

# Traveling to Japan with a Severe Shellfish Allergy and no EpiPen

## **TL;DR**

Japan is really cool, but you have to go to the right places based on your interests. Big cities have a lot of tourists in the touristy areas, but you can go to other places and see the same type of thing without dealing with other tourists very easily. Trains are my favorite way to get around and do the last mile on foot if you can.

## **General Itinerary**

### Anticipated:

| 5/30 | 5/31 | 6/1 | 6/2 | 6/3 | 6/4 | 6/5 | 6/6 | 6/7 | 6/8 | 6/9 | 6/10 | 6/11 |
|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| X    | X    | Osa | Osa | Osa | Nar | Kbe | Kyo | Kyo | Kyo | Kyo | Osa  | X    |

### Actual:

| 5/30 | 5/31 | 6/1 | 6/2 | 6/3 | 6/4 | 6/5 | 6/6 | 6/7 | 6/8 | 6/9 | 6/10 | 6/11 |
|------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| X    | X    | Osa | Osa | Osa | Nar | Osa | Kyo | Kyo | Uji | Kyo | Osa  | X    |

X - flight day

Osa - Osaka

Nar - Nara

Kbe - Kobe

Kyo - Kyoto

Uji - Uji

## **Flights**

If you have never flown to Japan, it can be rough from the midwest. I enjoyed my flight out more than my flight in because my long flight over the Pacific was during the night and not during the day. It was a lot easier to fall asleep when everyone around you *also* wants to try to sleep. JAL is a good partner. I had no problems with the food or chairs, but take the opportunity to get up and walk around because a 12 hour flight is going to be rough. If you're in Economy, the seats will never be *that* comfortable. Also, be ready for long layovers. It sucks, but it's not that bad, and for your first city in the country, it's better to have more time to get through customs than less.

Take the time to look around at airports around you when booking flights. I had ~\$600 in savings by driving to a nearby airport instead of using the airport in my city. It cost ~\$150 to park my car in long term parking, but even then, in total I saved about ~\$450 by driving instead of sticking with my local airport.

## **Food**

I have a severe allergy to shellfish. Bad enough that if there's shellfish cooked in the same restaurant, I can have a reaction. So you may be asking, "why do you not have an EpiPen?" And the answer is simple: it's not that bad in the US, and I figured I could buy one in Japan. I could not, but I did think ahead and made 100 cards that essentially said: "Shellfish will kill me, anaphylactic shock, please be careful." With my cards and a saved google translate that said "I am allergic to shellfish, can I eat here?" I experienced only one issue, and it was minor. I found that if the restaurant was very confident I could safely eat there, the food wasn't going to be great. However, if the restaurant was unsure, the food would be great.

Additionally, this is only with restaurants. Most of the food I ate was through Combinis. Combini are great, and the sandwiches you get from there are tasty, cheap, and readily available in most places. Lawson's was my standard, but 711 and Family Mart were also good.

## Cities

### Osaka

In Osaka I was in a hotel in Dotonbori. This seems to be the most “party” area of the city, especially for foreigners. It was very easy to be in Osaka without being too out of place and annoying to locals. There were a lot of bars that were very cool with locals, and people I was with let me know that there was an American bar area. Osaka castle was also very impressive. I would highly recommend it. Also, Osaka has really good connectivity with rail, so it’s a great “homebase” city if you don’t want to have to switch hotels at all.

### Kyoto

Kyoto is very cool, and very touristy. I would say that if you get there very early, you’ll probably enjoy the parks and shrines a lot more because no one else will be there. I did not enjoy dealing with the other tourists. Not that anyone was that bad or annoying, but it was for sure less fun to deal with everyone else. I would strongly recommend starting in the “tourist trap” areas and then wander from there to find things others haven’t.

### Uji

Uji is like Kyoto but with *way less tourists*. Uji also can probably be completely seen in a day or two. Even on the city’s official tourism website, they stretch it out to a 3 day trip, but there’s a bit of fluff (in my opinion). If Osaka was my favorite city to be in, it was mostly due to Uji just being a good day trip and not one I could explore deeply. But as a day trip, my day in Uji was by far my favorite day in Japan.

### Nara

Nara is cool because it was a center of Buddhism in Japan and there’s a lot of history to it. The Buddhism museum was really cool, the deer were pretty cool as well. The day trip to Nara was definitely worth it, but I would say that Nara is best as a day trip.

## **Getting Around:**

Strongly suggest getting an IC card. You can buy them at large train stations and it's a kiosk, not a person you purchase from. They work throughout Japan on trains and buses, and I put about 10K yen on mine. I added 1000 yen at one point out of caution, but I was fine. I took the bus to and from the airport, but otherwise I just used google maps, trains, and walking. I strongly recommend this method. Trains will get you 90% of the way there, and that 10% you walk will be where you find all sorts of cool little shops, shrines, and stuff to do.

## **Hotels**

I got all my hotels from Booking.com on recommendation from a friend and I would also recommend doing this. I only stayed in one business hotel, and it was my least favorite hotel. Otherwise, I simply went on Booking.com and looked for cool and reasonably priced hotels and stayed there. I stayed in two 3-star hotels and they were extremely reasonably priced, and I would say that the 3-star hotels are a good target to get to; not too fancy (you're not going to spend a ton of time there) but also good amenities and helpful staff.

## **Extra Tips**

**Tip 1:** book things as far in advance as possible. Cool things require reservations and those rarely can be made the same day. Booking.com can help you with that, but if you want to do something, look for its website and start from there.

**Tip 2:** Spend the money to get your big bags shipped. Yamato Shipping will take your bags from one hotel to another, it's not too expensive, and it saves you so much stress navigating public transport. Trains are pretty busy most of the time, and not having to navigate the stations with a large bag will make your day so much better. Plan on talking with hotel staff the day before your last day to schedule the shipping.

**Tip 3:** Credit cards can work, but cash is easiest. Get 1000 yen bills and a coin purse. Your coins are significantly valuable, and you'll want to keep them on you.