

# Japanese Guest Houses

## Travel Information Packet



**Discover Japanese Hospitality at a  
Ryokan**

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## Transportation

### **Train Travel in Japan**

Japan has one of the most thorough rail networks in the world, and that network is constantly expanding. It is highly automated, drivers are punctual, and train lines reach to all corners of the country. Furthermore, there are various types of train travel to choose from, including high speed *Shinkansen* (bullet trains) that reach speeds of 188 mph (300 km/hour), special limited expresses, regular expresses, overnight trains, local trains, subways, sightseeing and historical trains, streetcars and even cable cars. Most rails are operated by JR (Japan Rail) but there are also quite a few Private Railway companies. Your JR Rail Pass will only work on JR trains and buses. If you are not sure if you can use your JR Rail pass please ask a station employe.

### **JR Rail Pass**

After you arrive in Japan, you will need to turn in the “Exchange Order” to receive your JR Rail Pass. This can be done at Kansai International Airport and you will need to present the staff with your passport indicating that you have entered Japan with a “temporary visitor status” (in other words, as tourists) and are eligible for the JR Rail Pass. Your JR Rail Pass will allow you to use any JR train or bus except for the “*Nozomi*” Trains on the Shinkansen. When you take a *Shinkansen* (Bullet Train) you will need to ride on a “*Hikari*”.

When at a JR station, please note that certain ticket gates are staffed with station employees, and you are required to show your JR Pass to the employee rather than use the automated ticket gate. To make a seat reservation for a limited express or *Shinkansen* (bullet train), please bring your pass and go to a Travel Service Center or a Reservation Office (*Midori-no-madoguchi*) at a JR station.

When riding the *Shinkansen*, you don't have to make a seat reservation and can ride in one of the train cars labeled *jiyuseki* (non-reserved); however, you may have to stand if the train is crowded, and if you reserve a seat before the train arrives you are guaranteed a place to sit and you have a good chance of being able to sit by any friends or family you may be traveling with. *Shiteiseki* means reserved seat in Japanese. There are special cars known as “Green Cars” that have luxury seating; unfortunately, you cannot reserve seats in these cars with the standard JR Rail Pass. Also be aware that there are smoking and non-smoking cars. Some limited expresses have only reserved seats, while some have both reserved and non-reserved.



Midori no Mado Sign

Please note that you may be asked by a conductor to show your ticket/rail pass while riding the train. For more information on limitations, terms and usage of the JR Rail Pass, please visit: <http://www.japanrailpass.net/eng/en001.html>

## Using Ticket Vending Machines on Private Railways

Ticket machines on Private Railways vary in style but are fairly straightforward, and some even have English menus but they can be confusing the first time you use one. If you are not sure what to do please ask a station employee for help.

To purchase a ticket from a Private Railway company look above the ticket vending machine at the map to determine the costs. Next, insert money (coins or bills, although some machines won't accept big bills) and push the corresponding fare button, which will either appear on a screen or on buttons that lights up once the money is inserted.

When you go through the ticket gate, put your ticket into the slot and pick it up on the other side (do not forget it). Ticket gates are often marked with an “X” or an “O”; the former cannot be used, as it is for people going the other way through the gates, so please use the gates marked with an “O”. When exiting through the ticket gate at your destination, put the ticket in the slot and walk through - the ticket will not be returned to you as you leave. If you try to leave a ticket gate, but it closes because you have not paid the proper fare, take your ticket (it will be returned to you) to the fare adjustment machine (which usually has an English language option), put the ticket in and pay the balance shown on the screen to receive a new ticket, which can be used to leave through the ticket gate. Japanese people do this all the time so please do not feel embarrassed if the machine beeps at you.



Ticket Vending Machine

## Determining Which Trains to Take

The train system in Japan can take you to almost any place in Japan if you know which trains to take. For years we had to look up train times and routes by hand but now we have the internet. The following is my favorite website for figuring out how to get to where I want to go in Japan. All you need to do is put your starting station name in one box and then your destination station in the second box. Choose the time and day you want to leave or arrive and click the search button. This will even tell you if it is a JR train or a private railway.

<http://www.jorudan.co.jp/english/norikae/>

## Buses and Streetcars

Bus travel provides a cheap alternative to trains for long distance travel at the expense of longer travel times. There are a variety of companies that operate highway buses, which often depart from major rails stations. Furthermore, buses allow access to some less

populated places that trains do not go to. All seats for highway buses must be reserved ahead of time, and tickets are handed to the driver upon boarding the bus. The JR Rail Pass can be used with JR highway buses.

There are also local and tourist buses in certain cities; for example, it is often much easier to get around Kyoto by city bus, and Nara has a loop line bus for tourists that goes around many the popular UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Depending on the city, you will enter the bus through either the front or the back (just watch what other passengers do if you are confused). While some buses have set fares, others have fares determined by the distance traveled. Airport buses are also convenient because it can be easier in some cases to board a single bus rather than make train transfers with heavy luggage.

When riding streetcars, you usually enter the vehicle through the rear door and pay into a fare box next to the driver when you get off. As opposed to standard trains, which base the fare on distance traveled, streetcars often have a single, set fare for any distance.

## Money

### **How to Access Money in Japan**

Japan is a cash society, and while some large department stores, restaurants and hotels in large urban areas accept credit or debit cards, most expenses must be paid in cash. Therefore, it is important to bring some money with you when you first enter the country (international airports like Narita and Kansai have currency exchange banks located in the airport) and have a plan for getting money while you are traveling.

### **Post Office ATMs**

Using Post offices ATMs is a very good way to withdraw money while in Japan because they accept foreign VISA, Plus, MasterCard, Euro Card, Maestro, Cirrus, American Express, Diners Card, and JCB cards; there are few other types of ATMs that can be used to withdraw money from foreign bank accounts. Also, Post office ATMs have English menus. Please note that these ATMs are not accessible 24 hours a day - smaller post offices are usually open from 9:00 am till 16:00 (4:00 pm) on weekdays, and larger post offices are often open until 21:00 (9:00 pm) on weekdays and have limited or no weekend hours.

Before departing your country, please make sure that your card can be used in Japan and you know its secret 4-digit or 6-digit PIN number. Also, it is a good idea to check what fees and daily or monthly limits are associated with international withdrawals. These details can be ascertained by contacting your bank. Your bank or credit card company may also be able to tell you the locations of international ATMs you can use in Japan.

### **Using Money in Japan**

Compared to some countries, people in Japan tend to carry larger amounts of cash, since they often have to pay for transportation, food and beverages, shopping, and even lodging

in cash. Bills come in denominations of 10,000, 5,000, and 1,000 yen, and coins come in denominations of 500, 100, 50, 10, 5 and 1 yen.

Even though Japan is considered a very safe place for travelers, it is still a good idea to use a money belt or similar travel pouch. Losing your money, credit cards or passport while overseas can create a very stressful situation. You should also carry at least 1 credit card for emergencies. Visa and MasterCard are the most widely accepted cards while American Express is not.

### **Tipping**

Please note that it is not customary to tip in Japan, and that extra fees are often figured into restaurant bills as a substitute. Some nicer restaurants and hotels may add a 10% or 15% service charge to your bill so please ask if there is a service charge.

### **Etiquette**

In general, the Japanese are very polite to foreigners, who they see as guests, and also very forgiving when you make mistakes. There are, however, two points of etiquette which cannot be overlooked.

### **Unforgivables**

While most things are easily forgiven in Japan, certain points of etiquette must always be observed very carefully:

- Take Off your Shoes when entering a Japanese house. If you see shoes by the entry way then you will need to also take off your shoes. Japanese will not bend on this rule
- Baths are for Soaking in, Not for Cleaning Yourself. You must wash your body and completely rinse off all soap before entering the bath. The same bath water is shared by all bathers and it is important to keep it clean.

### **Bowing**

When you first meet a Japanese person, a slight bow is usually the best way to greet them. Sometimes you will also shake hands, or shake hands instead of bowing, but it is best to let the Japanese person take the lead in this sense. Furthermore, if you are in business, it is common to exchange business cards with other businesspeople. Sometimes when you meet or get to know people, they will give you gifts – it is best to decline one or two times when they offer you a gift, in order not to seem too grasping.

### **Directness**

In general, Japanese try to avoid being too direct, especially when stating their opinions or criticizing others. Furthermore, they may give you many compliments for being able to use chopsticks or saying even a simple phrase in Japanese; in some countries, this would be considered flattery and seem artificial, but in Japan it is common courtesy. When

complimented, it is polite to downplay your abilities, saying things like “I’m not that good,” or “It’s nothing special”.

### **Sitting at a Traditional Table**

When seated at a low Japanese table on tatami mat flooring it is considered polite to sit *seiza*, which is when you sit with your legs tucked directly beneath you. If this is not possible or too uncomfortable it is fine to sit cross-legged. Most Japanese can only sit in *seiza* for 20 minutes or less. You may also ask for a special backrest which is like a chair without legs. If a chair is required then please ask your hostess. Please be careful and do not hurt yourself.



Your room may differ

## Ryokan Accommodations

### **Introduction**

Staying at a *ryokan* (Japanese inn) is one of the best ways to connect with Japan and her rich culture. Each ryokan is unique and is generally family owned and operated. This means that the service you receive at one ryokan will be different at a different ryokan. This has good and bad points but overall the experience makes it worthwhile.

### **Heating/Air Conditioning**

Ryokans, like Japanese many homes, are not centrally heat but instead each room will have a separate heater/AC to control the temperature which is generally attached to the wall. In colder areas you may even find a portable heater in your room. If you are not sure how to use the heater or air conditioner please ask for help. Also keep in mind that if your room has a private bath and toilet that that room may not be heated or cooled. Hallways and other public areas also may not be heated or cooled.



Entrance to a Japanese Inn  
(yours may differ)

### **Maintaining Tradition**

If you are staying at an older traditional *ryokan* please keep in mind that it may have been built before indoor plumbing and other modern conveniences which are common in Japan. In order to maintain the traditional feel of the inn the current owner may have opted to not add new plumbing, sound proofing, wireless internet or other conveniences that you

would find in a modern building. The room also might be a bit drafty and cold. These are all things that add to the charm and experience of staying in a traditional ryokan.

### **English**

All Japanese must take English while in school though the focus is on grammar and passing entrance exams. This means that most Japanese can read basic English but as many can speak fluently. The ryokan might not have English speaking staff but if you speak slowly without the use of slang or idioms you can generally be understood. If this does not work try writing what you want to say on a sheet of paper. You will also be surprised at how well gestures communicate. Once again this is also part experience and something that should be looked at with an open mind and heart.

### **Security**

Unlike a large modern hotel, people off the street cannot just wander in to take a look around or use the bathroom. The feeling is kind of like a B&B in North America. The ryokan is reserved for guest (and their friends) who are staying at the ryokan. Because of this, and the general safety of Japan, many ryokan do not have locks on guest room doors. If you have valuables that you would like to keep in a safe please ask the front desk staff. Also many room will have a small safe for you to use.

### **Japanese Style Room**

Your room at the ryokan will be Japanese style meaning that the flooring will be *tatami* (reed mats). When you enter the room you will see a low table with cushions around it. Before you go to bed this table will be moved and your bedding will be prepared in the same location. Your room may contain some or all of the following, depending on the style, design, and expense of the ryokan.

- *agari-kamachi* - after opening the door guests step into this small area and take off their slippers (do not wear your slippers on the *tatami*)
- *shoji* - sliding Japanese doors that separate the *agari-kamachi* from the room
- *tatami* - reed mat flooring
- *zataku* – low, often wooden table
- *zabuton* - sitting cushions
- *futon* - sleeping quilts
- *tokonoma* - an ornamental alcove built into the wall, used for placing flower vases and hanging scrolls
- *oshiire* - a closet for futon sleeping quilts
- *engawa* - enclosed sitting area separated from the room by *shoji*

When you arrive at the ryokan, you may be asked to take off your shoes at the entrance and put on slippers, which are used for walking around inside the ryokan. Your shoes will be placed in the entrance when you want to go outside. If you want to take a short walk near the ryokan, you can also wear the *geta* (wooden clogs), which are sometimes provided for guests.

## Entering the Room

After you check in, follow your hostess to your room. When you get to your room, take off your slippers before you walk on the *tatami* (reed mat flooring). If your room has a private bath and/or toilet you may notice that there will be an extra set of slippers that are to be used only in the bathroom.

## Settling In

Your room may have a *tokonoma* (an alcove built into the wall used for placing flower vases and hanging scrolls), an enclosed sitting area separated by a *shoji* (sliding door), and several cushions for sitting. Your hostess will show you where to place your luggage. If it rains at night, please be sure to close the outside glass window. Sometimes a maid will bring tea for you, and you can sit on the cushions, relax and enjoy your tea. The maids may enter your room either unannounced or after quickly knocking during your stay. This is a normal practice at some ryokans.

## Ryokan Clothing (if provided)

During your stay, a *yukata* or cotton robe may be provided for you to wear in your room, around the ryokan, and if you want, you can wear it together with your *geta* if you want to take a short walk near the ryokan. If it is cold outside, a *tanzen* (outer robe) may be provided to keep you warm (wear the *tanzen* over the *yukata*). You put the *yukata* on just like a robe but please make sure you wrap it left over right. The other way is reserved for deceased.

## Bathing

Bathing is a very important part of Japanese culture and many Japanese decide which ryokan they will stay at based on the baths that the ryokan offers. Remember that a bathtub in Japan is for soaking and not washing yourself. You must wash yourself and completely rinse off all soap before entering the bathtub.

Before dinner is a good time to take a bath. You may use the bath in your room if one is available, or else you can use the public bath in the ryokan. Personally I recommend using the ryokan's public bath.



Japanese Style Bath (your bath may differ)

When you arrive at the public bath, take off your clothes and leave them with your drying towel in the changing room. Take a small towel and go into the bathing room. The public bath is only for soaking your body, while cleaning your body is done in the area outside the bath. Depending on the ryokan, there may be small stools, soap, shampoo, and a mirror provided for the guests. When you have finished cleaning yourself and there is no soap left on your body, slowly step into the large bathtub. Be careful as these baths can be very hot! If the bath is too hot for you, try to enter it slowly and move as little as

possible (the more you move, the more the water is stirred and the hotter it gets). If you have heart trouble or high blood pressure, do not stay in the water for more than a few minutes also please consult your doctor before coming to Japan. Japanese baths can be the best thing to relax after a long day of sightseeing.

All ryokans offer baths that are separated by gender but if bathing with strangers is not your thing then you can ask if the ryokan has a “family bath” where you can bathe in private. This is also nice for couples.

## Dinner

Dinners were first offered at ryokans starting back in the Edo period (1603-1867) when warlords were required to travel every other year between their domain and Edo (modern Tokyo). The Shogun (Generalissimo), who lived in Edo, set up 5 major roads to make travel easier. Along the roads stations were established where travelers could get food and rest at ryokans. In the beginning the ryokans did not offer dinner so young samurai would wander the streets doing what young men do. When asked why they were wandering the streets they would reply that they were just looking for something to eat. Sometimes problems occurred so as a way to get everyone off the streets the Shogun required that all ryokans serve dinner. This got the problem off the streets and started a tradition where ryokans serve dinner. For many Japanese the dinner is the most important part of their stay at a ryokan.



Dinner at a Japanese Inn  
(your meal may differ)

Your dinner will be served either in your room or in the ryokan's dining room. If it is served in your room your maid will bring it to you. Generally this multi-course meal will be served all at once and there will be more than enough to fill even the largest of appetites. If you wish to have more food you may order it but please be aware that an extra charge will be levied. Also if you wish to have any other drinks besides tea there will be an extra charge. The ryokan will not mention the charge until you check out.

Once you have finished eating the maid will return to your room and will clear all the plates. Many times they will also set up your futons (sleeping quilts) at this time.

## Breakfast

After a good night sleep you will have breakfast. This is generally served in the ryokan's dining room and it is perfectly acceptable to wear your yukata. The breakfast will be Japanese style though the ryokan may offer a Western style breakfast. If you wish to have

a Western style breakfast you must let them know at check in. If you wait until the morning they will not be able change the menu.

### **Front Desk and Curfews**

Front desks at ryokans generally close early as most ryokans are small and family owned. If there is no one at the front desk when you need someone just call out “Sumimasen” and someone will come, assuming that you are asking during normal hours. If you are planning to stay out late, please confirm the curfew time and if there is a way to enter the ryokan after the curfew.

### **Japanese Toilets**

There are two general types in Japan: the traditional Japanese-style toilet (or “squat toilet”) and Western-style toilet.

Often in public restrooms you will find Japanese-style toilets although in many tourist areas you may find at least one Western-style toilet. Hotels and department stores can also be a good place to find Western-style toilet.



Japanese Style Toilet

Often public restrooms will not supply toilet paper so it is a good idea to carry some tissues with you. In busy cities you will find people handing out tissues with advertising on them and it is a good idea to take as many as you can. Not only are they practical while in Japan they can also make fun mementos. You can also find tissue vending machines outside of many public toilets.

Here are some tips on how to use a Japanese-style toilet:

- Face the hood of the toilet
- Pull down your pants completely below your knees
- Squat down as closely to the hood as possible. If the toilet is elevated, you need to stand on a raised platform while squatting
- There is usually a small bar to hold on to if you have trouble keeping your balance

In a Japanese home or a ryokan, the toilet and the bathtub are often in separate rooms. If there is a toilet room, guests may find toilet slippers, which are to be worn only inside the toilet room. Leave your regular slippers outside, step inside the toilet room and immediately put on the toilet slippers. When you leave the toilet room, please leave the toilet slippers behind and change back into your regular slippers.

## **Packing**

### **Luggage**

Most Japanese travel domestically with very small suitcases so it is hard to travel with large suitcases. We suggest you bring two smaller bags rather than one large bag. The

luggage space in trains can sometimes be very small. Suitcases with wheels work well, just keep in mind there may be times when they will have to be carried up and down the stairs in train stations or ryokans. Backpacks also work well. We also suggest you bring a collapsible suitcase or duffel bag to carry home any souvenirs you may purchase in Japan. Please try and pack small and leave unnecessary belonging at home. Remember you will be carrying your own luggage throughout the tour and after a while you will feel every ounce. If you forget something you can always purchase it in Japan.

### **Clothing**

You are on vacation so dress comfortably. Casual clothing is fine unless you plan a special dinner someplace where you might want to dress up a bit. Shrines and temples do not have dress codes but since they are places of worship conservative clothing should be worn. The weather in Japan changes often so pack clothes that you can layer to make it easier to adjust your clothes to the weather.

Before you start packing please take a look on the internet to see what the weather is like. Yahoo Weather is pretty good: <http://weather.yahoo.com/regional/JAXX.html>

It is a good idea to carry a handkerchief while in Japan. Many restrooms in Japan don't have paper towels or hand dryers so you can use the handkerchief to dry your hands. Do not use this handkerchief to blow your nose as this is considered rude and unclean. Pocket tissues are also a good idea as some restrooms do not have toilet paper.

### **Shoes**

Japan is a land of walking so bring comfortable shoes that you can wear almost everyday. Also remember that it is custom to take off your shoes indoors so shoes that are easy to put on and take off are recommended. Also socks or stockings are a good idea.

### **Appliances/Electricity**

The voltage supply in Japan is 100V throughout the country though the frequency is different. In the eastern part (Tokyo, Yokohama), the frequency is 50 Hz and in the western part, (Osaka, Kyoto) it is 60 Hz. Thus a frequency converter must be used for sensitive equipment when traveling throughout the country. Most modern US appliances will work reasonably well in Japan, but you better check the specification on the back of your appliance or phone the distributor to make sure. For more information about electric appliances in Japan, please see: <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2225.html>

### **Call home**

Most tourists want to call home at least one time while they are in Japan but this is not always easy or cheap. Here we suggest you 5 different options that we have tested.

#### **Option 1 Use your cell phone in Japan...**

Most of the foreign phones do not work in Japan and the ones that do can be very expensive to you. If you have a smart phone like an iPhone or Android you may have better luck but due to data charges this can also be a very expensive option. In fact, we

recommend you to keep your smart phone on “airplane mode” and only use it to connect to the Internet by WIFI. Japan is famous for new technologies but free WIFI spots are not as common as it can be in other countries. Please ask your hotel front desk where you can access free WIFI.

Note: Even your cell phone provider says your phone will work in Japan please read all the fine print and understand what the actual costs are.

### **Option 2 Use your hotel phone...**

Nowadays the in-room phones are mostly used for room service, wake up calls and emergencies. For an international phone call this option would work but this will be very expensive and I do not recommend it.

### **Option 3 Renting a Cell Phone in Japan...**

This is a very convenient alternative, you just pick up the rental phone at the airport when you arrive in Japan and drop it off on the way back home. However please be careful as the rental fee is usually very attractive but the calls can be very expensive and its not ideal for calling overseas. Many rent a phone companies charge over 100 yen per minute for outgoing domestic calls. Here is a list of rental cell phone companies:

<http://www.rentafonejapan.com/>

<http://www.myjapanphone.com/>

<http://www.jrcorp.com/>

[http://www.narita-airport.jp/en/guide/service/list/svc\\_19.html](http://www.narita-airport.jp/en/guide/service/list/svc_19.html)

(These are just listed for your convenience and not a recommendation of service, please research carefully.)

### **Option 4 International Phone Cards...**

This is one of the best and most reasonable solutions for calling home and is one of the two options that we recommend. You can use International Phone Cards with a very competitive rate to call overseas. Depending on the Phone Cards, they can be used from public phones or rental mobile phones. Phone cards are sold at convenience stores, kiosks, on the Internet and vending machines.

[http://www.callingcards.com/index\\_japan.asp?origsel=Japan](http://www.callingcards.com/index_japan.asp?origsel=Japan)

<http://www.nobelcom.com/>

<http://www.rebtel.com/>

(These are just listed for your convenience and not a recommendation of service, please research carefully.)

### **Option 5 Use Skype to call...**

If you are at a WIFI spot you can use your computer, smart phone (iPhone, Blackberry, Android...), or iPad to make free calls to others while on Skype. You can also use Skype to make cheap calls to land lines around the world. At Japanese Guest Houses and Japan Roads we use Skype to contact each other between the US and Japan. It works great and if the person you are calling has Skype then it is all free. Once you are away from the WIFI area make sure that you put your smart phone or other device on airplane mode.

<http://www.skype.com>

## Sightseeing Guidelines

### **Major Religions in Japan**

The two main religions of Japan are *Shinto*, the native religion based around nature and multiple gods, and Buddhism, imported from India through Korea and China. The following are brief descriptions of the two religions and explanations of what to do when visiting *Shinto* Shrines (*jinja*) and Buddhist Temples (*otera*).

### **Shintoism**

The Shinto religion is the native religion of Japan, and the word '*Shinto*' means 'way of the gods'. There are many *kami* (gods) and they often take the form of things close to life and nature such as trees, mountains, rivers, wind, rain, and fertility. People also become *kami* after they die and are worshiped as ancestral gods by their relatives.

In *Shinto*, people are believed to be essentially good. Therefore, the evil people do is caused by evil spirits. As a result, the purpose of most Shinto rituals is to keep away evil spirits by prayer, purification, and offerings to the *kami*.



Gate in front of a Shinto Shrine

*Shinto* is deeply rooted in the history of the Japanese. During the Meiji Period (1868-1912), *Shinto* was officially recognized as state religion but after World War II the state and the *Shinto* religion were officially separated.

### **Visiting a Shinto Shrine (*jinja*)**

Shinto shrines are the homes of *kami* and therefore places of worship. Shrines are visited during special yearly events such as '*oshogatsu*' (New Year's holiday) and festivals. People also visit shrines to pay respect to *kami* and pray for good fortune.

Throughout the year there are countless festivals held all over Japan to celebrate such events as the coming farming season, the harvest or important local historical events. Some festivals are small, local festivals while others are huge and attract people from all over Japan. If you are lucky enough to experience such a festival, or *matsuri*, it will be an event you will always remember.

How should you behave when visiting a shrine? It is not much different than visiting a church or cathedral. Visitors are expected to behave respectfully and to dress appropriately. Near the shrine's entrance you will find a purification fountain. Pick up the ladle lying over the small well, fill it with the water provided, and rinse both hands. Then transfer some water into your cupped hand, rinse your mouth and spit the water beside the fountain. You are not supposed to drink the water directly from the ladle. Many people however only wash their hands or simple do not perform this purification ritual.

At the offering hall, throw a coin (any amount will do) into the offering box, bow deeply twice, clap your hands twice, bow deeply once more and pray for a few seconds. If there is some type of gong, use it before praying in order to 'wake up' the gods.

Visitors are usually allowed to take pictures at shrines but watch for signs banning photography, just in case. Sacred objects representing the *kami* are stored in the inner chamber of the shrine where they cannot be seen except on very special occasions.

### **Buddhism**

In the 6th Century, Buddhism made its way into Japan through Korea and China. Unlike Shintoism, Buddhism has a founder, Gautama Siddhartha, and the religion is based on his teachings. At first, there were some conflicts between Buddhism and Shintoism, but eventually the followers of both religions learned to live together in relative harmony.



Buddhist Temple

Throughout history Buddhism gained political influence: during the 8th Century, it was this influence that prompted the move of Japan's capital from Nara to Kyoto (to escape the overbearing Buddhist political influence in the former capital).

The first branch of Buddhism introduced to Japan was Mahayana Buddhism but this was soon followed by other sects of Buddhism from China such as the Tendai sect (805 AD), the Shingon sect (806 AD) and the Zen sect (1195 AD). Other popular sects like Jodo (1175 AD), Jodo-Shinshu (1224 AD) and Nichiren (1253) developed in Japan as well.

Today in Japan about 90 million people consider themselves Buddhist but the religion does not strongly affect people's everyday life, except on certain occasions like funerals.

### Visiting a Buddhist Temple (*otera*)

As with Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples are places of worship and visitors should behave respectfully and dress appropriately. Every town in Japan has a temple. Some cities like Kyoto have thousands of temples.

Visitors can show their respect at a temple by throwing a coin (any amount will do) into the offering box in front of the main hall and then quietly saying a short prayer. When entering temple buildings, as a sign of respect you may be required to take off your shoes. Leave your shoes on the shelves at the entrance or take them with you in plastic bags provided at some temples.

At some temples, visitors burn incense in large incense burners. The smoke from the incense burners is believed to have healing power or to make you more intelligent.

Temples store display sacred Buddhist objects which you can purchase. Photography is usually permitted on the temple grounds. It is not allowed indoors at some temples so visitors should watch for signs.

### Japanese Language

Despite English language being a required part of Japanese education, many Japanese do not speak much or any of the language. The most likely to understand you are university students, and they will best understand you if you speak slowly, clearly, and perhaps even write out your questions if they don't understand. However, since you are visiting their country, it is polite to try to speak in Japanese when possible. Furthermore, it will add to your cultural experience, and the people you meet will be very appreciative that you took the time to learn a little bit about their language before coming to Japan. The following are some basic Japanese phrases and terms that may be useful to you as you travel:

#### Greetings

| Meaning                              | Alphabet                               | Japanese  |
|--------------------------------------|--|-----------|
| It's nice to meet you. My name is... | <i>Hajimemashite, [your name] desu</i> | はじめまして    |
| Good Morning                         | <i>Ohayou gozaimasu</i>                | おはようございます |
| Good Afternoon                       | <i>Konnichiwa</i>                      | こんにちは     |
| Good Evening                         | <i>Konbanwa</i>                        | こんばんは     |
| Good Night (before going to bed)     | <i>Oyasuminasai</i>                    | おやすみなさい   |
| Goodbye                              | <i>Sayounara</i>                       | さようなら     |

#### Useful Phrases

| Meaning | Alphabet   | Japanese |
|---------|------------|----------|
| Yes     | <i>Hai</i> | はい       |

|   |                                       |              |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| No  | Iie                                   | いいえ          |
| Yesterday   | <i>Kinou</i>                          | 昨日           |
| Today   | <i>Kyou</i>                           | 今日           |
| Tomorrow  | <i>Ashita</i>                         | 明日           |
| Excuse Me/ Pardon Me/ I'm Sorry                     | <i>Sumimasen</i>                      | すみません        |
| Please (when offering something)                    | <i>Douzo</i>                          | どうぞ          |
| After You (when telling someone to go ahead of you) | <i>Douzo</i>                          | どうぞ          |
| Please (when requesting something)                  | <i>Kudasai</i>                        | 下さい          |
| Thank You   | <i>Doumo arigato</i>                  | どうもありがとう     |
| You're Welcome                                      | <i>Dou itashimashite</i>              | どういたしまして     |
| I can't speak Japanese                              | <i>Nihongo wa dekimasen</i>           | 日本語は出来ません    |
| Do you speak English?                               | <i>Eigo ga hanasemasu ka</i>          | 英語が話せますか     |
| I'd like to buy...                                  | <i>...o kaitai desu</i>               | ...を買いたいです   |
| How much does it cost?                              | <i>Ikura desu ka?</i>                 | いくらですか       |
| I'll take this one                                  | <i>Kore wo kudasai</i>                | これをお願いします    |
| Can I have a receipt?                               | <i>Ryoushuusho o itadakemasuka?</i>   | 領収書を頂けますか    |
| Is it okay to take a picture?                       | <i>Shashin o totte mo ii desu ka?</i> | 写真を撮ってもいいですか |
| Where is the restroom?                              | <i>Toire wa doko desu ka?</i>         | トイレはどこですか    |

### Asking Directions

| Meaning   | Alphabet                   | Japanese  |
|---|----------------------------|-----------|
| Where is...?  | <i>...wa doko desu ka?</i> | ...はどこですか |
| Tourist Information Office                              | <i>Kankouan'naijo</i>      | 観光案内所     |
| Post Office   | <i>Yuubinkyoku</i>         | 郵便局       |
| Bank  | <i>Ginkou</i>              | 銀行        |
| Train Station   | <i>Eki</i>                 | 駅         |
| Public Telephone  | <i>Koushuu denwa</i>       | 公衆電話      |
| Police Box (small neighborhood public safety buildings) | <i>Kouban</i>              | 交番        |
| Hotel   | <i>Hoteru</i>              | ホテル       |
| Ryokan  | <i>Ryokan</i>              | 旅館        |
| Buddhist Temple   | <i>Otera</i>               | お寺        |
| Shinto Shrine   | <i>Jinja</i>               | 神社        |

## Transportation

| Meaning   | Alphabet                         | Japanese |
|---|----------------------------------|----------|
| Train   | <i>Densha</i>                    | 電車       |
| Bus   | <i>Basu</i>                      | バス       |
| Subway  | <i>Chikatetsu</i>                | 地下鉄      |
| Train/Subway Station                                    | <i>Eki</i>                       | 駅        |
| Bus Stop  | <i>Basutei</i>                   | バス停      |
| “Bullet Train”  | <i>Shinkansen</i>                | 新幹線      |
| Boat  | <i>Fune</i>                      | 船        |
| Tourist Boat  | <i>Kankousen</i>                 | 観光船      |
| Ferry   | <i>Ferii</i>                     | フェリー     |
| Ropeway   | <i>Roopuwee</i>                  | ロープウェー   |
| Streetcar   | <i>Romen densha</i>              | 路面電車     |
| Airplane  | <i>Hikouki</i>                   | 飛行機      |
| Airport   | <i>Kuukou</i>                    | 空港       |
| Reserved Seat   | <i>Shiteiseki</i>                | 指定席      |
| Non-Reserved Seat                                       | <i>Jiyuuseki</i>                 | 自由席      |
| Smoking Seat (on a train, in a restaurant)              | <i>Kitsuenseki</i>               | 喫煙席      |
| Non-Smoking Seat (on a train, in a restaurant)          | <i>Kin'enseki</i>                | 禁煙席      |
| Limited Express   | <i>Tokkyuu</i>                   | 特急       |
| Express   | <i>Kyuukou / kaisoku</i>         | 急行 / 快速  |
| Semi-Express  | <i>Junkyuu</i>                   | 準急       |
| Local (stops at every station)                          | <i>Kakueki teisha</i>            | 各駅停車     |
| Ticket  | <i>Kippu</i>                     | 切符       |
| Reservation and Information Office (at a train station) | <i>Midori no madoguchi</i>       | みどりの窓口   |
| When Does It Depart?                                    | <i>Itsu shuppatsu shimasuka?</i> | いつ出発しますか |
| When Does It Arrive?                                    | <i>Itsu touchaku shimasuka?</i>  | いつ到着ですか  |

## Emergencies

| Meaning                  | Alphabet                           | Japanese   |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|
| I need a doctor          | <i>Isha ga hitsuyou desu</i>       | 医者が必要です    |
| Please call an ambulance | <i>Kyuukyuusha o yonde kudasai</i> | 救急車を呼んで下さい |
| It hurts here (point)    | <i>Koko ni itai desu</i>           | ここに痛いです    |
| Where is the hospital?   | <i>Byouin wa doko desu ka?</i>     | 病院はどこですか   |
| Help me!                 | <i>Tasukete!</i>                   | 助けて!       |

|                    |                                   |              |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| I'm allergic to... | ... <i>ni arerugii ga arimasu</i> | …にアレルギーがあります |
| I'm ill            | <i>Kibun ga warui desu</i>        | 気分が悪いです      |

## Safety Tips

Although the crime rate is quite low in Japan, as a tourist you are more of a target than the average Japanese person. While many people rarely find themselves in threatening situations while traveling in Japan, it is always a good idea to use common sense in any situation.

- Use a money pouch to keep your money, passport, credit cards and other important items in. As always, and especially in big cities, don't go waving your money around if you are carrying a lot of it.
- If you lose something, check with a nearby police box or station lost-and-found to see if it has been turned in.
- If you lose your passport, please go directly to the nearest embassy or consulate of your country. It might be a good idea to look these up ahead of time.
- Japan is an earthquake-prone country, so please be careful and try to remain calm if one does occur. It is best to head for the nearest doorway or supporting pillar. Smaller rooms are in general more stable than larger ones in the event of a large quake. Hotels in Japan have evacuation maps posted, and there are public evacuation areas in all Japanese cities. If you are at the beach, please leave the shoreline and beware of *tsunami* title waves following a quake. Although Japan has very advanced technology for detecting and dealing with quakes, they still pose a real danger. Television will broadcast information following an earthquake, and in case of a major disaster, emergency broadcasts will be aired over the radio in English and other foreign languages in some areas (76.1 FM in Tokyo, 76.5 FM in Kansai).
- Riding trains around constantly, and traveling in general, can be very hard on the body because of the amount of walking, bag carrying and stair climbing that is required. Please be sensible and give yourself enough time to rest each day.
- There are many instances of low clearance when walking through stations, entering doorways, etc. Please watch your head, even if you are not exceptionally tall by your country's standards.
- Most trains stop between 23:00-00:30 (11:00 pm – 12:30 am) each night, depending on the area you are in. If you plan on staying out late, please take a look at the train time tables beforehand to avoid getting stranded at night. Also check to see if your ryokan has a curfew.
- Women have to be more careful when traveling in Japan, as crimes such as sexual harassment, molestation and attempted rape are more common than theft in Japan. Although some will tell you it is safe to walk alone at night, use common sense and don't do anything you wouldn't do at home. Be especially careful when spending time in the entertainment districts at night, as drunken men may see a foreign women and think it is acceptable to verbally or physically harass or

assault her. If you are being followed, please go to a safe, public place, or look for a Koban (police box) which is a neighborhood public safety building run by the municipal police.

- Molestation on trains has become more of a problem over the years in Japan, and to combat it, special cars have been introduced that only allow women to ride during peak transit hours. They are clearly marked with signs on the train cars and sometimes on the platforms, so please try to use these to your advantage.
- Other precautions you would normally take at home still apply while you are abroad. Rather than worrying, learn about the possible risks ahead of time and be prepared so you can fully enjoy your trip. As in many other countries, emergency numbers can be called for free from a public phone. For the police dial 110, and for fire or ambulance dial 119.

### **Emergency Contact Numbers**

- Police: 110
- Ambulance or Fire Truck: 119
- Japan Helpline: 0120-461-997 (provides help in English any time)
- Japanese Guest Houses: 090-5464-6071
- United States Embassy: 03-3224-5000
- Australian Embassy: 03-5232-4111
- New Zealand Embassy: 03-3467-2271
- British Embassy: 03-3265-5511
- Irish Embassy: 03-3263-0695
- Canadian Embassy: 03-5412-6200
- Hospital Information: 03-5285-8181

### **The main points are**

- Japan is a cash society
- Check to make sure your electronics will work in Japan
- Public transportation will be used and you will have to carry everything so pack light and small
- Comfortable shoes that can be taken off and put on easily
- More than one pair of comfortable shoes in case it rains
- Casual conservative clothes will work the best
- Weather might change so dress in layers

**Each traveler is different and we all have our own ways of packing. The above is just some points that we have found helpful while traveling in Japan.**