

Japanese manners and customs



Japanese train manners

- You are expected to not talk on the phone on the train and subway. However, quiet smartphone/tablet use is normal. Speaking loudly to other passengers is also discouraged.
- In train stations, people usually line up for the train in areas marked on the platform. Wait for the passengers to disembark.

- The trains can get very crowded in the early mornings and evening (rush hours). Be mindful of your belongings if you have a large bag or suitcase. You are also encouraged to hold your backpack or wear it in front of you while on the train.
- Trains and subways accept physical tickets (purchased at ticket machines outside the gate) and IC cards. IC cards can be purchased and charged at ticket machines. IC cards are also sometimes accepted for payment of taxis, buses, and shops.
- Train station staff at gates usually have maps and travel information in English. Larger stations often have English-speaking staff.
- Subway station exits are numbered, and are usually labeled in map applications.
- Some major train stations are under construction in preparation for the Tokyo Olympics. Be mindful of the signs in case of a detour. The signs are usually in English and Japanese.
- Cell service is widespread and strong, however, there are some train/subway lines that have underground portions without coverage.
- Trains do not run 24 hours, and train routes can vary throughout the day. Use an app or website to confirm train schedules and routes.
Recommended site: <http://www.hyperdia.com/>



At the airport / hotel

- Inbound tourism is at an historical high in Japan, so there may be many tour groups.
- Airport signs are usually in Japanese, English, Chinese, and Korean. Many staff members speak English or Chinese.
- Transportation from the airports includes buses and trains. Check with your hotel if they have an airport shuttle or there is an airport bus stop nearby.
- Hotels usually offer free wi-fi, but it may be slow.
- Having suitcases delivered from the airport to hotel, and then hotel to the airport, is a common service in Japan. Consult with airport staff and hotel staff for more information.



Around Tokyo

- Trash in Tokyo is separated: burnables, non-burnables, cans, plastic bottles, and glass bottles.
- It is sometimes hard to find trash cans. There are usually trash for cans and bottles next to vending machines, and various kinds of trash cans in front of convenience stores and on train platforms.
- Japanese public restrooms do not always have paper towels or air dryers. It is recommended to bring a handkerchief or small towel.
- Taxis usually have automatic doors. Do not open or close a taxi door by yourself.
- Public free wi-fi is not widespread and often requires an account with a local internet provider
- Japanese SIM cards can be rented at airports and many large electronics stores.
- Smoking rules vary by location. Smoking is banned in trains and taxis. Some large buildings and train stations have smoking rooms. Some areas of Tokyo have outdoor smoking areas, and other areas allow smoking on the street, and others totally ban smoking. Be mindful of signs explaining the rules.
- In March, the weather will be a little cold and dry. Some indoor locations and trains may use heating.
- Japan is a cash-based society. All denominations of Japanese currency, including up to the 10,000 yen bill, are accepted at any store. Vending machines usually accept 10, 50, 100, and 500 yen coins, as well as 1000 yen bills.
- Credit cards/debit cards are not accepted at some smaller stores and restaurants.
- ATMs are often not open 24 hours, and many do not accept international cards. Post office ATMs accept international credit/debit cards, but are not usually open 24 hours. Convenience store ATMs are usually open 24 hours, but do not always accept international cards. However, most 7-11 convenience store ATMs accept foreign cards 24 hours a day.
- Personal care items and toiletries are widespread and high quality.
- Many bars, restaurants, and clubs close around 1am, around the time of the last trains. Taxis are available 24 hours, but charge extra during the late night and early morning.
- Keep your passport with you at all times. Japanese police are allowed to ask anyone to show ID. For foreign tourists, only a passport will be accepted for this.
- People do not usually eat/drink while walking outside.
- If you ride an escalator, stand on the left, walk through on the right



Eating out in Japan

- Tipping is not a part of Japanese culture. However, it is common for restaurants and bars to have a table charge with a small appetizer (500 – 1000 yen per person).
- Japan has strict food safety laws, so there is little cause for concern with eating raw foods at restaurants, including eggs and certain kinds of meat and fish.
- It is not common to ask for dish substitutions at restaurants (for example, a salad instead of a side of French fries, leaving out a certain ingredient, etc). However, the staff will be accommodating and will help you select a meal if you are a vegetarian, have religious dietary rules, etc.



Common dishes and snacks

- Yakiniku: Korean BBQ, grill your own meat slices and vegetables
- Yakitori: grilled chicken, etc, vegetables on skewers
- Donburi: a big bowl of rice topped with various meat, vegetables, egg, etc.
- Ramen: a big bowl of noodle soup; the soup is usually salty, or flavored with soy sauce, miso, or pork marrow. Comes with pork slices, seaweed, pickled bamboo, green onions, etc.
- Sushi: small bites of vinegared rice topped with raw fish. Other toppings can include shrimp, egg, cooked fish, and vegetables. Hold the sushi upside down and dip the fish portion in soy sauce. Sushi often comes with wasabi already on the rice, but more can be added if desired.
- Hamburg: a large hamburger patty topped with cheese, gravy, etc.
- Japanese curry: a sweet, thick curry served with rice. Usually have pork, potatoes, carrots, and onions.
- Fish: fish is often served grilled and whole, from head to tail, and with the bones. Eat carefully with chopsticks. You do not have to eat the head, fins or bones.

- Tempura: battered and deep fried vegetables, fish, etc. Common types of tempura include jumbo shrimp, whitefish, pumpkin slices, eggplant chunks, and mushrooms.
- Tonkatsu: breaded and deep fried pork cutlet. Usually eaten with a sweet-and-savory sauce and spicy mustard. Tonkatsu is usually sold as a set meal with a large cabbage salad, rice, and miso soup.
- Onigiri: rice balls with various fillings, and wrapped in seaweed. Seafood, including salmon, tuna, shrimp, and spicy roe, are common fillings. A popular snack from a convenience store.
- Crepe: a crepe (thin pancake) rolled into a cone and filled with whipped cream, fruit, chocolate chips, etc.
- Bento: a boxed lunch. Includes a large portion of rice, and small portions of meat, various vegetables, pasta, pickles, etc. Can be purchased at any convenience store, supermarket, or basement/food court of a department store.
- Pan (bread): Japanese bread has numerous flavors and fillings. Savory breads can be topped with bacon, filled with curry, etc. Sweet breads can have sweet red beans, filled with whipped cream, etc. Can be purchased at convenience stores, supermarkets, and bakeries



Vegetarianism/veganism/food allergies in Japan

- Food that is truly vegan/vegetarian can be hard to find. Some points of caution:
 - Many soups, including miso soup, usually have a dashi (fish stock) base, and boiled vegetables are often cooked in similar broth.
 - Many savory Japanese snacks have minimal amounts of dashi or other seafood flavoring.
 - Vegetable yakitori and vegetable tempura usually have no animal products, but are probably cooked on the same grill or fried in the same oil as meat products.
 - Many tofu dishes come with a meat-based sauce or have fish flakes sprinkled on top. Many salads have some chopped bacon or small fish.



Shopping in Japan

- Store and restaurant staff will usually shout out a greeting (“irasshaimase”) when you enter. No response is necessary except maybe a nod of the head or a smile.
- Medicine, including aspirin, can only be bought in drug stores and designated areas of supermarkets and department stores. They cannot be purchased at convenience stores and many smaller supermarkets.
- In supermarkets, the customers bag their own purchases. Also, some supermarkets charge for plastic bags, so a bringing a reusable shopping bag is encouraged. Department stores, on the other hand, provide bags, and often provide extra shopping bags by request or if the purchase is for a common gift item (boxes of snacks, Japanese souvenirs, etc.).
- Many shops offer tax-free purchases. Look for posters advertising this service and follow the instructions.



Business manners

- It is expected that you take your shoes off before entering a private residence, a room with grass mats (tatami flooring), and in restaurants with Japanese-style seating. Taking off your shoes is not expected in most public areas, shops, businesses, etc.
- Business cards are an important part of Japanese business and networking. Do not write on a card or fold it. Lay it on a desk or hold it until the meeting/conversation is over. If you have a card, pass it to the other person with both hands, with the text right side-up for them (upside-down for you)
- Most Japanese people are familiar with shaking hands as a business greeting. Feel free to start a handshake, bow, or bow while shaking hands.



Popular tourist spots

- Tokyo Sky Tree: observation tower, shopping, restaurants
- Roppongi Hills Tower: shopping, dining, art museum
- Akihabara: computers, video games, toys, comics, etc. Many shops
- Tokyo Dome: Pro baseball stadium, small amusement park, shopping, dining
- Tokyo Tower: historic sightseeing
- Meiji Shrine: historic sightseeing
- Tsukiji Fish Market: sightseeing and sushi
- Ueno Park: museums, zoo, park
- Tokyo Station (outside the gates): restaurants, character shops, department stores
- Shibuya: shopping, dining (geared towards young people)
- Ginza/Yurakucho: shopping, dining (luxury and international brands)
- Harajuku/Omotesando: shopping, dining (Harajuku: younger, pop culture; Omotesando: older, boutiques)
- Ikebukuro/Sunshine City: shopping, observation tower
- Odaiba: Island with various museums, shopping, dining