

# Japan Adventure Tour

## What you need to know before you travel with JAT and other helpful tips

**Walking:** While we won't be doing strenuous outdoor activity, we will do a lot of walking and Japan has a lot of stairs. This is a country that is best seen and enjoyed on foot and JAT gears the trip for travelers to have an intimate Japanese experience. Walking is so ingrained in the culture that distance measurements are provided in the time it takes to walk somewhere rather than giving the distance in kilometers or miles.

We will be climbing stairs, walking small hills and taking back streets with uneven cobblestones, or dirt paths. Participants will need to be comfortable walking one mile in 25 minutes or less and be able to go up and down flights of stairs without difficulty. The itinerary includes several walking tours as well as a market day. These may require hours of walking, although it will be leisurely with frequent stops, there will be days when we will walk 5 miles or more. We ask that you take this into careful consideration before joining the tour.

**Shoes:** Comfortable walking shoes are a must. Slip on shoes without laces are preferred as there will be times when you will be required to remove your 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. If you prefer not to wear socks with your shoes then we suggest that you have a pair of socks with you at all times, you will want to wear socks when you are required to remove your shoes and put on communal slippers. We also recommend that you pack a second pair of walking shoes as alternating between different shoes can be helpful for weary feet.

**In-Country Transportation:** While in Japan we will use public transportation on many of our excursions and to classes. Trains, subways and city buses will be used for most travel. We will also use a private charter bus on some of our day trips excursions. JAT will provide all of your train tickets as well as a card to be used on local transportation. It will not be necessary for you to purchase a Japan Rail Pass or any other type of transportation card while traveling with JAT.

**Pack lightly:** We recommend that you consider the size of your suitcase carefully. Porters are very scarce in Japan and you will need to be able to manage your own bags and be able to carry your luggage for short distances.

Trains only stop at stations for a very short time and getting on and off the trains with multiple suitcases can be difficult. At some train stations we will have to use stairs, not escalators or elevators.

Japan provides a great service; for a small fee luggage can be shipped overnight to your next destination. We will take our luggage to the hotel lobby in the morning the day before we depart for the next destination and it will be waiting for us at our next hotel upon arrival. The fee for this is not included in the trip cost but we expect everyone to take advantage of this service when we travel leave Tokyo. You will need a small overnight bag or backpack for 2 days of clothing and daily necessities when we leave Tokyo and go to Kanazawa as our luggage will be shipped to Kyoto.

**Laundry service:** The hotels offer a laundry service at an additional cost (which can be expensive). However, there is an automated laundromat 5 blocks from our hotel in Kyoto. We suggest that you use the hotel service or plan an evening to do laundry rather than pack a lot of clothes.

**Japan shopping is fun:** There will be many opportunities to purchase local and unusual souvenirs. We will go to a large outdoor market on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October in Kyoto. You will find crafts, kimonos, clothing, antiques, wood block prints, chopsticks, pottery, and much more. This is always one of the favorite days for JAT travelers. A lightweight backpack is recommended, as shoulder bags get heavy with purchases.

You may want to bring a lightweight duffel type bag that folds very small and fits inside your suitcase to use for taking home all of your purchases. These type of bags are also available for purchase at the Tokyu Hands store, very close to our hotel in Kyoto. Although it is usually cheaper to pay for an extra bag on the airplane, it may be easier to send your purchases home before leaving Japan. Shipping boxes can be purchased, and the hotel will mail packages for you.

**Japanese cuisine:** Fish is the mainstay of the diet, it is eaten for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and even fish lovers can have too much of a good thing. But, not to worry as most restaurants offer vegetarian and meat choices as well. Japanese people also enjoy many different cuisines so restaurants serving Italian, Indian, Chinese, French, and American fast food chains are easy to find. The convenience stores like 7-11 have surprisingly good quality prepared food. Some of them even have tables and chairs for customers to dine in. Another great place to pick up wonderful quality prepared food at a reasonable price is at a depacheka, the basement of a department store.

All department stores have a food court in the basement. They close around 7pm, go just before closing as all the prepared food is offered at a discounted price.

**Wifi & Internet:** All of our hotels will have free Wi-Fi and internet access in the rooms. Many train stations as well as Starbucks have free Wi-Fi, which is helpful if you get lost and need google maps or want to text someone, no password in the train stations.

**Electric:** The electric service is the same in Japan as in the US, however, outlets do not accommodate 3-prong plugs. Most convenience stores and 100 yen (yes, they have a lot of dollar stores) sell inexpensive adapters that convert 3-prong to 2-prong.

**Phone Service:** Many stores now sell sim cards for mobile phones. However, when you get a sim card you will have a Japanese phone number. So we recommend that you check with your phone carrier about a short term service plan while in Japan. AT&T offers a \$10 a day plan that covers most everything you will need, phone calls, internet, text messages, etc. and you only get charged on the days you use it. It must be activated before you start using it or you will be charged the local roaming charges. Don't have AT&T?, check with your carrier as they may have a similar plan.

Viber and WhatsApp are smart phone apps that let you make local and overseas calls as well as send text messages and photos for free with a Wi-Fi connection.

An international wi-fi hotspot can be rented for about 8,340 to 12,040 (about \$76 to \$110 USD) for 18 days depending on the service your choose. It needs to be ordered before you leave the US and will be sent to the hotel or can be picked up at the airport. There are advantages to having a hotspot; it works in areas that phone service may not and it will support multiple devices, so if traveling with a companion you can share one hotspot. A dependable company we have used in the past is [GlobalAdvancedComm.com](http://GlobalAdvancedComm.com). You should also get the insurance, an extra 800 yen (\$7.50 USD) in case the device and/or battery is lost.

**Weather:** Temperatures and conditions in the fall 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. Check the weather before leaving the hotel each day to determine if you will need outer clothing and/or an umbrella. On our walking tours we also recommend to bring your camera and a water bottle.

**Passport & Visa:** If you have a passport check the expiration date, if you don't have a passport or if you need to renew yours allow 6 to 8 weeks for processing.

Most countries of origin are not required to obtain a Visa, the USA, UK and Australia do not. Japan recently introduced a 1,000 yen (about \$9.25) departure tax for each person leaving the country. It is usually added to airfare, however some travelers have reported that they had to pay this on departure and it was required to pay it in Yen.

**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 there is an easy method of estimating Yen to USD, simply place a decimal point as you would with the dollar and you will get the approximate cost of a purchase: 100 yen = \$1.00, 5,000 yen = \$50.00, 10,000 yen = \$100.

You may be more comfortable purchasing some yen before leaving the US. Many banks will sell yen without a fee and you are usually able to return unused yen free of charge. Wells Fargo has this service for members but check with your bank to see if they offer this service.

Although there are kiosks in most US airports the exchange rate tends to be very high. However, the exchange rate at Japanese airports is very reasonable and comparable to anywhere else you will be able to get Yen while in Japan.

The only ATM machines that will take foreign debit cards are located in post offices, 7-11 and Family Mart convenience stores.

**Credit cards:** Many small restaurants and stores do not accept credit cards advisable to have yen on hand. Also, check with your credit card company about foreign transaction fees on purchases, they can be very high. Capital One, Bank of America, Chase and American Express do not charge a fee but check with your company to confirm. It is also important to let your credit cards companies know that you will be traveling outside of the country so that they don't flag your account as being used fraudulently.

**Japan is a very safe country:** The Japanese people will jokingly tell you that the policemen's job is to give directions to tourists. We have had valuable things returned to our travelers on several of our trips (laptop computer, Bose headphones, clothing, and more). That said, we do not recommend that you bring valuable jewelry or anything that could not be replaced if it was lost. Purses and man bags should be on a cross over shoulder strap so that it will not be easy to leave on a train or bus.

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