



What you will need and other helpful tips

In Country Transportation: While in Japan we will use public transportation on many of our excursions and to classes. Trains, Subways & Taxis will be used for most travel while in Kyoto and Tokyo as large busses can be difficult to maneuver through very narrow roads. We will also travel by private charter to several locations.

Walking: This trip involves considerable walking up hills or stairs, and uneven or cobblestone streets. We expect guests to be able to walk at least 5 miles, sometimes at more than a leisurely pace, to keep the group together. Subways and train stations do not always have escalators or elevators and stairs will be required.

Shoes: Comfortable walking shoes are very important. Slip on shoes without laces are easier as there will be times when you will be required to remove shoes at restaurants, temples or when you least expect it like dressing rooms in stores when trying on clothes. Slippers are provided at these places. A second pair of walking shoes is recommended. You may want to have a pair of socks with you if we are required to remove our shoes and put on slippers.

Pack lightly: Getting on and off trains with multiple suitcases can be difficult. Also, some train stations only have stairs, no escalators or elevators. Be prepared to carry your luggage for short distances. A lightweight duffle type bag that folds very small can be packed in your suitcase and used to pack all of your purchases. However, it may be easier to send your purchases home before leaving Japan. Shipping boxes are easy to purchase, and hotels will mail packages for you.

Japan also provides a great service, for a small fee, of shipping your luggage to your next destination. If we get them to the lobby of the hotel early enough they will be waiting for us at our next hotel upon arrival. If you want to take advantage of this great service, it is advisable to pack a small overnight bag to take with you in the event luggage does not arrive the same day.

Laundry service: Will be available (at an additional cost) at hotels and around town. There is an automated laundry shop 5 blocks from our hotel in Kyoto.

Japan is very safe and shopping is fun. There is a large flea market on the 25th of September in Kyoto where you will find crafts, kimonos, clothing, antiques, chopsticks, pottery, food items, etc. A lightweight backpack is recommended, as shoulder bags get heavy with purchases. You may need outer clothing, umbrella, camera, or water bottle, while walking and touring sites.

Japanese cuisine: Fish is the mainstay of the diet, it is eaten for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Most restaurants offer vegetarian and meat choices as well. Japanese people enjoy eating other types of cuisines so restaurants serving Italian, Indian, and American fast food chains are easy to find.

Wi-Fi, Internet & Electric: The Hotel rooms have free Wi-Fi. Train stations have free Wi-Fi, this is helpful if you get lost and need google maps or want to text someone, and no password is needed. Also, Starbucks has free Wi-Fi, however you have to first go to:
http://starbucks.wi2.co.jp/pc/index_en.html, register and create a password in advance. Electric is the same as the US. Outlets do not accommodate 3-prong plugs. Most convenience stores sell adapters to convert 3-prong to 2-prong.

Phone Service: It is difficult to buy a sim card for mobile phones in Japan. You can also check with your phone carrier about short term use of service while in Japan. Viber is a smart phone app that lets you to make local and overseas calls with a Wi-Fi connection. Viber will also work with an international data plan which is a lot cheaper than per minute charges with overseas plans. An international hotspot can be rented for about \$60 for 30 days. It needs to be ordered in advance and will be sent to the hotel for you to have upon arrival.

Weather: Temperatures and conditions in the spring are unpredictable and can include: sun, rain, wind, heat, and cold. Bring clothing that can be layered. A small umbrella and lightweight rain gear is recommended.

Passport & Visa: If you have a passport check the expiration date, if you don't have a passport or you need to renew yours allow 6 – 8 weeks for processing. Japan does not require entrance or exit taxes or fees. Most countries of origin are not required to obtain a Visa. USA, UK & Australia do not.

Japanese Time: Japan uses a 24 hour clock. Japan time vs. USA: Eastern +13 hrs. Central +12 Hrs., Mountain +11 Hrs., Pacific +10 Hrs.

Japanese Yen: The conversion rate fluctuates daily, however based on the last 12 months here is an easy method of estimating Yen to USD. Approximate yen to USD rate: 100 yen = \$1.00, 5,000 yen = \$50.00, 10,000 yen= \$100, place a decimal point as you would with the dollar you will get the approximate cost of a purchase. It is advisable to purchase yen before leaving the US. Many banks will sell yen without a fee and you are able to return unused yen free of charge also. Wells Fargo offers this service to members so check with your bank for this option. There are also kiosks in the airports in the US and Japan which do charge a fee for purchasing. ATM machines are not readily for foreign exchange so we would recommend not depending on them for yen but will certainly be useful if you find yourself short. Credit cards are not accepted in all restaurants or stores so it is advisable to have yen on hand. Also, check with your credit card company about foreign transaction fees on purchases. Capital One, Bank of America, Chase and American Express do not charge fee but check with your company to confirm. It is also important to let your cc company know that you will be traveling outside of the country so that they don't flag your account as being used fraudulently.

Miscellaneous: Please let us know if we haven't addressed all of your questions.