

Health and Safety for the American Tourist in Japan

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Images: Google Image Search "Japan"



Executive Summary

Japan has a reputation as a tourist friendly country but planning a trip overseas can seem like a daunting task. Before finalizing a budget and buying those plane tickets consider a few items regarding your health and safety. The following pages are intended as a guide for American tourists to help plan for possible emergencies, know where to go in the event of an emergency, and provide tools to avoid going over budget while traveling around Japan. Some of this information contained herein should be considered and acted on during your vacation planning process. During your travels this information may act as a quick reference in a pinch or provide tips to stretch your budget.

Thorough planning before you go can save you from potential issues or even emergencies abroad. In this document you will find helpful information surrounding health precautions, currency, language, personal safety, what to have on you at all times, domestic travel, the US embassy, and what to pack. Spending even a couple minutes to compose a list or program numbers and addresses into your phone before you go, is almost guaranteed to save you time so you can solely focus on enjoying your travels.

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Health

COVID-19 Measures

The COVID-19 pandemic has made impactful changes around the globe, and travel measures are certainly not excluded. In an effort to slow down the spread of the virus while still trying to allow travelers in and out, countries have put measures in place to keep travel safe and efficient. To make the best experience out of a trip to Japan in light of recent health events, it is important to plan in advance by knowing the restrictions and requirements before entering the country. Worst case scenario, a tourist might not be allowed to leave the airport. That is, beyond hopping on a plane back home.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, official government site, contains frequently updated information surrounding border enforcement measures following the pandemic. Currently, all travelers entering Japan, whether they're a citizen or tourist, must conduct a COVID-19 test and provide proof of a negative result within three days of departure. If this is not done, the traveler will be denied entry ("Border Enforcement," 2021).

Upon arrival, one must complete the necessary documentation and download several communicative applications on the mobile phone as well as clear the immigration process ("COVID-19 Information," 2021). Once into Japan, an individual may be subjected to additional COVID-19 testing and quarantine ("Border Enforcement," 2021). It is vital to understand that tourists cannot completely enter Japan right away, so make the necessary trip adjustments. As of October 2021, travelers vaccinated with Moderna, Pfizer, or AstraZeneca at least two weeks before entering the country must quarantine in a room for 10 days. During this period, officials will arrange regular calls to ensure traveler compliance with Japan's quarantine measures. On the final day, a negative antigen or PCR test result must be displayed in order to begin traveling. If a traveler is unvaccinated, their period of quarantine is 14 days instead of 10 ("COVID-19 Information," 2021).

In regards to health precautions around Japan, it is recommended to wear a face mask in public, particularly in crowded areas or transportation ("COVID-19 Information," 2021). Businesses may have their own mask-policies as well. If an individual is unable to read Japanese, look for illustrated guidelines or follow what other people seem to be doing. (See section on language barrier for more information) It is customary to wear a mask indoors nowadays.

Mental Wellness

Traveling can exacerbate mental health as a tourist goes through the four stages of culture shock: Honeymoon, Crisis, Adjustment, and Recovery. The University of South Florida effectively explains these phases in detail. The first stage, Honeymoon, refers to the initial excitement of being enveloped in a new culture and environment. The Crisis, also known as the Withdrawal stage, comes when this sense of exhilaration and adventure ends. At this phase is the realization that routines are now different and habits need to change ("Mental Health," n.d.). A minor inconvenience or encounter can cause a greater deal of frustration and may trigger depression. Adjustment is the third phase, where the sense of feeling lost begins to diminish. The

traveler begins to settle into their environment and find their place as a foreigner. Once this is over, the final stage begins. Recovery is when the traveler becomes in tune with their new role and understands how to get around and communicate effectively (“Mental Health,” n.d.). Recognizing these stages beforehand is helpful towards processing the roller coaster of emotions one might face as a tourist in Japan.

To minimize the impact of culture shock and successfully adjust to visiting Japan, keep realistic expectations and learn the necessary self-care techniques. Speaking with someone who has visited the country before allows for others to more adequately prepare by listening to the experiences and confusions they confronted. Once in Japan, it’s imperative to maintain good nutrition and sleep throughout the trip to remain energized and focused. In addition, homesickness is normal. It may be helpful--and even insightful--to have a journal on hand to document emotions through the journey (“Mental Health,” n.d.). Moreover, expect to feel frustration. Traveling to a new country involves a great deal of learning but the proper preparation can make it a more positive, rather than negative, experience.

Allergies and Other Medical Conditions

Before going to Japan, note down the name and address of the nearest hospital of every hotel. In addition, see a doctor and get any prescriptions filled to cover the amount of time away.

Anyone planning on traveling *anywhere* with an allergy must carry an epinephrine pen at all times. Moreover, accompanying friends or family should also know how to administer the pen in the event an allergic individual is unresponsive. Upon administration, immediately go to the emergency room and explain what happened so the hospital staff can take care of the situation. **DIAL 119** to reach the emergency number in Japan.

Personal Safety

Situational Awareness

Being alert while traveling is of utmost importance, as safety is top priority. Proper planning needs to be conducted on all the potential areas one might travel to in Japan. While it’s considered a relatively safe country by citizens and travelers, no place is 100% secure, especially without learning the most likely dangers beforehand.

Facing potential natural disasters is one of the biggest risks for a tourist in Japan. Tsunamis, earthquakes, typhoons, flooding, landslides, and eruptions are not new to the country (“Risks and Dangers,” n.d.). If possible, it would be safer to schedule a trip outside of the favorite seasons here for Mother Nature’s wrath: Spring and Summer. Hotels in Japan are expected to uphold the necessary procedures for warnings and evacuation (“Risks and Dangers,” n.d.), but it is always good to be aware of backup plans and understand what the advisory levels mean. The Japanese government has five levels to its disaster warning system, where evacuation is called at the Level 4 advisory. Elderly people are advised to evacuate upon Level 3. Check out the advisory information for each city destination to know where additional shelters are located (“How To Find An Evacuation Shelter,” 2019).

As always, it would be prudent for a traveler to look up the common dangers of every place they will be visiting. Steer clear of potential trouble spots, examples of these include areas affected by internal strife, protests, or disasters (Leggat & Klein, 2001). Downloading location-based notification apps such as Alert Traveler can prevent accidental wandering into danger.

Many of the fatal accidents in American travelers are from traffic disasters (Leggat & Klein, 2001). It is recommended for tourists to avoid operating any vehicles in Japan, which would be illegal without a permit anyways. Even with a permit, buying or renting a car is more expensive than other forms of transportation during a trip. In addition, do not jaywalk to significantly decrease risk of traffic accidents.

Avoiding Scams

Before going anywhere, not just Japan, it's important to be vigilant of the common scams of that area. Knowing what to expect beforehand, especially the signs of an upcoming scam, can save a tourist a lot of trouble and money. In addition, getting caught up in a con may also turn into a legitimate, physically-dangerous situation. The main scams tourists face in Japan are the Speak and Show, The Beggar, Spiked Drink, and the Drop and Swap (Cover-More, 2019). They're so common that they have their own names and countless stories of victimized travelers can be found online. While Japan is generally regarded as a safe country, nowhere is 100% safe from scams.

Anyone speaking English in a non-English speaking country is bound to bring attention. As a tourist who's susceptible in their new environment, this may attract scammers to what they think might be a golden-goose opportunity. The Speak and Show is when a group of students or young adults approach a tourist asking to practice their English. They'll behave kindly and act interested, even leading the innocent tourist to a café or restaurant. By the end, the poor tourist will find themselves alone at the table and a bill for hundreds of dollars (Cover-More, 2019).

The Beggar is when, like in the name, a beggar comes up to a tourist trying to guilt them into giving them loose change. They can come in the form of anyone but are usually old or pregnant. While they might seem innocent—after all, all they want are a few cents—there might be someone else around watching to see where the tourist keeps their wallet to grab it the moment they're distracted (Cover-More, 2019).

The Spiked Drink scam is when someone spikes another's drink while their head might be turned for a second. It happens everywhere, and Japan is no exception. As a result, instances of sexual assault may occur as well as the victim having their identification and money stolen. Everyone, not only women but men as well, need to be alert and cover their open drink at all times. In some cases, people have woken up in situations where they're in an isolated area with people demanding more money (Cover-More, 2019).

The Drop and Swap is when someone, a shopkeeper or cab driver, will drop the foreigner's change on "accident" and pick up coins or notes that look similar. These coins or

notes will be less than the actual value of the change. Usually a traveler has not inspected the foreign currency enough to tell the difference on the spot (Cover-More, 2019).

In addition, the safest method of payment in Japan is using either a credit card, letters of credit, or Japan Trust Pay. If a traveler were to find themselves a victim of fraud, report to the nearest police station as well as the Japan Anti Fraud Organization, otherwise known as JAFO (“Anti Fraud Organization in Japan,” n.d.). The number in Japan to call the police is **110**.

United States Embassy in Japan

Knowing how to locate the United States Embassy or consulates when traveling abroad is essential for any American tourist. No one plans to get into an accident or for a natural disaster to occur while on vacation but it can happen. According to the United States Embassy and Consulates in Japan website, <https://jp.usembassy.gov/>, the main United States Embassy in Japan is located in Tokyo. There are five consulates located in five other metropolitan areas across Japan. The US Embassy's website gives the address with a virtual map and phone numbers of each location. Depending on the planned path of travel, it is advised to save the closest consulate or embassy's phone numbers in the phone for easy access. Play it safe and know how to locate the American Embassy or consulates.

The website also provides an A-to-Z Index of Services, Holiday calendar, and a link to the American View Online Magazine which is the official magazine of the Embassy of the United States in Tokyo (U.S. Embassy in Japan, 2021). There is also a link to the U.S. Custom and Border Protection, CBP, that informs travelers whether or not the souvenirs purchased while in Japan are allowed into the United States.

Currency Exchange

The Japanese Yen

Japan's currency is the Japanese Yen, JPY. While many places around major cities accept some credit cards, the rural areas do not (Kepnes, 2021). It is advised to have cash on hand and check with establishments about their credit/cash policy in advance (Hangry by Nature, 2020).

Be careful with whom and where currency is exchanged. The U.S. Embassy in Japan website has a section called “Financial Assistance” under the services index (U.S. Embassy in Japan, 2021). Clicking on “ATMs” in the A-to-Z Index of the U.S. Embassy's services index will redirect the user to the “Financial Assistance” section of the site. While the embassy does not provide ATMs or currency exchange, they provide information about reliable places to find an ATM or where to exchange currency while in Japan.

Finding the Most Current Rates

Most banking institution's websites have current exchange rates listed online. For example, Wells Fargo provides an online ordering system as well as a phone number to speak with someone about ordering currency (Wells Fargo, 2021). If possible, check with a preferred and trusted bank about exchanging money in advance of the scheduled departure week as many banks must order the foreign currency. Existing customers often pay little to no fees for this

service. This same page contains a link to “Check today’s rates”. If one types “Exchange Rates USD to JPY ” into the Duck-Duck-Go search engine a conversion tool is displayed. This allows the user to change amounts of either JPY or the USD for an up to date conversion.

The Language Barrier

Language barriers are frustrating but with a little patience and respect the barrier can be overcome. There are many English speakers in Japan in the larger cities. Once you travel further out, you will not find as many english signs or those fluent in english in the more rural areas. This section tackles ways to avoid confusion due to potential language barriers.

Memorize Common Phrases in Japanese

Eriko Sato teaches Japanese at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and authored *Japanese for Dummies Cheat Sheet*. Sato emphasises learning basic greetings because it is considered impolite to not greet someone or to be lazy with your greetings. Bowing is not considered important for a foreigner to get correct. A simple nod of the head works for informal situations. Sato’s *Cheat Sheet* goes on to give numbers, polite phrases, and how to ask a question each with the English phonetic pronunciations.

Google Translate

Google Translate is a mobile phone app that is a must have for anyone traveling abroad. While using the app the user can speak into the phone and it will translate for the receiver and vice versa. It also allows you to use your camera to translate signs. Google Translate works in other apps to help translate communications.

Language Lessons

There are many mobile apps currently on the market that provide language lessons. Some of the apps provide free content and some are paid subscriptions. If there is time and room in the budget, find a Japanese language class. Having another person to converse in a new language may increase recall once in Japan.

Etiquette While Traveling

Etiquette is an important part of Japanese culture. Both Nomadic Matt’s Travel Site and Hangry by Nature bring up this topic in their descriptions of Japan. Littering is a big no-no and the clean streets in Tokyo and other major cities attest to this. Hangry by Nature goes so far as to remind the new travelers to Japan that walking while eating or drinking is considered rude. Christoph Schimkomsky works in the Department of Sociological Studies & School of East Asian Studies at the University of Sheffield in Great Britain. Schimkomsky (2021) studied the “manners posters” that are prevalent on Japan’s transit system stations and transports. These posters started as early as the 1970s and provide strong visual persuasive techniques to remind individuals of expected civility and appropriate conduct while using the transit system in Japan. (Schimkomsky, 2021).” Be a kind and curious traveler by seeking out more information about etiquette in Japan. Ann Water (2018) writes for *Business People*, a journal for business and

economics, and shares that respect is very important in Japanese culture. Water also says that the Japanese are very forgiving and do not expect Westerners to get every nuance correct.

Traveling Around Japan

Once you get to Japan, how can you get around? Below are a few resources and some research provided to assist in making that decision.

Modes of Travel


The transit system that connects the main islands of Japan provides many options. The Japan Railway, JR, is one of many trains that run routes between the metropolitan areas of Japan. The JR is most famous for the bullet trains called shinkansen. Travel vlogger, Hangry by Nature, recommends using the shinkansen if time is important for your trip but warns that purchasing a JR Pass outside of Japan is a must (2021). The prices are much higher in Japan and you are not guaranteed a seat unless you reserve in advance. Make sure you have researched your routes ahead of time to make the most timely and cost effective itinerary.

Travel author Matt Kepnes describes various modes of travel on his website, Nomadic Matt's Travel Site (2021). When describing traveling around Japan, Kepnes recommends the shinkansen if you are spending less than two weeks in the country. The bullet trains have routes in all major metropolitan areas and can get you there quickly. The regular trains are less expensive but are slower and make more stops. There are many different railway companies that operate in Japan. Make sure you know which company railway you need to get to your location.

All of the larger islands are connected by railways and bridges. The bus system is by far the least expensive. The buses make frequent stops, according to Kepnes (2021) and Hangry by Nature (2020), but the stops are often in interesting locations

Traveling in Japan

KYOTO TO TOKYO (283 MILES)



BULLET TRAIN

\$\$\$


 \$267 USD for a 7 day pass

 \$426 USD for a 14 day pass

 \$545 USD for a 21 day pass

 ⌚ : 3 HRS

 Make sure you reserve your seat BEFORE going to Japan, you won't be able to later.




REGIONAL TRAIN

\$\$

 Very scenic!

 ⌚ ⌚ : 9 HRS

 The costs fluctuate, so plan in advance. Payment is by route for this option.



BUS


\$

 Bus trips are longer and will be making frequent stops. That's okay! Maybe strike conversation with the person next to you.

 ⌚ ⌚ ⌚ : 8 1/2 HRS +STOPS

 (Night bus doesn't make stops.)


 There are overnight buses as well.



CAR

\$\$\$\$\$\$

 Foreign travelers are discouraged from driving in Japan, especially if you don't understand the language or have a permit. It could be dangerous!



or small towns that tourists may not otherwise get to see. If you have the time and are stretching your budget, the bus may be a great option.

To Rent or Not to Rent

Both Nomadic Matt's website and the Hangry by Nature travel vloggers do not recommend renting a car in Japan. Select the "Driving in Japan" option from the services menu in the U.S. Embassy A-to-Z services list previously mentioned. The U.S. Embassy in Japan states that an American can not drive in Japan with an American driver's license (2021). An international driver's permit, IDP, must be obtained in advance. In other words, this is the least favorable option. Consider your budget and the extenuating costs and legal requirements of operating a vehicle.

Uber & Rideshares

According to Uber's website, the company operates 24/7 in all major areas in Japan. If you need to get across town quickly, it may be worth downloading the app in advance of arriving in the country (2021). If you already have the app on your mobile device Uber says it works anywhere. Kepnes recommends an app called CarpoolWorld (2021). CarpoolWorld is a site that allows drivers that run regular routes to advertise open seats in their vehicle. Pay close attention to the descriptions as seats can be limited if with a group. Passengers looking to catch a ride can advertise on CarpoolWorld. Think of it as digitally tracked hitchhiking. This could be a great way to connect with locals while finding your way around. Be smart! If the situation doesn't feel right, remove yourself from it and find a safe place or call the police - **DIAL 110**.

What to Pack and What to Carry at all Times

While traveling to Japan there are some things to pack and things to carry at all times. Without these things it will be hard if not impossible to travel to Japan. There are locations in larger cities where replacements or smaller forgotten items like soap can be purchased but that might not be the case in all areas of Japan. The following is a list of items to pack and items to carry at all times. These suggestions are a great start to any packing checklist.

Passport

One of the essential things to carry at all times is your passport. Without this, it will not be possible to travel internationally because it is required for international flights. Carrying your passport at all times along with a passport holder. It is recommended to take a picture of the ID page within the passport (Brecht, 2019). If your passport is not current then make sure to get it renewed as soon as possible. If you do not have a passport then you need to apply for one at a government facility that issues passports.

ID

Some form of identification will be necessary while traveling in Japan. It will likely be needed throughout your trip. Any official ID like a driver's license can be used while in Japan but a passport should be used as identification while at the airport. The ID in the passport can be

used when needed while in Japan. This means that your passport should be carried at all times because it is needed throughout the entire trip.

Cash

Cash is crucial while traveling around Japan. Convert US dollars to Japanese Yen before entering Japan. See the Currency Exchange section in this paper for more information. Wherever you go in Japan you will need to spend money and therefore you need to keep cash on you at all times. Have a debit or credit card handy in case an account withdrawal is needed. ATMs are available throughout Japan (Brech, 2019).

Communication Device (phone, tablet, etc.)

A communication device such as a phone, tablet, computer or any other device is very important while traveling in Japan. Being able to communicate with traveling companions in case someone is lost at some point in the trip is crucial. In addition to bringing a communication device, be sure to have the appropriate charger handy. It will certainly be necessary to recharge the communication device while on the trip. It is best to charge the communication device overnight while you sleep so it won't run out of battery during the daytime.

Hotel Key

If staying in a hotel while in Japan there will likely be a physical hotel key that opens your room when used. It is important to keep this key handy at all times so you don't have to worry about getting locked out of your room. If your key is lost most hotels will be able to replace the key when asked at the front desk. Hotel keys are often either a card that is swiped or scanned or an actual key that opens the door. Either way it is important to keep track of the hotel key in order to avoid the discomfort of getting locked out of your room and having to get a replacement key.

WiFi Hotspot

While in Japan it would be a good idea to set up a wifi hotspot on your phone, tablet or computer. This will allow one to have their own connection to the Internet. This is especially helpful while traveling to a foreign country like Japan because there may not always be a reliable Internet connection in your location and many of the networks require passwords. Setting up a wifi hotspot is very convenient when traveling to many different places within Japan.

Know Where you are Staying

Another important thing to know while traveling in Japan is the address of the place you are staying. Obviously it will be necessary to know this in order to get to the place you are staying at in the first place. It is also important to be able to get back to the place where you are staying after going out during the day. To do this write down the address in your phone or on a piece of paper and put it in your pocket. This will help ensure that the address of the place where you are staying is not forgotten.

Medication

Many people take medications for various conditions and take it daily. Bringing medication on your trip to Japan is critical because you will need to take your medication daily

most likely in order to maintain your health. Make sure to bring enough medication for the entire trip and if you are running low on medication, get a refill from your doctor. Also, make sure that you bring your prescriptions in case the medication is lost while on the trip (Brech, 2019). You will need to get a refill if the medication is lost while on the trip. If you have a particular medical condition or allergy that people need to know about then it is a good idea to carry a note from your doctor that describes the condition and how it should be treated (Brech, 2019). Make sure to make an appointment with your doctor a few weeks before traveling if you have a chronic medical condition so you can prepare a medical note for when you travel and get your prescription refilled (Jerrard & Jerrard, 2021).

Prescriptions

Previously, we described the importance of bringing prescribed medications along on a trip. Remember to bring any prescription documentation as well. This is in case medication is lost, the prescription can be refilled while in Japan. As previously mentioned, schedule an appointment a few weeks before any trip to obtain a doctor's note explaining your condition and treatment requirements. Make sure to carry this prescription on your person while traveling around Japan.

Hygiene Products

While traveling it is important to stay clean and keep up with hygiene. On the trip, bring deodorant, tooth paste, a tooth brush, dental floss, sunscreen, shampoo, and conditioner. Bringing these things will help you stay clean while on the trip. It might help to put these items in a bag together then put them in your suitcase so you don't lose track of any of the items. If you lose some of these items they are likely available at a local drug store.

Clothing

One of the most important things to bring on your trip is clothes. Make sure to bring enough clothes for the entire trip. The types of clothes you bring is highly dependent on what season it is in Japan (Brech, 2019). If you are traveling during the summer then a lot of light t-shirts, shorts and sunglasses will be necessary (Brech, 2019). If you are traveling in the winter a multi-layered jacket, mittens, a hat, thick socks and sweaters will be helpful (Brech, 2019). If it is spring or autumn then long-sleeved shirts, pants, and light jackets will be suitable (Brech, 2019). While hiking, bring a rain jacket, waterproof pants and durable shoes (Brech, 2019). While exploring the cities bring casual clothes like jeans and t-shirts (Brech, 2019). When going out at night to explore the nightclubs, wear something nicer like a dress for women and a button-up shirt and nice pants for men (Brech, 2019). Also, if you are planning on going to the beach or if there is a pool at your hotel then you should bring a swimsuit.

Jacket

Depending on what time of the year it is in Japan, it might be appropriate to bring a jacket (Brech, 2019). It can get cold in the winter and fall in Japan so it is a good idea to bring a thick, multi-layered jacket if it is the winter or a light jacket if it is the fall. If it is the winter and

it is very cold then it would be good to bring mittens and a hat to keep yourself warm while on the trip. If it is the spring or in the summer then a jacket is probably not necessary.

Glasses/Contacts and Solution

Being able to see is a critical part of functioning in everyday life and it is especially important when traveling to someplace new. If you wear glasses or contacts then you will need to bring your glasses and contacts on the trip as well as contact solution. If you wear glasses only then only bring glasses but if you wear contacts and have glasses as well then bring both your contacts and your glasses. This is important because if your contacts are lost or something happens to them then your glasses can be worn.

About the Authors

Dora Halter is a senior at George Mason University in the Bachelor of Individualized Studies Program and full-time chemist. Dora is passionate about writing, reading, and creating. When she finds time this author loves weekend adventures with her family and hopes to one day use the advice in this white paper to see the sites and eat all the food in Japan.

Scott Boulineaux is a senior Psychology major with a concentration in Human Factors at George Mason University. He loves spending time with family, playing sports such as basketball and tennis, watching NBA basketball and professional tennis as well as hiking, reading, and watching movies. He currently works in a lab at George Mason studying anxiety. He hopes that the information in this white paper will be useful for future travelers.

Zainab Shah is a senior Biology major at George Mason University also pursuing a minor in English. Her personal interests include writing, reading, creating digital art, and giving her cats way more hugs than they could possibly want. In her free time, she volunteers at her local fire station training to become a fully-certified and released EMT by the Summer of 2022. As of 2021, Zainab has experience traveling to multiple countries across North America, Europe, and Asia.

Glossary & Acronyms

110 - the number to reach Japanese police

119 - emergency and fire response number in Japan

ATM - Automated Teller Machine

CBP - Custom and Border Protection

COVID-19 - respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus

Google Translate - a mobile application that can help translate foreign languages

IDP - International Driver's Permit

JAFO - Japan Anti-Fraud Organization

JR Pass - this is a pass one purchases to ride on the Japan Railways trains

Natural Disasters - flooding, typhoons, earthquakes, tornados

Shinkansen - the bullet train

WiFi - a wireless technology that is used to connect devices such as computers and smartphones to the Internet

WiFi Hotspot - a specific area where there is access to the Internet

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