the instructions. If you are unsure which fare to choose, select the cheapest option and when you arrive at your destination pay the difference at the '*Fare Adjustment*' machine or at the ticket window. This is a common practise and not deemed to be an attempt at fare dodging.



In most towns and cities you board a local bus at the rear, take a ticket from the machine and pay the driver the correct fare as you disembark at the front. In Tokyo there is a flat fare (210¥) and you board at the front. Kyoto also has flat fares (230¥) but boarding is at the back of the bus. The Japanese are very disciplined when using public transport and you should follow their example by standing in the correct place + boarding quickly.

Never jaywalk in Japan, cars will often jump red lights. Also be aware of bicycles on the pavements which is perfectly legal if somewhat dangerous. Taxi drivers are unlikely to speak English so you will need to be clear when telling them your intended destination, ideally have it written in Japanese. Always carry the hotel's card to show to the driver, helpful if you get lost. Incidentally, empty taxis display a red light. Don't tip the drivers.



Toilets are free and plentiful in Japan. Whilst they have adopted western style toilets, some with heated seats and instant 'bidet' facility, others are the very basic squat versions.. Sometimes toilet paper is not provided so you may want to keep some tissues handy in your pocket/handbag.

Despite being the source of much technology Japan tends to be a cash country when it comes to paying for most things. Western credit cards tend to not work in Japanese cash machines as the magnetic strip is on the wrong side of the card. Some larger shops, hotels and restaurants can take western cards but check before committing to a meal or purchase. Look out for '*International Bank Machines*' such as those provided by Citibank if you need to withdraw cash. Tipping is not expected and can be taken as an insult. If you do tip it will likely be returned to you. However, should you wish to tip our guides they do appreciate it. At time of writing the exchange rate is approx. £1 = 130¥.





Please note that use of leisure facilities and swimming pools in all hotels is generally at an additional charge. Onsen bathing in the hot springs water is very popular in Japan and a relaxing communal activity. Baths tend to have different times for ladies or gents use as no clothes are worn. Before taking to the waters you remove any jewellery as the waters can tarnish it. Then thoroughly wash your body and hair so you are clean before entering the water. No hair or towel must touch the water. Place your small 'modesty towel' on the side or as the Japanese do, on your head. Then just relax and enjoy!

Onsens don't allow anyone with tattoos to use them, small tattoos could be covered by a waterproof plaster.

When visiting temples and shrines for example shoes may need to be removed and either carried in a bag provided or left on a shelf as guided. Socks should be worn so do carry a pair if wearing sandals. Slippers should be worn in traditional restaurants. When walking on the tatami mats (straw) slippers should be removed and socks/tights worn. Most toilets, public and private will have special toilet slippers to be worn inside, don't forget to change when leaving! Our guide will advise us when this is required on excursions. NB. Please don't keep slippers provided in the hotels as they are re-used and you would be charged for them.



To call the UK from Japan dial 010 44 (or +44) then the number minus the first zero. Numbers stored in a mobile are dialled as normal, the phone will automatically connect to the network. Calls can be expensive so ideally check rates with your phone provider. If your phone has internet access, turn 'Data Roaming' off to avoid an eye-watering bill! Check rates before using a hotel phone as they tend to be dear. To call a number in Japan from a UK mobile dial 00 81 (or +81) then the city code and local number. If sending **postcards** ensure that you clearly print the address or it may not be sent. An international stamp costs 70¥.

Electricity in Japan runs on 100 volts AC, which is similar to the USA. Plugs with two flat pins are standard, American plugs are suitable and can be used to charge up a phone or tablet ok. Most British and European appliances such as hairdryers, will only work with a transformer which is heavy and expensive. Some hotels have two outlets, 110 and 220 volts but again will only accept plugs with two flat pins.



Our main luggage will be transported between hotels so we do not have to carry them on trains etc. On leaving Tokyo the baggage will travel directly to Takayama so we will need a small bag for the two nights in Hakone and Matsumoto. **NB.** We have to carry our bags during the tour of Hakone. Main bags will travel from Takayama to Kyoto so a small overnight bag will also be required for the 2 nights in Hiroshima.

Our hotels will be of a good standard but rooms are generally on the small size to what we tend to expect. This is no reflection of the quality of the hotel. Most hotels have smoking rooms and we may be allocated these, if a problem for you please mention it to myself before we check-in and I will ask the guide to speak with reception. In many cases there will be a '*Yukata*' in your bedroom. These are lightweight, usually cotton, more casual types of kimono. They are for your use whilst resident and, as with slippers, not to be removed. When wearing one, place left over right, the other way is used at funerals.. Breakfast is included and queues can build up so it is recommended to go early to avoid missing out.



Japan is 8 hours ahead of the UK. The flight crew will advise the correct times before landing in Hong Kong, Tokyo and London. Paris is one hour ahead of GMT.

Smoking is often permitted in hotels, as above. There are many areas within Japan that do not allow smoking outside unless in designated areas. This is because of the danger of injury in crowded areas, especially to children. Also because of the fragile nature of some Japanese buildings and flammability of materials such as paper. Our guide can advise when smoking is or isn't permitted.



