



Japan Adventure Tour

Helpful Tips & General Information

Walking: We will be doing a great deal of walking at several locations on the tour. We ask that our guests be comfortable walking at least 5 miles at a comfortable pace, over several hours, as we tour Gion, Kanazawa, Miyajima, Nikko, Naoshima, and possibly other places. There will be sites where the walkways may be uneven or made of cobblestone so extra care must be taken when walking. Not all subway or train stations have escalators or elevators, and stairs may be the only option.

Shoes: With all of the walking we will be doing it is important to have very comfortable walking shoes. We recommend you bring a second pair of walking shoes so that you can rotate them if needed. It will give your feet a break if the shoes are different styles.

Slippers: Slippers are provided at most of temples, shrines and some restaurants. Slip on shoes without laces are easier as there will be many times when you will be required to remove shoes, sometimes when you least expect it like dressing rooms in stores when trying on clothes. You may want to either wear socks or bring socks as they should be worn with the slippers. It is considered good manners to turn your shoes to point towards the door after you have removed them. *Tatami* should only be stepped on with socks or in bare feet. Remove your slippers before stepping onto *tatami* and place them neatly outside the *tatami* area.

Toilet Slippers: Furthermore, separate toilet slippers are often provided for use inside washrooms. The regular slippers are left outside the door when using the washroom. Don't forget to remove your toilet slippers after usage, a common faux pas among foreign travelers.

Luggage: When Japan re-opened last fall it was with some new rules and restrictions. The one that affects us directly is luggage on the Shinkansen (bullet) trains. In the past we would stow luggage behind the last car on the train but that is now restricted. Now only a small bag may be carried on and stowed in the overhead rack. There are limitations and restrictions for larger suitcases. With these new conditions we have decided to use a courier service to transfer our luggage between the hotels when traveling from Hiroshima to Kyoto and Kyoto to Tokyo. There will be a small fee, between \$25 to \$40, for this service depending on the size and number of suitcases you have. We will pack a change of clothes and toiletries in our backpacks or small bags and take our luggage to be sent by courier down either the night

before or the morning of departure. The courier pick up is usually around 9am so we need to have our luggage down, registered and paid for before 8am. The hours and time of drop off may be different depending on the hotel. If different, you will be advised upon checkin.

Masks: The Japanese people have used masks since the 1917 flu epidemic. They wear them out of respect to others when they have colds or allergies. They are wearing them now due to covid, colds and allergies. So we are asking our participants to wear masks indoors, on the subways, trains, anywhere that makes distancing difficult.

Laundry Service: Will be available (at an additional cost) at hotels and around town. There is an automated laundry 5 blocks from our hotel in Kyoto which might be just about the time you want to refresh your wardrobe. This is one of the times you will remove your shoes and wear slippers.

October Weather: Typically October has moderate temperatures in the 70s. October is considered the rainy season, but we have experienced very little rain during our October tours. We don't guarantee the weather, but we do suggest that you pack layers, jackets, and a small umbrella. During rainy weather, wet umbrellas and raincoats are supposed to be left outside or put into plastic bags to prevent them from dripping water everywhere.

Japanese Cuisine: Fish and rice are the mainstay of the Japanese diet however there are many other options available. Soba, Udon and Ramen noodles are also very popular as lunch items. Japanese people enjoy eating other cuisines so restaurants serving Italian, Indian, and American fast-food chains are easy to find. The hotel breakfasts feature large buffets that offer an extensive mix of Japanese and Western fare.

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, in advance of the trip, you should go to: http://starbucks.wi2.co.jp/pc/index_en.html, to register and create a password. Electric is the same as the US, however the wall outlets do not accommodate 3-prong plugs. Most convenience stores sell inexpensive adapters to convert 3-prong to 2-prong or if you may want to bring one. If you use a CPAP or any other device that you will need next to your bed, an extension cord will be very helpful in case the outlet is not close enough.

Phone Service: Please check with your cell phone service provider about your options for using your phone in Japan.

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 to 8 weeks for processing. Visitors to Japan will need to pay a 1,000 yen departure tax. Last time we were there it had to be paid in Yen,

so be sure save enough yen to pay this. The USA, UK & Australia do not require a Visa but if you are traveling from a country other than those listed, please check with the airline or local embassy.

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 this is an easy method of estimating Yen to USD. Simply place a decimal point as you would with the dollar, and you will know the approximate cost of a purchase.

Approximate yen to USD rate: 100 yen = \$1.00; 5,000 yen = \$50.00; 10,000 yen = \$100.

Credit Cards: The use of credit cards in Japan has increased tremendously however there may be a few places that will not accept them such as small restaurants and boutique stores. Most banks no longer charge transaction fees on credit cards used in foreign currency but check with your bank for confirmation of that.

How to Purchase Yen:

ATM Machines: Many ATM machines in Japan will not except foreign debit cards.

International ATMs can be found at International Airports, many convenience stores like Seven Eleven, Family Mart, or Lawson. Post offices also have ATM machines that work with foreign cards and are often located outside in a small vestibule so that they are accessible even if the post office is closed. Please note that the withdrawal limit is dependent on your bank, and certain rules and limits may apply.

Your Bank: Check with you bank as they may allow you to purchase Yen without transaction or return fees, but you will probably need to order yen in advance as most banks do not have it on hand.

Airport Kiosks: If you did not get yen in advance of leaving home, and would like to have some Yen available when you land we recommend that you purchase yen at the airport in Japan as you will probably find that the fees are less at the airport in the US or other countries.

Japanese Etiquette:

Drinks: Do not fill your own glass – it implies that your host or dining partners are ungracious. Wait for someone else to fill it, and be sure to return the favor. If possible, try and raise your glass a little off the table while it's being filled – this is very formal Japanese etiquette, however, so if you are dining with friends wait and see what everyone else does first.

Eating in Public. In general, walking while eating or drinking is frowned upon, although it is acceptable in the case of some foods, especially during festive occasions. You'll see most people carrying their takeout in secure bags to eat later, or finishing their drinks while standing at the vending machine. In Japan, they've taken bad public transport etiquette one step

further: drinking and eating are actually prohibited except on some of the long distance trains that serve food.

Tipping: Tipping is not expected in Japan. Restaurants will usually have a built in fee. Leaving a few coins behind can be considered insulting. Also, resist the temptation to count your change as that is also considered rude.

Use the Payment Tray: Most stores, restaurants and taxis will have small trays in which to place the money when paying rather than handing it directly to a person. If you spot such a tray be sure to put the money or credit card in there, because disregarding it is somewhat rude.

Geisha, Maiko in Gion: Do not approach them for selfies. However, you may see 'fake' Geisha or Maiko. You can usually tell as they will not be in a hurry, will be leisurely strolling on the popular streets and, if you ask, they will probably be happy to have their photo taken.

Slurping: It is considered a compliment to the chef to loudly slurp your noodles and soup. In Japan you will drink the soup right from the bowl, do not use a spoon.

Perfume: Don't wear a lot of perfume. None should be worn if you plan to eat sushi.

Deer are Sacred: It is considered extremely rude to harass the small deer at Nara or Miyijima Island. These deer roam free and can be somewhat aggressive as they are used to tourists feeding them. However, if a deer tries to take something out of your bag you should never swat at it, just turn your back and they will probably find another tourist willing to feed them. If you wish to feed the deer, there is food available in nearby vending machines. Do not feed them anything else as it can make them sick.

Phone Etiquette: When using your phone to take photos it should make a sound and not be silenced. This is so that the people around you will know that a photo was taken. Also, be sure photos are allowed if you are inside a business, temple or shrine. Do not make a phone call while on public transportation. When talking amongst yourselves, talk softly so as not to disturb others who may be relaxing.

Traveling as a Group: It is important to realize when traveling in a group the impact many people have on the normal flow of walking for others around us. Be aware of others and try and walk to one side. Watch the flow of other walkers and if you see that everyone on one side is going the same direction then follow suit. Try and be aware of others trying to pass and be careful not to block entrances or exits.

Escalators: Stay on one side. Usually it will be the right side, but look for signs on the escalator when you get on as there are often arrows that indicate which side to stand on. If you have luggage it should be in front or behind you - not next to you. Everyone should be single file, do not stand next to someone else. This will allow others in a hurry to pass easily.

Taxis: Don't worry, drivers don't take advantage of their clients and fares are calculated by metres. Most drivers are men and are almost always wearing suits with white gloves. Taxis are impeccably clean, white lace is often found on seats and headrests. To avoid the language barrier, have your destination address written on a piece of paper. Another option would be to show them the destination on your phone. Be sure to always have a card from your hotel with you in case you need to find your way back. Most taxis only accept cash.