



# Japan 2023

A guide to a trip to Japan in 2023

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# 1. Introduction

In 2023, we are going on a trip to the land of the rising sun - Japan - a bit of a taster trip really as Japan is too vast to cover it all in such a short time. Japan was on my personal bucket-list of places to go to so I am excited to (finally!) be doing this!

As for previous eBooks, this eBook is divided into 3 main sections, namely:

- Stuff to do before we go,
- The trip itself, and
- Coming home at the end

If I think of any other stuff I'll put it into appendices at the end. So, without further ado, let's crack on!

## 2. Before We Go

Well, before we start our trip, there are a few things to think about and do. I have split these up as follows:

- Background: why we are going at this time of year, weather, distances etc.
- Health: what we need to do before we go (in terms of inoculations, tablets etc.)
- Travel: what our outbound long-haul flight details are, any considerations about time left on passports etc.
- Money: what the local currency is, advice from journey planners re use of credit cards etc.
- Miscellaneous: duty free precautions, electrical supply etc.

I have also included as an Appendix what I envisage packing for the trip (excluding clothing - I am sure you can make up your own minds about clothing!).

### Background

We are visiting Japan in late March/early April so we can catch the 'blossom season' - a very popular tourist time of year for foreign tourists and for the Japanese

themselves.

This is one of the best times to visit as it precedes the major foreign tourist season from May through September. We fly out of the UK on **Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> March** and return on **Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> April**.

## Weather

The weather in Japan for the time of our trip is very similar to UK weather - quite cool with some rainfall, best sums it up. So, not hot and occasional nights when overnight temperatures are cold. Take decent overnight gear and a light waterproof for showers is my best advice. Layers will be the order of the day.

Spring in Japan coincides with what most of us think of as spring, spanning March through May. Temperatures are warm across most of the country, but it isn't yet too hot or too humid. This is, of course, peak tourist season as the famed cherry blossoms are in bloom and festivals are celebrating their arrival across the country.

**What to Pack:** During spring in Japan, temperatures are still cold. You'll want to dress in layers, as well as carry a light jacket and scarf. In early spring, a heavier coat will still be necessary for some parts of the country.

Tokyo has a humid, subtropical climate with warm summers and cool winters, that can occasionally be very cold. The warmest month is August, when temperatures hover around 80 degrees Fahrenheit (26 degrees Celsius), while the coldest month is January, averaging just 41 degrees Fahrenheit (5 degrees Celsius). The city receives approximately 60 inches of rain per year, with most of it concentrated during the summer months. Snow is irregular but usually does occur at least once per year. The city can occasionally experience typhoons.

Osaka and Kyoto, cities on the southern part of Japan's Honshu Island, have a mild winter and hot, humid summers. Like the rest of the country, they can experience monsoon-type conditions, but the inland coast location protects them from typhoons and the worst of summer's monsoon conditions. Winter is warm, with temperatures rarely falling below 45 degrees Fahrenheit (7 degrees Celsius), but summers are steamy - high temperatures can exceed 95 degrees Fahrenheit (35 degrees Celsius).

## **Population and Geography**

Japan is a country of approx. 121 million people and nearly four hundred thousand square kilometres in size made up from 6852 islands. 97% of the land area is

taken up by the 5 main islands (Hokkaido, Honshu, Kyushu, Shikoku, and Okinawa); for comparison, the UK has a population of approaching 70 million people crammed into nearly 250,000 square kilometres of land mass (and we only have 136 permanently inhabited islands).



Our holiday will be almost exclusively on the main Honshu island:

- Kyoto - including Golden Pavilion, bamboo forest, geisha and cherry blossoms
- Hiroshima - including Hiroshima itself and Miyajima island (with floating Torii gate)

- Tokyo - including Hakone (day trip - optional?) and Tokyo itself (with the SkyTree tower)

## Health

Do check with your GP about what inoculations they advise for your personal circumstances for this trip. They will normally check for whether you are up to date with vaccines for cholera, typhoid, Hepatitis A and Tetanus.

Make sure and get them to bring your vaccination record card up to date and store it somewhere safe.

Advice from Exoidus is to take both printed and electronic proof of vaccinations you have had. This includes any specific to this trip e.g. the two encephalitis jabs.

Hampton GP surgery also gave me two web sites to check:

- [National Travel Health Network and Centre](#), and
- [Fit For Travel](#)

From those web sites for Japan: travellers should be up to date with routine vaccination courses and boosters as recommended in the UK. These vaccinations include

for example measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine and diphtheria-tetanus-polio vaccine. We have decided to get a vaccine for Japanese (and tick-borne) encephalitis even though we are not spending protracted time in rice fields, swamps or marshes. These vaccines must be paid for and are not free on the NHS, but we have decided that given our age that we want the best protection possible. Similarly, rabies risk is low in Japan and confined to bites from bats so we again will probably not have a course of rabies vaccine. We should not eat or drink unpasteurised milk products to avoid tick-borne encephalitis, but again this is marked as very low risk.

There is no mentioned risk of Yellow Fever in visiting Japan.

Do check with your GP about whether you can take with you any "normal" tablets you take e.g. my metformin, headache tablets, joint pain tablets etc. If necessary, ask your GP for a note confirming the prescription medicines you are taking.

## Travel

Japan is in a different time zone to the UK - they are 9 hours in front of us.



Your passport should be valid for the proposed duration of your stay. No additional period of validity beyond this is required. There should be at least 2 completely blank pages left in your passport as well.

We are travelling a significant distance during this holiday, by air, by rail and by road. The table below shows our long-haul flights to and from Japan, each of which is on Emirates airlines. The remainder of the holiday travel within Japan is by road and rail (plus a short ferry journey across to Miyajima from Hiroshima).

Air Journey	Distance (miles)
<p><b>Birmingham to Osaka via Dubai</b></p> <p>19<sup>th</sup> March</p> <p>Flight <b>EK40</b> from Birmingham to Dubai [3]  Depart: 1330, Arrive: 0035 on 20<sup>rd</sup> March</p> <p>Flight <b>EK316</b> from Dubai [3] to Osaka Kansai  International [1]  Depart: 0305, Arrive: 1705 (20<sup>th</sup> March)</p>	8203
<p><b>Tokyo to Birmingham via Dubai</b></p> <p>3<sup>rd</sup> April</p> <p>Flight <b>EK313</b> from Tokyo International Haneda  [3] to Dubai [3]  Depart: 0005, Arrive: 0620</p> <p>Flight <b>EK39</b> from Dubai [3] to Birmingham  Depart: 0740, Arrive: 1225</p>	8453
<b>TOTAL air miles</b>	<b>16656</b>

N.B.

1. Terminal numbers as known right now are in square brackets after the airport.
2. All departure and arrival times are local so

don't forget about different time zones for Japan when calculating journey times.

3. As you can see, we have a layover in Dubai of two and a half hours on the way to Japan but only one hour twenty minutes on the way back from Japan to the UK.

We will arrive in Osaka a little after the arrival of the main group. So we have to make our own way from Osaka Kansai International airport. Fastest way is to get the train direct from the airport to the main train station in Kyoto - our hotel in Kyoto is a 5-10 minute walk from there. Exodus have so far provided the following advice about this journey:

The start hotel for this trip is located 500m from Kyoto train station and will require a total transfer time from the airport of 2-2.5 hours. There is a regular hourly bus service from Kansai airport to Kyoto station, which costs approximately 2600 YEN (17 GBP) and takes a little under 2 hours. Otherwise, there is a faster rail service which runs every 30 minutes (Japan Rail Haruka Express), which costs approximately 2850 YEN (19 GBP) if you buy the ticket at the Tourist Info desk - The Kansai Tourist Information Center Kansai International Airport is located in the 1st floor international arrivals lobby of Kansai International Airport's Terminal 1 - , and this takes 1 hour and 20 minutes to arrive at Kyoto station. It's open till 10pm.

If arriving by train into Kyoto station, upon disembarking, head through the Shinkansen Central Exit and look for signs to the Central Gate entrance (Karasuma gate) to exit the station. The Dormy Inn Premium Kyoto Ekimae is located no more than 5-10 minutes' walk away.

Please find further instructions on how to reach this hotel on foot from Kyoto station at <http://dormy-inn-premium-kyoto-ekimae.hotel-ds.com/en/#map>

As part of our tour, we will also have scheduled journeys by road/rail. excluding any we do ourselves when we have time at leisure.

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Lesley and I will each have a "travel pack" with printed copies of our travel documentation plus other stuff to do with the trip. We will also have our Japanese currency split up between us.

## Money

Japan has the yen (¥) as its unit of currency.

Although Japan is high-tech, we have been advised to take sufficient cash as many places e.g. some restaurants, shops etc. do not accept debit or credit card payments. Weird eh? As with any holiday abroad,

you are recommended to let your bank know that you will be using your card(s) in Japan before you leave.

Previous exchange rate (for the original holiday) was 135 Yen to the pound. Today (9 February 2023) it is 158. This doesn't mean we can get more for our money, though, as inflation has hit Japanese prices as well as our own UK pricing!

So, for example, for the originally planned holiday, we bought just over £500 of Japanese yen (¥) giving us 65,000 yen (¥). Today, that amount of yen is worth just over £400. Quite a loss of money!

In our Japanese yen (¥) we have our cash in the following note denominations:

- 1000 (¥) = £6.17
- 2000 (¥) = £12.34
- 5000 (¥) = £30.85

So be aware of how much you are spending :)

Credit cards (and pre-paid credit cards such as FairFX) are accepted for certain things in Japan e.g. train tickets, hotels (maybe not ryokan, though?)

Tipping is not customary in Japan. In fact, it can be considered rude and insulting in many situations. Most

Japanese restaurants require customers to pay for their meals at the front register, rather than leave money with the waiter or waitress. Tipping also isn't required for cab or bus rides and many hotel services. You will probably receive some of the best service in the world here ... but this is about people doing their job with pride rather than hoping for a tip.

## Miscellaneous

### Duty Free Precautions

Nothing special here except it says there is a 50ml max on perfume being brought into Japan (incl. gents after shave and spray, and eau-de-toilette)

On the return to the UK, these are selected allowances:

- Up to 18 litres of wine (not sparkling)
- Up to 4 litre of spirits over 22% alcohol, or
- Up to 9 litres of sparkling wine, fortified wine (for example port, sherry) and other alcoholic drinks up to 22% alcohol (not including beer or still wine) It is worth noting that Japanese sake falls into this category - it is approx. 15% alcohol, although undiluted sake can go as high as 20%

## Wifi and Phones

In Japan, free wifi has been very rare in the past. Most hotels nowadays in Japan offer free internet in their guest rooms. Access is usually provided as a wireless network or wired internet via LAN cable. Internet in the room is somewhat less common at ryokan. Instead, some ryokan provide wireless internet or a public computer in their lobby.

Thanks to efforts by businesses and governments, public Wi-Fi networks for free use by foreign tourists have become quite numerous. Tourists will encounter these networks at international airports, major railway stations (including all Yamanote Line stations and many shinkansen stations), inside an increasing number of trains and buses, selected coffee, fast food and convenience store chains and many tourist information desks.

*Ian Roberts never bought a SIM card for use in Japan and we probably wont either.*

If we think we will need to use our phones in Japan, other than via wifi, we may have to purchase some Japanese SIMs (Edward and Mike did and said they were fantastic). Prices for data-only SIM cards look to be about £40 with those allowing voice calling and texts starting at £50.

We may or may not be able to print our boarding cards for our return flight to the UK when we are away. As for some previous holidays we may be able to download the airline app and just have a downloadable boarding pass. *I have downloaded the Emirates app on my iPhone and will let you know how that works.*

## Electricity

The voltage in Japan is 100 Volt, which is different from North America (120V), Central Europe (230V) and most other regions of the world. Japanese electrical plugs and outlets resemble North American ones. Plugs come in various versions, but most commonly they are non-polarized and ungrounded with two pins. Our current blue travel adaptors MAY be OK for use with Japanese voltage - this will need checking.





Type A Socket



Type B Socket



Type C Socket



Type L Socket

So we will need travel adapters and (maybe) voltage adapters as well so we can have our 4-way blocks plugged in at our various accommodations. As mentioned above, the existing blue travel adaptors MAY be OK.

# 3. The Trip - Preliminary Information

## UK to Kyoto (via Osaka) - Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> March

Flight departure time from Birmingham Airport is approx. 1330 so we will probably get to the airport between 0930 and 1000 to check in, allowing extra time for revised security arrangements. LONG FLIGHT.

There is a layover of two and a half hours in Dubai but our luggage should be transferred across for us. Don't forget to watch your data usage in Dubai - remember my £80 bill from one holiday!

We depart from Dubai at 0305 and arrive in Osaka (Kansai International Airport) at 1705

## Arrive in Kyoto - Monday 20<sup>th</sup> March

We will arrive Osaka at roughly 5pm in the evening (local time). After clearing immigration, baggage etc we will need to make our own way from Osaka Kansai airport to Kyoto main rail station. As we will arrive quite late in the evening, we will most likely miss the welcome briefing. Nothing is 'planned' for the

remainder of that evening. We will probably miss the official group briefing so we need to make arrangements with other travellers or the guide regarding start time tomorrow

On arrival at the hotel, we will need to make the hotel staff aware you are part of an Exodus group. If your tour leader is already at the hotel, they may have left a message for you, so we will need to check with front desk staff.

N.B. members of the group booked on the flight inclusive option will be arriving at 10:40 on flight BA4627 on the 20 Mar 2023

Tonight's accommodation (and for the subsequent 4 nights) is at the [Dormy Inn Premium Kyoto Ekimae](#)

**Meals included: NONE**

## **Around Kyoto (full day - guided) - Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> March**



We will start our Kyoto tour by travelling to the famous Golden Pavilion (above). We then travel to the Ryoanji temple before stopping for lunch either in the Nishiki Market (Kyoto's Kitchen) or rest back at the hotel. We will also be touring the famous Gion district in the late afternoon / early evening and trying to spot geisha at work. This would also be the time to sample Pontocho Alley (Edward and Mike recommendation) - food stuff.

**Meals included: NONE**

## Nara (full day trip) - Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March



Journey time to Nara is approx. 1 hour each way. Nara has 8 UNESCO World Heritage sites, including the Todaiji Great Buddha temple. Apparently, this is one of Japan's most famous and historically significant temples and a landmark of Nara. The temple was constructed in 752 as the head temple of all provincial Buddhist temples of Japan and grew so powerful that the capital was moved from Nara to Nagaoka in 784 in order to lower the temple's influence on government affairs.

Temple visitors will also encounter some deer from the adjacent Nara Park, begging for shika senbei, special crackers for deer that are sold for around 200 yen (£1.50).

**Meals included: NONE**

### **Kyoto - free day - Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March<**

Lots of potential things to do here, just down to practicalities how many we want, or can, do. See the Appendix to this book for some suggestions.

Apparently lots of well established and easy-to-follow walking tours in Kyoto. Ian Roberts has some maps to give us some ideas.

**Meals included: NONE**

### **Hiroshima - (day trip from Kyoto) - Friday 24<sup>th</sup> March**

Starts with a 2 hour ride on the bullet train (Shinkansen) from Kyoto to Hiroshima. While in Hiroshima, we have a boat trip to Miyajima island - past the majestic floating Torii Gate - and the Hiroshima Peace Park, returning to Kyoto late afternoon.



**REMEMBER:** This is our last night in this hotel and we will be moving to a ryokan in Takayama. We are only allowed to take an overnight bag with us and our main case will meet us in two days time at Matsumoto (fingers crossed)

## **Travel to Takayama in the Japanese "Alps" - Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March**

Travel by more traditional Japanese railways to Takayama (4 hours). In the afternoon, we visit the Hida Folk Village, located a short walk from our accommodation (our first experience of a Japanese ryokan). We are here for 2 nights.



**Meals included:** Dinner

## **Takayama - Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March**

Morning guided orientation tour of Takayama followed by free afternoon to explore until the evening banquet meal at the ryokan.





**Meals included:** Breakfast, Dinner

**Tsumago, Nakasendo Way and Matsumoto -  
Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> March**

First travel to Tsumago and (optionally) join tour guide for a walk along the Naksendo Way - of course, would be rude not to! *Scheduled for 1 hour but Ian and Jenny and some others from their tour group did a longer walk, almost all the way to Matsumoto.*





After Tsumago, continue travelling on by rail to Matsumoto which is reached in the late afternoon - perfect to stroll out and catch the impressive castle lit up at night!



**Meals included:** Breakfast

## Matsumoto and travel to Yudanaka - Monday 27<sup>th</sup> March



Morning guided visit to the Crow Castle (Matsumoto).  
Return to Matsumoto rail station for afternoon journey  
to the hot spring area of Yudanaka where the  
accommodation is our second ryokan.

**REMEMBER:** This is our last night in this hotel and we  
will be moving to a ryokan in Yudanaka. As before, we  
are only allowed to take an overnight bag with us and  
our main case will meet us at our hotel in Tokyo on  
Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> March (again, fingers crossed)

**Meals included:** Dinner (at Yudanaka)

## **Snow Monkeys and travel to Tokyo - Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> March**

The morning has a 30-minute walk to the hot springs area of the Snow Monkey Park where we may see these macaque monkeys "bathing" in the hot springs.



This afternoon we travel from Yudanaka to Tokyo by Shinkansen (4 hours) arriving in Tokyo in the early evening.



After checking into the hotel we have a short guided orientation tour of Tokyo by night.



**Meals included:** Breakfast (at Yudanaka)

**Tokyo free day - Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> March**

An optional trip to Hakone using the last day of our Japan Rail Pass looks good - may get a view of Mount



Fuji on a clear day (bit like our views of Popocatepetl in Mexico). *Ian and Jenny did a few nice garden walks in Hakone and he has lent us copies of the maps*



Some example other things to see are listed later [in the Appendix](#)

**Meals included: NONE**

## Tokyo - Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> March

Full day city tour of Tokyo. We will travel on their tube system to visit many attractions including the famous Senso-Ji temple in the more traditional area of Asakusa and one of the many large parks. There is also free time to do what we want to do e.g. a visit up the SkyTree Tower, second only in height to the CN Tower (when it was constructed) but this will probably need booking in advance - there are large queues apparently.



**Meals included: NONE**

## Tokyo - free day - Friday 31<sup>st</sup> April

Lots to see here - so busy and yet nowhere near as



noisy as UK and US cities (apparently)! For example, the Shinjuku area near Tokyo's station. Include Izakaya tour (An izakaya is a type of informal Japanese pub. They are casual places for after-work drinking. They have been compared to Irish pubs, tapas bars and early American saloons and taverns.) and Robot Restaurant (not a restaurant) - EDWARD

Other ideas in the Appendix

## **Tokyo and flight home - Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> April**

Return flights to the UK are at approx. five past midnight from Haneda airport so we will need to start out for there round about 8pm local time (given Tokyo traffic). Rest of the day is our own provided we can arrange a room drop for our cases. If we are very fortunate, we may also be able to come back and freshen up for the journey before leaving.

## **Return to Birmingham - Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April**

Should arrive back in Birmingham for 12:25 on 3<sup>rd</sup> April - worn out I bet! As for the outward journey, there is a layover of only 1 hour and 20 minutes - which is a tight swap over time, particularly if we have to de-plane and board again - in Dubai so keep a wary eye on your data usage on your phone!

# 4. Appendix 1 Personal Packing Checklist

For what it's worth, my personal holiday essentials list is included below. Adapt for your own needs, of course!

## Holiday Essentials

### Passport Details

N.B. Blood group added in pre Japan trip

Name on Passport	Passport No.	Expiry Date	Blood Group
John Brinley Cable	534663386	1 May 2026	AB+
Lesley Anne Cable	556517863	18 February 2029	O+
Sophie Vinetta Cable	575491003	11 January 2030	A+
Emily Beatrice Cable	527280869	6 September 2025	B+

## Preparation

- Clear out travel backpack
- Charge up camera batteries
- Charge up juice-block
- Unload current camera memory cards
- Download any programmes to watch to iPad
- Sort out device charging leads - iPhone, iPad, FitBit, juice block
- USB charging plug
- Multi-way charging block
- Sunglasses and spare pair of ordinary glasses
- Cap (optional)
- Sort out documents: passport, travel documents, immunisation certificates
- Travel adapter
- Check and buy if necessary:
  - travel sickness tablets
  - insect repellent
  - travel-size toiletries

## Packing

- Put USB and charging leads in protective Tupperware
- Put charging block in base of case
- Tablets for the trip - hip etc.
- Backpack:

- throw-away fiction book
- iPad + headphones
- Travel sickness tablets
- Small pack tissues / cleansing wipes
- Pack into carrier bags:
  - Underwear
  - Socks - incl. sports socks
  - Swim stuff\*
  - Shirts + trousers / shorts
- Shoes + sandals ( + flip-flops\* )
- Pyjamas - in outside case pocket.
- Pack toiletry bag:
  - Razor + blades
  - Shaving foam
  - Toothbrush head\*?
  - Spray\*\*
  - After bite + Savlon
  - Headache tablets
  - Hairbrush

Don't forget to weigh case - safe maximum is 20KG.

Camera (in backpack) is hand luggage

Note for neighbours

N.B.

\* optional - depends on the holiday

\*\* may purchase in Duty Free at airport

\*? may be packed with family toiletry bag

## 5. Appendix 2 Kyoto free time potentials

Short list of things to consider for the free day in Kyoto:



The Fushimi Inari shrine is a famous early stop point reached by walkways lined with Tori gates up the hillside to the shrine itself (see photo above). There is also a network of walking trails behind the main buildings. All advice is to see this first thing in the morning - light, crowds?



In the eastern part of Kyoto the Philosophers Walk (or Path) is a great place to enjoy the cherry blossoms. Small coffee shops exist on this walk/path. 2km long and would take about 1.5 hours to walk both ways.



We also have the bamboo forest (see photo above) and many other temples/shrines to see, or many easy to follow walking routes around Kyoto. Or just chill and wander round Kyoto town itself.

## 6. Appendix 3 Tokyo free time potentials

Short list of things to consider for the free time in Tokyo:

- Shinjuku area

This more modern area of Tokyo includes the famous Shibuya 'scramble' crossing. This is away from the Asakusa area where our hotel is located.



This also includes the Edward-recommended Robot Restaurant





- Boat trip on river
- SkyTree Tower

Long queues potentially. Tickets range upwards from approx. £25 per person.

- Visit the Asahi brewery (near SkyTree tower).