

Japan Travel Tips & Recommendations

Japan in general:

- No visa is needed coming from the US for short term, tourism travel.
- Digital or physical IC cards, Suica/Pasmo card for subway. For iPhone, Can download on your phone and easily use. There are some complications with Android where a physical card may be needed.
- Train stations are huge. Pay attention to entrance and enter gates as they will save a tremendous amount of time when entering or leaving the station. Google maps will usually give you a recommendation of which entrance/exit to use, for example B2, C5, South Entrance, North Entrance.
- Uber is available or local apps, GO, but it is expensive and in Tokyo traffic can be bad and distance is far. Subways are more convenient and cheaper.
 - GO may be better outside major cities.
 - When flagging a taxi on the street, Red light means available, green is taken.
 - For Airport pick up/drop off we have had good success with the service NearMe
 - https://nearme.jp/en_us/
 - Rates are usually much cheaper than uber, or what you will get quoted for your hotel to arrange transportation.
- E-Sim's work well to have service in Japan (depending on your cell phone, provider, and international plan). I generally use Airalo. Can use my referral for \$3 credit 😊
 - My referral code: MICHAEL13333
 - <https://airalo.go.link/gBQOH>
- Credit cards are common but there are still a lot of cash only places, so it is recommended to always carry some cash. For me, 711 ATM's usually have more reliable rates.
 - Amex is generally accepted, but Visa is probably more universally accepted, especially in smaller businesses or rural areas.
 - When paying with cash you will accumulate a lot of coins fast. If going to a convenience store (711/Family Mart/Lawson) there are machines you can usually just put all the coins in when paying and it will consolidate and use for your purchase. Also, you can use coins to buy train tickets or refill physical IC cards.
 - It is common for stores to have a tray to place any cash/coins in when paying. It is also polite to hand your credit card with both hands to the cashier.
- When paying with a credit card, assuming your card does not have foreign transaction fees, always pay in local currency to benefit from the most up to date exchange rate. POS machines that do the conversion for you are usually pre-programmed with a static rate that may not be updated timely.
- If planning to travel to multiple cities, especially via the Shinkansen (bullet train), purchasing a JR Rail pass may make sense, although it really depends on the amount of planned travel by train. For infrequent day trips, or single trips between Tokyo/Kyoto, or

Kyoto/Osaka, it is cheaper to just purchase the shinkansen tickets in most cases. I use Klook which generally has cheaper fares, Also, some routes will allow QR code scanning (via the app) to enter the shinkansen tracks.

- o https://www.klook.com/en-US/transport/?target_product_id=32
- o **Luggage note:**
 - Small/medium bags fit overhead
 - Large luggage requires seat reservations with oversized baggage space
 - There is also limited storage between train cars
- There are also services in Japan to ship your luggage direct to your hotel from the airport or train station. This can be a great option when travelling between cities with a lot of baggage.
 - o Yamato Transport
 - o JAL ABC
- Google maps work well for directions, especially when using the trains.
- Google translate or other translation apps will come in handy. Hotels, Airports, Train stations, and major restaurants generally will always have English speaking personnel. Small restaurants, shops, markets, and more rural areas of the country it will be less common to encounter someone English speaking, but using a translation app will help. Especially, to scan restaurant menus and translate with your phone camera.
 - o Download the Japanese language on your phone before going to Japan to ensure you can use it if you lose service.
- No tipping in Japan!
- There are strict areas outside for smoking. Some Izakaya or Japanese bars allow smoking indoors as well.
- Tax Free shopping but you must have your physical passport.
- Hotel rooms are generally much smaller than you may expect, especially at non 5 Star luxury hotels.
- Hotel check-in time is generally very strict. Early check-in is rarely allowed (must buy the night before). I do not recommend risking the ability for early check-in, especially if your flight arrives very early.
- Japan is 100V, Type A (US is 120V). Flat two-prong US plugs fit; the lower voltage is why hair dryers/curling irons feel weaker, and some grounded 3-prong US plugs won't fit without an adapter
- Making restaurant reservations in Japan:
 - o Hotel concierge can be helpful but not for the more popular, hard to get reservations.
 - o Omakase.in, Tablecheck, Pocket Concierge are all options to explore.
 - Omakase.in is best for high end, especially in Tokyo.
 - Tableall can be an option, but you will pay a premium for most reservations. Only use for very hard to get/bucket list restaurants. You may be 1-3x.

- Tabelog = Japan's dominant review site (the one "better than Google" — correct). It also supports some bookings.
 - For walk in restaurants/café's queuing in line for 30+ minutes can be very normal, so plan accordingly, especially around peak times.
 - Google maps can be helpful for restaurant information but opening times for smaller local restaurants may be misleading or incorrect. You can have your hotel concierge call or even check if they have Instagram and post their opening/closing times.
- Common/helpful words/phrases:

Japanese (English)	English Meaning	Phonetic (Easy English)
Konnichiwa	Hello / Good afternoon	kohn-nee-chee-wah
Arigatō gozaimasu	Thank you (polite)	ah-ree-gah-toh go-zah-ee-mahs
Sumimasen	Excuse me / Sorry	soo-mee-mah-sen
Onegaishimasu	Please	oh-neh-guy-shee-mahs
Hai	Yes	high
Iie	No	ee-eh
Eigo o hanasemasu ka?	Do you speak English?	eh-go oh hah-nah-seh-mahs kah
Wakarimasen	I don't understand	wah-kah-ree-mah-sen
... wa doko desu ka?	Where is...?	... wah doh-koh dess kah
Ikura desu ka?	How much is this?	ee-koo-rah dess kah

**See separate guides for Tokyo & Kyoto specific information/recommendations*

