

JAPAN TRAVEL TIPS



CREDIT CARD / CASH

Only **Seven Bank** (found in 24 hour convenient stores and other locations), **Citibank** (24 hours, found in major cities only), **Shinsei Bank** or **Post Office ATM's** (normal business hours) will accept foreign credit cards for cash withdrawals - **Don't forget your PIN & to inform your card service provider that you are leaving your home country** - they sometimes put a security block on using cards overseas. It is advisable to bring as much cash as might you need or as much as possible - credit cards and Japan are not as advanced as you might think! Laser Cards are not accepted in most places. Never run low on cash when not in a city as you will find it tough to change currency at banks, or find an ATM suitable. We recommend a budget of €50 – €80 per day per person (when accommodation is already pre booked). If you are taking part in a small group escorted tour, this figure may be less, as your activities and places of interest will keep you busy hence less time to spend money.



LUGGAGE

Bring one suitcase weighing a recommended weight of 15 kg on your way to Japan. You'll add to this during your stay and the maximum weight allowance is 20 kg per person on most economy seats. Business class varies but is around 30 kg per person - however, we do not recommend you to carry 30 kg around with you. Without knowing it, you may need to carry this case up stairs, through stations, and so on. The lighter the case, the less energy wasted! Not only this, Japanese airports are very strict about weight and usually charge ¥3,000 per extra kilo. If you get caught at the airport with a hefty fine, use the Post Office Service to send by SAL. This takes from 1 week up to 6 weeks to be delivered. It's a lot cheaper than Air Freight.

"Takkyubin" is a postal service that delivers parcels, including suitcases, skis, etc. from anywhere, and to anywhere, within Japan. Distances that do not require a flight usually take less than one day. So if you send your bag from Tokyo in the morning it can sometimes be at your Kyoto hotel that evening or the following morning. If you are planning an overnight stay in the countryside (where few coin lockers exist), this service is highly recommended.



"Coin Lockers" - "コインロッカー" are found in most train stations (look for the sign). The bigger the station is the bigger the lockers are; i.e. lockers available for larger suitcases. Smaller rural stations may only have lockers suitable for light luggage. This option is safe and very convenient. It is not recommended to carry baggage when sightseeing, especially in cities. It will tire you out and get in the way. Cost per locker depends on the size and time ranging from ¥200 - ¥600 for up to 6 - 8 hours.

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CLOTHES

Check the climate and temperature before you leave and bring clothes to suit the season. Japanese weather is very predictable so it shouldn't be a problem planning your wardrobe. Japanese people dress very casually day and night - except in Tokyo where you won't know what to expect. Women dress quite modestly but very elegantly. Men are well dressed but if work is not involved, a suit is not worn. Unless you are travelling for a special occasion or on business, there's no need for men to bring a suit. Business travellers should bring smart, clean, neat suits with all the trimmings - if you want to impress.



TRAVEL ADAPTOR

If you plan to carry electronic devices it is advisable to carry a travel adaptor with you. Voltage in Japan is 120V (compared to 220V in Ireland, for example). Make sure your device has a built in transformer or you may burn it out.



SHOES & SOCKS

Bizarre as it may sound, clean socks are vital in Japan. You will be surprised at the number of unexpected times you have to take off your shoes to enter a room, even dressing rooms in clothes stores. Comfortable shoes are a necessity. Lots of walking involved - even if from hotel lobby to room.



MOBILE PHONES

A common mistake many travellers make is assuming your mobile phone will work in Japan. Until recently no carrier operated roaming in Japan but now, some phones *might* work (not all). It is recommended you contact your phone company before going. Note that roaming charges are extortionate. If you cannot be without, you can rent for a reasonable fee. Options will be available to you on arrival at the airport. It may be difficult to arrange this on your own in a city so we recommend you get this task done at the airport where they will also speak English.



TIME

It is advisable not to go to MacDonald's 10 minutes before your train leaves - they won't wait. A common shock for many travelling to Japan for the first time is the punctuality of services, especially with the trains. If your train is due to leave at 11.11, you should aim to be at the station for 10.50. This gives you time to find which carriage you are supposed to be standing at (written on your ticket). The bullet train will arrive at 11.11 and leave 10 seconds later so there is really no time for wasting or rushing.



INTERNATIONAL CALLS

It is not cheap to call home and even more expensive from a hotel room. Your best option is to buy an International Call Card at a convenience store. You can use this from your hotel room or any pay phone that allows International calling (you will see a sign). ¥1,000 will buy you 15 minutes approximately to an Irish landline, for example. It is a lot more economical to call land lines than mobiles.



If you have a Skype account you can call your family for free (as long as your family have a Skype account on their own PC at home). This is the best way to call home. You can call mobile phones and landlines also for a much cheaper fee than a normal phone or call card. It is worth looking into before going to Japan, especially if you plan on bringing your laptop with you! If you do not have a laptop, you can use Skype from an internet cafe. Just bring your own headset with earphones and microphone. Talk for free! For more information visit: <http://www.skype.com/>



LANGUAGE

Surprisingly, you will find little or no English once you leave the main cities (Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto etc.). For this reason it is advisable to carry a pocket phrase book, go on an escorted tour or consult with us before you leave for Japan. Advance planning will make your trip to Japan a lot more worthwhile and comfortable.



WI-FI

Wi-Fi service is improving throughout Japan. Many cafes now offer free Wi-Fi service, including Starbucks, and in most Tokyo underground/metro stations. There is also an option to hire a portable Wi-Fi router for around ¥1,000 a day at the airport. Some companies allow you to book online and have it delivered to your hotel. There is also a free app you can download which allows you to use Wi-Fi for free. For more information visit: <http://wi2.co.jp/tjw/welcome/english.html>





BULLET TRAINS (*Shinkansen*) & JAPAN RAIL PASS

If you are travelling in Japan using the Japan Rail Pass, it is still advised to reserve seats prior to getting on the bullet trains. Advance booking is always recommended in Japan. During busy seasons trains can get quite full, even in reserved areas. If you do not reserve your seat, you could end up standing for most of your journey which is not necessary. Same goes for any long distance or special types of trains in Japan - reservations recommended.



VISAS, AIRPORT SECURITY & DOCUMENTATION

Passengers carrying an EU passport are exempt from obtaining a visa to enter Japan. You are not permitted to work as this is only a tourist visa. Visas can be validated for up to 6 months or less. For more information on Visas in Japan visit:

http://www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/visa/02.html

Since November 2007, security checks on entering an International Airport in Japan requires passengers to give their finger print and photo, kept on file and processed at the immigration area. You are not required to bring a photo with you. You will receive an immigration card to fill out (usually handed out on the aircraft before landing). This must be filled out and handed in to Immigration on arrival.



TOKYO TRANSPORT

If you do not have use of Japan Rail Pass and plan on being in Tokyo for more than a few days, we recommend you to buy a SUICA card*. This is similar to a pay as you go transport card, like the Leap card in Dublin or the Oyster card in London. You can purchase this at any JR office or alternatively from a ticket machine located beside the entrance to tracks. A small deposit is required to buy the card. Top it up as necessary. It can be used on all trains in Tokyo. Extremely handy and saves you time. Just swipe the card at the ticket gates. The gates will tell you how much each journey costs, and how much you have left on the card. For more information visit:

<http://www.jreast.co.jp/e/index.html>

*In some cases, your itinerary may state that your Private Tour Guide will provide you with your SUICA card.