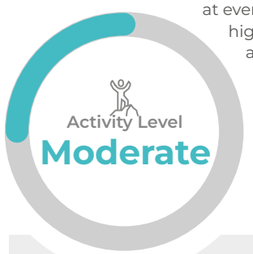
Discovering *Japan*

Japan, often called the Land of the Rising Sun, is an island nation made up of four main islands. It offers a striking mix of ancient traditions, natural beauty, and modern innovation that captivates travelers from around the world with its unique charm and fascinating cultural depth.

Visitors encounter contrasts at every turn—high-tech cities alongside centuries-old temples, serene gardens beside towering skyscrapers, and delicate spring cherry blossoms illuminated by neon lights at night. Culinary experiences range from conveyor-belt sushi to warm sake, while open-air hot springs provide moments of relaxation, wellness, and cultural immersion deeply valued by locals and visitors alike.

Tokyo, the bustling capital, combines futuristic architecture and advanced technology with deep-rooted tradition. Beyond the city, travelers can explore Mount Fuji, Japan's tallest peak and one of its most sacred mountains, offering breathtaking views, outdoor adventures, spiritual inspiration, and an unforgettable sense of wonder.



Visa Process

U.S. citizens may enter Japan for tourism or business without obtaining a visa in advance, for stays of up to 90 days.

Currency

The official currency of Japan is the Japanese Yen (JPY). Banknotes are issued in denominations of ¥1,000, ¥5,000, and ¥10,000. Commonly used coins include ¥1, ¥5, ¥10, ¥50, ¥100, and ¥500.

Credit Cards

Major credit cards such as Visa and Mastercard are widely accepted in Japan's larger towns and cities. American Express and Diners Club are less commonly used. Cash is accepted almost everywhere and remains essential, particularly in smaller shops, markets, and rural areas.

Plug Sockets

Japan uses Type A plugs with two flat parallel pins. The standard supply is 100 volts at 50/60 Hz. U.S. devices are generally compatible, though travelers may need a plug adapter.

Check in Process

Travelers should present a valid passport or government-issued identification at check-in. Standard check-in time in Japan is typically from 5:00 PM local time.

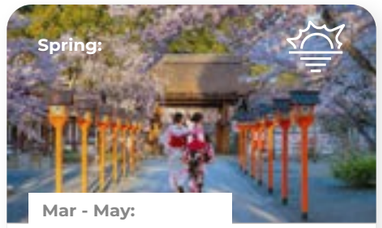
Gratuities

Tipping is not part of Japanese culture. Most restaurants, hotels, and service establishments include a service charge in the bill, and the price shown is typically the final amount

Instead of tipping, appreciation is expressed through polite gestures, such as a sincere thank you or a respectful bow.



Japan experiences four distinct seasons—spring, summer, autumn, and winter—each offering different weather conditions and travel experiences.

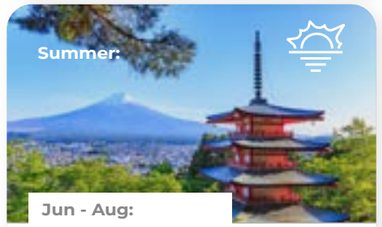


Spring:

Mar - May:

Renowned for its cherry blossoms, temperatures remain quite chilly until mid-April.

Average **50-75°F**



Summer:

Jun - Aug:

Summer is hot and humid, with occasional rain.

Average **50-75°F**



Autumn:

Sep - Nov:

Brings cooler temperatures and vibrant autumn foliage

Average **50-75°F**



Winter:

Dec - Feb:

From mild in southern regions to cold and snowy in the northern areas such as Hokkaido.

Average **50-75°F**



Cultural Norms

Japanese cultural norms emphasize respect, politeness, and social harmony. **Travelers should be mindful of the following practices:**

Bowing: A common greeting and sign of respect. The depth and duration of the bow vary depending on the situation and relationship.

Shoes Off Indoors: Remove shoes when entering homes, traditional accommodations (ryokan), and some restaurants. Indoor slippers are often provided.

Quietness: Public spaces value calm and reserved behavior; speaking loudly is considered disruptive.

Politeness: Use courteous language and gestures. Key phrases include arigatou (thank you) and sumimasen (excuse me).

Chopstick Etiquette: Avoid pointing with chopsticks, sticking them upright in rice, or passing food between chopsticks—these actions are linked to funeral rites.

Handling Money: Offer or receive money and items with both hands as a sign of respect.

Respect for Traditions: At temples and shrines, follow proper etiquette, such as washing hands and mouth at purification fountains.



Emergency

Dial 119 in Japan for ambulance and fire services, and 110 for police assistance. Both numbers are free to call from landlines and mobile phones. Travelers should keep a copy of their passport and key documents in a secure place, and carry the contact details of the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

Transportation

Japan has an extensive and efficient public transportation network, with announcements and signs provided in both Japanese and English for ease of navigation. Local trains, buses, and taxis are widely available.

Navigating Stations: Major stations, especially in Tokyo, can be large and complex. Follow signs closely and use station maps to avoid confusion.

Tickets: Travelers can purchase single-journey tickets (cash only) or use rechargeable IC cards such as Suica or Pasmo. These cards can also be added to Apple Wallet or Google Wallet.

Rush Hours: Trains are extremely crowded during morning and evening rush hours. Plan travel times accordingly. Japan's transportation system is punctual, clean, and reliable, making it straightforward to travel both within Tokyo and across the country.



Dining

Dining in Japan combines rich flavors with important cultural etiquette. Meals typically begin with itadakimasu ("I humbly receive") and end with gochisousama deshita ("Thank you for the meal").

Chopstick etiquette is essential—do not point with chopsticks, place them upright in rice, or pass food directly to others. When eating rice or miso soup, hold the bowl close to your mouth. Sushi may be eaten with either hands or chopsticks, while sashimi is eaten only with chopsticks.

Tap water is safe to drink throughout Japan, including in parks, gardens, and public facilities.

What to pack

Essentials:
Passport & Visa: Carry your passport, visa, and all necessary travel documents.
Travel Insurance: Strongly recommended for unexpected situations.
Money: Bring cash (especially small denominations) and credit/debit cards. ATMs are widely available.
Health Kit: Include prescription medications and essential over-the-counter medicines, kept in your hand luggage.

Clothing:
Seasonal Wear: Pack lightweight, breathable clothing for summer (June–August). Add warmer layers for spring (March–May) and autumn (September–November). Heavy clothing is required in winter (December–February), especially in northern regions such as Hokkaido.
Comfortable Shoes: Ideal for walking and exploring; sandals are useful for lighter activity days.

Personal Items:
Toiletries: Basic items such as toothpaste, shampoo, soap, and any personal products you regularly use.
Sunscreen & Sunglasses: Essential for sun protection.
Insect Repellent: Recommended, especially in rural or tropical areas.

Electronics:
Adaptor/Converter: Japan uses Type A and Type B outlets with 100V supply; bring a suitable adapter.
Phone & Charger: A local SIM card can improve connectivity and reduce roaming charges.
Camera: Bring extra memory cards and batteries.

Other Useful Items:
Small Backpack/Daypack: Convenient for day trips and carrying essentials.
Hand Sanitizer: Useful for cleanliness on the go.

