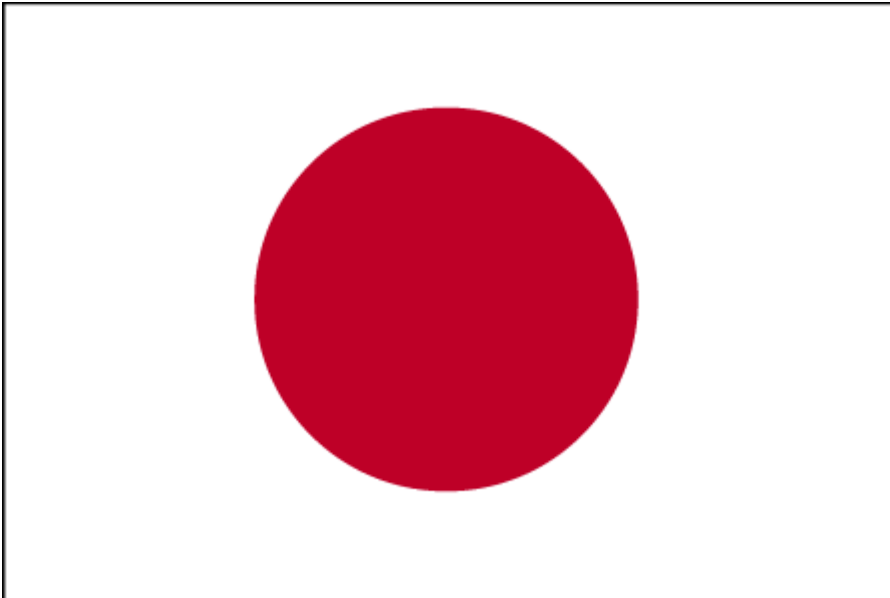


Japan

日本



NAME: **Japan**
CAPITAL: **Tokyo**
LANGUAGE: **Japanese**
RELIGION: **Shintoism & Buddhism**
CURRENCY: **Yen**

Getting Started

When to Visit

[Japan](#) is a very seasonally and regionally diverse country as it stretches north to south and contains every landscape from mountains to near tropical islands. Summers in the south and southern islands are tropical in nature with high humidity, with possible typhoons hitting in late summer. Meanwhile, the most northerly islands and mountains are cool, while Tokyo falls in the middle with average highs of about 85°F (30°C). Winters are just as diverse as the south gets cooler, but still remains in the 70s°F (21-26°C), while most of the northern islands and mountains are covered with snow and temperatures rarely get above freezing. Again, Tokyo falls in the middle, but the ocean keeps the city somewhat warm as the average temperature only tends to fall to around the 40s°F (4-9°C). The fall experiences falling temperatures and the spring experiences increasing tourists. More than temperature, spring offers blossoming cherry blossoms and both locals and foreigners alike flock to see this event. However the time they blossom slightly alters each year so planning a trip specifically around this event can be made difficult to predict.

Although the cherry blossoms are an incredible sight, the tourists do tend to mean higher prices across the country during this time so this event may be a motivation or detriment to travel at this point. Likewise, before planning your travel consider other local holidays. Holidays can make travel either more attractive, such as for large festivals, or less attractive due to tourist site closings and more expensive transportation options. In addition to the cherry blossoms, New Year's is a time for local travel so prices rise and transportation options may fill early. Two other local holidays experience similar price hikes and difficulties: Golden Week in early May and *Obon* in mid-August. Here is a list of [Japan's Holiday Schedule](#).

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Weather

Although weather can be generalized based upon years past, for more up to date weather patterns and predicted future weather patterns, visit weather websites like weather.com; many local news sources also have information for international weather forecasts.

Tours & Cruises

If you're looking for a pre-arranged trip, that involves little effort on your part, then you should consider going on an organized tour or cruise. Organized tours and cruises vary from all expenses included to only daily tours and perhaps hotels included in the price, but all the options below will help you arrange all the details so you don't have to worry about finding the best deal or right hotel.

[Celebrity Cruises](#): High end cruise line catered to adults who enjoy the luxury treatment celebrities enjoy.

[Gap Adventures](#): Known best among young adults, Gap Adventures provides local transportation, housing, and food, which cuts costs and introduces the local culture, but can also be challenging for those seeking luxury.

[Gecko's Adventures](#): Active in "responsible" tourism, Gecko's Adventures provides local transportation, housing, and food in small group settings.

[Holland America Cruises](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

[JTB Sunrise Tours](#): A subsidiary of the Japan Travel Bureau, Sunrise offers day tours and full package offerings.

[Intrepid Travel](#): Boasts more "off the beaten track" destinations; do your research though since some tours are very adventurous and involves camping and local hotels.

[Kensington Tours](#): Only offers personal tours for you and your family/friends, which allows greater flexibility, but also means slightly higher prices.

[Oceania Cruises](#): Oceania boasts "intimate and luxurious ships" with an emphasis on service and luxury.

[Princess Cruise Lines](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

[Road Scholar](#): For older adults, Road Scholar offers tours with an educational emphasis; formerly known as Elder Hostel.

[Royal Caribbean](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

[Samurai Tours](#): US-based company that works with locals and local transportation to offer an insight into both the sights and the culture.

Guidebooks

If you are just traveling on business and have little free time or are already familiar with [Japan](#), you may not need anything more than this guide! However, if you need more detailed and up to date information, there are a number of great country-wide, region-wide, and city-wide guidebooks available for travel in Japan.

[Eyewitness Guides](#): Incredible pictures and detailed maps of popular tourist sites including museums. Those living abroad can't put these books down.

[Frommer's](#): Incredible number of lists, which divide travel into various categories based upon your interests. Travelers looking to spend most of their time in a single location or on organized tours enjoy these books.

[Lonely Planet](#): Great maps and updated often with comprehensive housing information, restaurants, & transportation options. Backpackers and adventurers love these guidebooks.

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[National Geographic Traveler](#): Almost more of an information book about Germany, than a guidebook; offers great pictures, maps, history, and culture. Popular with armchair travelers and history buffs on organized tours.

Culture

Personality, Culture, & Identity

Today, [Japan](#) is a leader in the world. 200 years ago they were only a leader within the [Far East](#) and nearly 500 years ago they couldn't even control themselves as they were more strongly influenced from the outside [Mongols](#), [Chinese](#), and Koreans than they were by internal means. Japan has changed quite rapidly over time and is a state that resulted from relatively modern changes, while for most of their history they fell under China's political and cultural influence.

The [Japanese](#) gained order, independence, strength, and a unique culture beginning in the 1600s with feudalism under the *Shogun* and his *Samurai* rulers. This rule isolated the people as they focused on domestic issues while trying to ignore the world. That isolation helped develop the country's culture, but it also created a strong reaction when the country finally opened up to the world in the 1800s. At that point the country moved outward and obtained increasing political and economic influence throughout the Far East and later the world, but mostly by force.

Today, there's a revival of pride in being "[Japanese](#)," although this wasn't the case for the past few decades. Prior to World War II (WWII) this pride was in the connection to the Japanese ethnicity, but after their loss in WWII, the nation as a whole felt shamed and lost their identity in many ways. Today, this same term is being used as the primary means to identify, but today it isn't as closely related to the ethnicity as it is to the political and, more significantly, the economic state of Japan. While historic Japanese culture does contribute to this identity, today to be "Japanese" one typically points to the country's technological and economic successes.

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History

Although [Japanese](#) history goes back millennia, the first steps towards modern Japan began in about 300 BC as people emigrated from [China](#) into modern day Japan. These people also brought rice with them, a staple in Japanese cuisine ever since. From this point on, the islands of Japan were occasionally visited as some of these people stayed and contributed to the modern day Japanese ethnicity.

In the 500s Buddhism entered [Japan](#) from the Korean peninsula and spread quickly. Prior to this time Shintoism was the primary guiding philosophy, and today the two have merged in many ways as the Japanese commonly identify as both, while rarely separating the two. It was also during this time period that the Japanese integrated a number of influential aspects of [Chinese](#) culture including many parts of their governing system.

Through the 600s and 700s [Japan](#) made a number of huge improvements as communication expanded and technology advanced farming and agriculture. In 794 the capital was moved to the city of Kyoto and this city became Japan's cultural, academic, and political center for the next couple centuries.

In the late 1100s [Japan's](#) government was faltering and there was a series of uprisings. These uprisings eventually led to a new structure within Japan's political and social ranks. The Emperor maintained nominal power, but a new leader, known as a "Shogun" truly led the country in most spheres and directly worked with, and arose from, the samurai class, which was growing in power as the regional, family, or tribal leaders. This created a system in which the samurai worked for the Emperor and Shogun, but most control was held locally so each was given much freedom to rule over his territory.

The 1200s and 1300s were devastating for the [Japanese](#) as the [Mongols](#) under Kublai Khan invaded, then there were debates among the royal family and between the royal family and the shoguns. After a series of battles and wars, the shoguns proved their superiority over the

emperors with the help of the Samurai. As things settled back down in the late 1300s, relations with [China](#) improved and Japan opened up as a more significant trading hub.

Unfortunately, the decentralize rule in [Japan](#) led to more internal strife in the 1400s and with the [Europeans'](#) introduction of guns to Japan in the 1500s, the country was again unstable. As stability returned, Europeans settled Japan, then were forced to leave as the government struggled to find a balance between domestic and international agendas, which eventually resulted in focusing almost entirely on internal affairs.

Fortunately, from the early 1600s to the late 1800s stability existed as the shoguns firmly led the country. They improved the standard of living, allowed economic and religious freedoms, and improved communication. However, this system was rigid and class-based that neglected international affairs and intentionally isolated itself from the world.

By the mid- to late-1800s [Asian](#) trading routes were prized by many [European](#) and [North American](#) nations so [Japan](#) was forced to open up. After the [United States](#) threatened Japan and other countries followed suite, the shogun was removed from power as the people viewed him as a weak failure. This directly led to the establishment of the Empire of Japan (1868), which was again directly ruled by the Emperor.

Once freed of the shogun's rule and more open to the world, [Japan](#) quickly became a player on the international stage. They improved economically and technologically, gaining enough power to take many islands in the [Far East](#), including [Taiwan](#). They challenged and warred with both [China](#) and [Russia](#), taking Manchuria in China and the Korean peninsula.

For decades the [Japanese](#) pushed their borders with no consequences, but by the 1930s many countries viewed their advances into [China](#) with condemnation. In 1940, one year after the outbreak of World War II (WWII), Japan joined forces with [Germany](#) and [Italy](#), sparking

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tensions with much of the world, particularly the [United States](#), who supported China at the time and was vocal about Japan's advances into that country.

In 1941 [Japan](#) attacked the [United States](#), the American-held [Philippines](#), and [British](#)-held [Hong Kong](#) among other places. After these surprise attacks and a quick sweep over much of the [Far East](#), the Japanese fell back as their production, supplies, and army could not keep pace with the expanding American and British military spending and high output levels. The war for Japan ended with tragedy as the United States dropped two atomic bombs on the country; first on Hiroshima and days later on Nagasaki.

Since WWII, [Japan](#) has focused on opening up diplomatic relations and economic advancements as they were demilitarized. Ironically, the [United States](#) has become one of Japan's closest trading partners and today Japan is an economic and political world leader.

Dress & Behavior

There are few dress restrictions in [Japan](#). As a tourist, you can wear nearly anything, but in business, dress is formal and punctuality is demanded. The only issue to be aware of is that, unlike many beaches in [Europe](#), nakedness and women going topless is restricted and offenders will be arrested for public indecency, even if you're only sunbathing face down.

Behaviorally, the [Japanese](#) people are very proud people and insulting them or putting a person down in anyway can be very offensive as the person will feel "shamed." Additionally, turning down an invitation or offer may be received as an insult to the inviter. Due to this, the Japanese will rarely give you critical advice, insult you, or put you in a situation in which an answer is immediately needed in fear of "shaming" you. This is especially true in business. Turning down a business offer or even an invitation to a meal or event may unknowingly be an insult and could force your contact to feel so shamed that he will actually leave his job; if all hope is lost on a

business deal, allow your Japanese counterpart to gracefully exit the situation so he can save "face."

When greeting people in business, follow the local's lead. Although bowing is common among locals, many Japanese take great pride in understanding foreign customs and may insist on following European etiquette. Allow them to take the lead and follow suite. One thing that must be followed however is acknowledgement of the person speaking to you, which is symbolized by a regular head nod when a point is made. It is considered rude to make strong eye contact with a person older or more respected than you. Finally, there are numerous meanings behind body language so avoid touching your face or head, as simply scratching your head may send an unintentional message to the present company.

Dinning etiquette in [Japan](#) has a number of customs; to learn about dining etiquette in Japan, continue reading below.

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Food

Dining Etiquette

Dining in [Japan](#) may occur on the floor so get your legs and back ready for a meal on the ground. While this isn't as common in many restaurants, you may encounter this setting there as well. In restaurants, you will most likely be greeted with a wet cloth, which should be used to wash your hands; do not touch your face or neck with this cloth. Once your cleansing has been finished, it's time to eat.

You may be served with individual plates or with shared plates, from which you take your own food. If you're served with communal plates, be sure to pick your food from those plates with the "opposite" ends of your chopsticks, in other words, the side you don't eat from. No matter the serving style, don't begin eating until you're either invited to or until you hear the word "*itadakimasu*."

Depending on what's being served, it may or may not be accompanied by rice and/or soup, both of which are very common. If these are served, bring the bowl up to your mouth when eating these and if drinking soup, be sure to make a "slurping" noise to cool the soup. Generally, you shouldn't use your hands to eat anything and if eating *sushi*, be sure to dip it into any sauces with the rice side up, so the rice doesn't fall into the sauce.

If you' host invites you to consume alcohol, be sure to drink in moderation as drunkenness, particularly in a business setting is deemed highly inappropriate. You should also never fill your own glass; be sure to fill your neighbor's glass and your neighbor will surely fill yours as well. If you want no more to drink, be sure to leave your glass nearly full.

As you complete your meal, finish every last grain of rice and all the food on your plate. To symbolize that you are finished, place your

chopsticks back on the chopstick rest. If at a restaurant, the inviter generally pays for all guests, but it is appreciated to offer to help pay.

If looking to grab a quick bite to eat from a street vendor or at a fast food restaurant, be aware that eating or drinking in public is considered very rude so take a couple minutes to dine where you purchase your food.

History & Influences

[Japanese](#) food is and always has been focused on freshness so local seasonal foods dominate the menu. As in the past, with most dishes, a starch is served; rice is the most common starch, but in the mountainous regions, where rice doesn't grow, millet was more popular.

In the 500s and 600s, Buddhism made it into [Japan](#) from the Korean peninsula and the people began abstaining from meat. At the time meat was not too prevalent, but this new philosophy truly ended consumption for much of the population as eating meat became taboo. The consumption of fish also declined drastically, but encountered a renaissance in about 1000.

During the time of no meat, the [Japanese](#) proved very adept at using strong natural flavors and using different ingredients to complement each other. It was also during this time that food presentation and simplicity were cherished as preferred methods of food preparation.

In the 1500s the Portuguese arrived in large numbers and introduced two long lasting changes to [Japanese](#) cuisine: bread and *tempura*. Since that time soups, sauces, and noodles have gained popularity; more recently fast foods and processed foods have also made the dining table regularly.

Throughout history though, the most significant changes to the food in [Japan](#) have not been from the outside, but rather from within. Although simplicity is still favored, creating complexity and depth on

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each plate has been stressed, as if it is each chef's mission to get the most out of as little as possible.

Staple Foods

Noodles: most commonly ramen noodles, although multiple varieties are available

Rice: a common side or base with many dishes

Regional Varieties & Specialties

Sashimi: raw meat served alone, usually seafood and always served very fresh

Sushi: any food served with a vinegar rice; the most common food served with the rice is seafood

Tempura: seafood or vegetables battered and deep fried

Teriyaki: meats cooked after being marinated in a soy sauce marinade

Drinks

The [Japanese's](#) favorite non-alcoholic beverage is tea, although it seems every import in the world can be found in Japan.

The [Japanese](#) drink all sorts of alcohol from beers to wines and hard liquors, but the local drink, *sake* (rice wine, generally with a high alcohol content) is still one of the most popular. Another local drink is *Shochu*, which is typically distilled from barley, but can be produced from any number of starches.

Practical Information

Visas

Many foreign nationals need a visa to enter [Japan](#), however the requirements for citizens of different nationalities varies. To learn more about who need visas, what type of visa is needed, what requirements are needed to obtain a visa, and visa costs, please visit the [Official Website of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) or your nearest Japanese Embassy.

Health & Insurance

Every part of the world has different health concerns and diseases, including [Japan](#). Before traveling, consult with a physician to learn more about your destination and what steps you can take to prevent illness. At the time of writing, Japan didn't have any health immunizations that are required prior to arrival, although a number of immunizations are strongly recommended.

Many health insurance providers don't cover health care that is provided outside your home country. Before going abroad check with your health insurance to see if they cover international care. If not, consider purchasing an international medical insurance option, preferably from a company that specializes in international medical insurance.

Transportation

Unless you're on an organized tour or working with a travel agent, you will have to arrange some transportation. The below links can greatly help you start your planning, first by finding a flight to [Japan](#), then with domestic airlines and car rental agencies. If you don't know where to begin, try the "Flight & Rental Car Search Sites" to learn competitor's prices during your trip.

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Largest International Airlines: [Air France](#), [American Airlines](#); [British Airways](#); [Cathay Pacific](#); [China Southern Airlines](#); [Delta](#); [Emirates](#); [KLM](#); [LAN](#); [Lufthansa](#); [Qantas](#); [Singapore Airlines](#); [United Airlines](#).

Largest Japanese Airlines: [ANA All Nippon Airways](#) & [JAL Japan Airlines](#)

Largest Rental Car Agencies in Japan: [Europcar](#) & [Hertz](#).

Flight & Rental Car Search Sites: [Expedia.com](#); [Farecast.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

Housing

Housing options are numerous in most tourist destinations, but every individual seeks out something different when it comes to housing. The below links should help you get started, with low- to high-end hotels, hostels, and camping options.

Popular International Hotel Conglomerates: [Accor Group](#) (various price ranges); [Choice Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range); [Hilton](#) (various price ranges); [Hyatt](#) (high-end to resorts); [InterContinental Group](#) (mid- to high-price range); [Marriott Family](#) (various price ranges); [Starwood Hotels](#) (high-end); [Wyndham Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range).

Hotel Search Sites: [Expedia.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

Hostels: Although there are many hostel websites, some of the most popular and reputable include [hostels.com](#), [hostelworld.com](#), & [hostelbookers.com](#).

Camping: Camping is still a foreign concept in Japan. Although there are movements to change this, currently there are few organized and official options.

Opening Hours, Expenses, & Tipping

[Japan](#) is on a similar time schedule as much of northern [Europe](#), but tends to work longer hours. Shops tend to open at about 8:00-9:00 am and close between 5:00-8:00 pm. This later work day leads to later dinners, which usually occur at 7:00 pm or later. Most places close on weekends, which are Saturdays and Sundays in Japan, although most restaurants and tourist sights are open seven days a week, some of which have extended hours during the weekend.

[Japan](#) is a very expensive country, even compared to [European](#) standards. There are some cheaper options in housing and food, but transportation can quickly add up. An inexpensive hostel will cost at least 1,500 yen (\$20), whereas hotels are much more expensive. Most hotels in Tokyo's business and tourist areas are about 20,000 yen (\$275) a night, while in other parts of Tokyo and the country nice hotels can be found for 10,000 yen (\$130). Food can range from as little as 500-1,000 yen (\$6-12) for foods like noodles, while most local restaurants cost 1,000-3,000 yen (\$12-40). High end restaurants have no upper limit on food costs, especially in Tokyo. Local city transportation costs are fairly reasonable, but taxis and cross country transportation is very expensive and is a difficult area to save money. A train trip from Tokyo to Kyoto will cost about 8,000 yen (\$100) and flight costs are similar, if not more expensive.

There is no tipping in [Japan](#) and offering a tip is actual an insult. This however doesn't make service poor; the Japanese give incredible service.

Crime & Safety

[Japan](#) is a relatively safe place to visit, however has its share of crime, particularly petty theft in busy tourist areas and on public transportation. These crimes are less common than in most countries however. The greatest danger in Japan is transportation safety and the hazards of the roads, which are again safer than in many countries.

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