

# Japan Guide:

definitive guide to Japan

useful informations

I have always searched for a complete guide to [Japan](#), with all useful information and tourist available at once. Since I couldn't find it, I gathered everything: when you should go in [Japan](#), what to bring with you, customs rules, tourist information about most beautiful Japanese places and so on. You can read everything online or you can download everything in PDF files, so you can print it and bring it with you.

For simplicity, this guide is divided in sections.

## When you should go to [Japan](#)

If you would like to appreciate [Japan](#) you should visit it in April or May, during the Spring. During this period you could see the amazing Hanami - cherry blossom fest, the Golden Week (Apr 29 - May 5).

I have personally visited [Japan](#) in August, but humidity is very high and if you can't stand it you really should consider to visit in in April or in October, with lower prices.

## What bring with you in [Japan](#)

First of all take with you a large variety of clothes, better in your hand-luggage. This is useful if you lose your luggages (this happened to me!). In second hand, weather changes frequently in [Japan](#), especially during spring, and you should be prepared with suitable clothes.

Be sure to have a credit card (see below) for any needs. Credit cards are appreciated and very used in [Japan](#).

Another thing I recommend you is to check your passport or ask for a Welcome Card (see below) to your travel agency.

## Customs

There are some rules you should keep in mind. When you arrive to [Japan](#) customs, while in queue, you will be asked to fill in a small module, with informations about time of stay and reason to your travel to [Japan](#). As security measure, your fingerprints are taken by a custom employee.

There are no limits on money you can bring with you, but if you have more than 1 million Yen (about 10,000 USD) you have to declare it to immigrations.

You can't also introduce drugs, porn material, everything that violates copyright, guns or ammo.

If you smoke, remember that you can bring in [Japan](#) no more than 400 cigarettes. Other limitations are on alcohol (max 100 ounces) and perfume (2 ounces).

## Entry Visa, Passport and Boarding Card

When you are on plane, before arriving, you will be asked to fill a boarding card. They will give you 2 of them: first one is for your arrival, the second should be filled when you leave.

If you plan to go to [Japan](#) as a tourist, you will not need an Entry Visa, since your passport is enough. In this case, your stay is limited to 90 days. This is applicable in case of tourism, study, sport, visiting parents or friends.

Remember that you should bring the passport with you in any moment, since you could even be arrested if you are found without it!

## Welcome card

You can ask for a Welcome Card to your travel agency or, when you're in [Japan](#), in some tourist-information offices in Tokyo or Kyoto.

With a Welcome Card you can have a discount on hotels, ryokan, food, drinks and many tourist-related services too, like Museum and temple tickets.

## Money

Japanese currency is Yen, which symbol is ¥.

Yen coins are:

¥ 1 (about 0.01 USD), ¥ 5 (0.05 USD), ¥ 10 (0.10 USD), ¥ 50 (0.50 USD), ¥ 100 (1 USD) and ¥ 500 (5.00 USD).

Paper money are:

¥ 1,000 (10.23 USD), ¥ 2,000 (20.46 USD), ¥ 5,000 (51.16 USD) and ¥ 10,000 (102.32 USD).

Remember that you can change paper money in your currency when you leave, but coins are not changed.

## Banks

There are many banks in [Japan](#), like Fuji Bank, Sumitomo Mitsui, Mizho Bank or Tokyo-Mitsubishi. Usually banks are open from 9am to 15pm from Monday to Saturday. I don't suggest travelers' checks since they are accepted only in the biggest banks. Nippon Ginko is the government bank, but don't change your money here, since this bank is not for tourists.

## Credit cards

International credit cards are accepted. Here is a list of the most common used and accepted in [Japan](#): American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and VISA. Even if those cards are accepted in stores and hotels, you can't always use them to withdraw money from cashpoint machines (hole in the wall). Cashpoint cards aren't usually accepted.

## Change

You can change your currency or traveler's check or cheques in post offices, on some big stores or in ryokan and hotels.

## Medical care

Look for American Pharmacy in Tokyo, since you can find American and European medicines here.

AMDA Asian Medical Doctors Associations is the right choice if you need medical assistance, that is very professional in [Japan](#). Alas, it is not cheap. You should go to the hospital if you get ill or, if there are no particular problems, you should consult a pharmacist.

## Electricity

Japanese voltage is 100 Volt and power outlets are 2-pin ungrounded.

Frequency of electric current is 50Hz in Eastern [Japan](#), Tokyo, Hokkaido, Tohoku and Yokoama.

Frequency is 60Hz in Western [Japan](#), Kyoto, Hiroshima, Shikoku, Kyushi, Nagoya, Osaka.

I suggest to buy electrical equipment in [Japan](#) if you need, since your could be damaged even if the power outlets are identical to North America ones.

## Transports

There is a wide variety of transports available in [Japan](#). Subways and trains are very efficient and always on time: these are the best transport choice in [Japan](#).

### Airports (Narita, Kansai)

If you want to reach Osaka or Kyoto, you should choose Kansai Airport, that is connected to Europe and North America.

**Kansai Airport to Osaka:** JR station is on the other side of the road near airport arrivals hall. You can just follow the marked walkway to reach the train station. You can then choose between JR Haruka express train, that runs from Kansai Airport to Kyoto, scaling in Tennoji and Shin-Osaka. From there you can take the Shinkansen (fastest Japanese train) to reach Osaka. Price is about 3,000 Yen (about 30 USD). This is the fastest solution, since you will reach Osaka in about 70 mins.

**Kansai Airport to Kyoto:** follow the same instructions below and reach the train station and take JR train to Kyoto.

**Narita Airport to Tokyo:** there is a JR Station near Narita Terminals and you can go directly to Tokyo from here. If you have JR Rail Pass you can go directly to Tokyo using Narita Express (N'EX) Train.

## Ship

You can choose to reach [Japan](#) by Ship. Asian seaports like Pusan in South Korea or Shangai in China provide motor vessels to reach Osaka or Kobe.

## Trains

JR is the most important Rail group of [Japan](#), and includes the famous shinkansen trains. My advice is to get a JR pass if you plan to use train to visit Japanese areas.

**What is a JR pass? (Taken from our [Mount Fuji Guide](#) )**

The [Japan Rail Pass](#) is a weekly, twice weekly or monthly ticket that allows you to travel by any train or bus (except the Shinkansen Nozomi and some other trains, but don't worry: if you take one of this buses by mistake, you won't be fined, you'll just have to pay for the line you're using). There are both first and second class tickets.

However, you cannot buy this pass in [Japan](#), but only in the proper travel agencies.

## Europe

USIT CAMPUS  
(LONDON) TEL  
020-7730-7285  
FAX 020-7730-5739  
Kintetsu International  
Express (Europe) B.V.  
(FRANKFURT) TEL  
(069) 1381-0510  
FAX (069) 1381-0570  
Intia-Keskus Ltd.  
(HELSINKI) TEL  
096803180  
FAX 09611970  
Kintetsu International  
Express (SPAIN) S.A.  
Madrid TEL (91)  
559-5112  
FAX (91) 559-8713

## Asia

Seoul Travel SVC (SEOUL)  
TEL 822-755-9696  
FAX 822-753-9076  
NTA Travel (HONG KONG)  
Co., Ltd. TEL  
852-2721-1348  
FAX 852-2724-3271  
Diners World (SINGAPORE)  
TEL 65-292-5522  
FAX 65-294-1863  
JTC Thailand (BANGKOK)  
TEL 66-2237-7498  
FAX 66-2237-2291  
Sen Travel (TAIPEI) TEL  
8862-2100-1986  
FAX 8862-2100-1820

## North America Middle East

JTB International  
(Canada) Ltd.

(VANCOUVER) TEL  
604-688-0315

FAX 604-688-9031

JTB International  
(Canada) Ltd.

(TORONTO) TEL  
416-367-5824

FAX 416-367-4859

JTB Corp. USA Inc.  
(TORRANCE) TEL

310-618-0961

FAX 310-618-1294

JTB Corp. USA Inc.  
(SAN FRANCISCO) TEL

415-986-4764

FAX 415-986-3989

JTB Corp. USA Inc.  
(NEW YORK) TEL

212-698-4919

FAX 212-586-9686

JTB Corp. USA Inc.  
(NEW JERSEY) TEL

201-288-5007

FAX 201-288-5048

Bahrain International  
Travel (BAHRAIN) TEL

253315

Al-Rashed International  
Travel Co. (KUWAIT) TEL

2461538

Saudi Tourist & Travel  
Bureau (DHARAN) TEL (3)

8641792

Saudi Tourist and Travel  
Bureau (JEDDAH) TEL (2)

6674405

U.A.E. Al Futtaim Travel  
and Tourism (DUBAI) TEL

(4) 228-5470

U.A.E. Albadie Travel  
Agency (ABU DHABI) TEL

(2) 632-3142

You can ask for a pass in these agencies, and if you decide to buy it you'll get all the documents you need to obtain an "actual" JR pass in [Japan](#) (it's available in Narita and Kansai station, and in all the major stations in whole country). Just look for one of these offices with your vocheur and passport, and you'll get your JRP, that will be active after its first use!

Be careful, only tourists (for a maximum of 90 days) can use a JRP, while it's forbidden for Japanese citizens and people who went to [Japan](#) for job purposes. Here's a pricelist for the JRP in whole [Japan](#) and Kansai only, depending on duration and class. (more available passes are the *JR East Rail Pass*, *JR West Rail Pass*, *JR Central Pass*, *JR Kyushu Pass*, *JR Hokkaido Pass* e *JR Shikoku Pass*)

### JAPAN RAIL PASS

TYPE

GREEN (1st class)

ORDINARY (2nd class)

Duration	Adults	Children*	Adulti	Children*
7 days	\$ 445	\$ 221	\$ 332	\$ 166
14 days	\$ 717	\$ 359	\$ 530	\$ 265
21 days	\$ 935	\$ 467	\$ 731	\$ 338

or

### JAPAN RAIL PASS

TIPO	GREEN (1st class)		ORDINARY (2nd class)	
Duration	Adults	Children*	Adults	Children*
2 days	-	-	\$ 46	\$ 23
3 days	-	-	\$ 58	\$ 29
4 days	-	-	\$ 73	\$ 35

\* Children fare: 6 to 11 (included) years old. For children from 0 to 5 years old, the ticket is free.

It is convenient to buy a pass only if you planned to travel by train everyday or you take long journeys. So think of it very carefully. You should also get a timetable to know time and durations. If you can't speak Japanese will be difficult to ask for help about transports, since the majority of people can't speak English.

One more benefit you'll obtain thanks to this pass: the possibility do lodge in conventioned hotels belonging to the **JR Hotel Group** and pay less. Usually these hotels are close to the airports.

*Warning!* If you want to delete your reservation for the JRP before coming to [Japan](#), you'll have to pay a fine amount of 10% from the total, plus 46 \$.

For more information about the JRP, visit the official site which is very detailed [www.japanrailpass.net](http://www.japanrailpass.net)

## Subway

[Japan](#) Subway is huge, since you can reach almost every place with it. Tokyo subway is the most widespread, but there are large subways in Kyoto, Osaka, Yokohama and Fukoka.

Every line has a different color and you can buy the ticket using the machines outsides subway entrances. For a detailed map of every subway in Tokyo and Kyoto, download the tourist informations PDF below.

## Taxi

Taxi are expensive in [Japan](#), but you can use them if you are in hurry or you don't know where to take a train or subway. Prices for taxi are similar to American ones, and doors opens automatically without the need for the driver to do that.

## Etiquette

There are some etiquette rules that you should know before going to [Japan](#). Most important ones are summarized below and could help you to be polite in social situations.

## Bow

Bow is Japanese traditional way to greet. It is important to know that the lower you bow, the lower you are considered in hierarchical grade. Shaking hand is permitted for foreigners. You will notice that many personnel in shops or near elevators will bow at your passage. This is a common courtesy and you can smile or ignore it. There is no need to bow in those situations.

## Shoes

Shoes are very important aspect of cultural etiquette. When you enter an house, a restaurant, a temple or an hotel take a look in the entrance. If you see other shoes nearby, you should remove yours too. If slippers are provided, you have to wear them; if not, you have to enter with socks or barefoot.

Remember that there are particular slippers on bathroom entrances, especially in ryokans, and you have to wear them when you are using the toilette, and remove them when you have finished.

## Temples

If the temple has not a marble or rock floor, you have leave your shoes outside. Some temples gives you plastic bags to hold your shoes at entrance. Inside a temple you have to be quiet, but there are no particular rules, since Japanese people are more superstitious than religious.

## Queues

When you have to take the train, do as Japanese does: stay in the queue neatly. If you are stuck inside a train because there are a lot of people, say 'orimasu' that means 'I need to get off' and people will let you pass.

Japanese people are very clever in respecting queues, when you are in a restaurant, when you have to take the train or cross the road.

## Giving a tip

Giving a tip is not necessary and sometimes could be offensive. Giving a tip is something you do with people you are in strict-contact, and in this case money are placed inside an envelope.

## Informations point

Japan Guide: definitive guide to Japan - useful informations

If you are in Tokyo or Kyoto you can go to a TIC (Tourist Information Center) that have very prepared and qualified personnel. Service is free. If you need more informations on the web, you should visit [jnto website](#).

## More Informations on the Web

- [Google excerpt of Lonely Planet Japan Guide](#)
- [Japan Guides on WikiTravel](#)
- [Japan National Tourism Organization](#)
- [Tokyo on Wikipedia](#)

## Guide to [Japan](#): the tourist guide

Places: read more about tourist aspect of [Japan](#) travel in our [Japan Guide](#) articles:

- [Japan Guide: Nikko](#)
- [Japan Guide: Mount Fuji](#)
- [Tokyo Shinjuku and Shibuya guide](#)
- [Tokyo Guide](#)
- [Kyoto guide](#)
- [Japan guide: Shikoku.](#)