**JAPAN!**

**GENERAL TIPS**

-Always wander off the path. Everything is so amazing, and the best part is seeing all new things that are not crowded by tons of people.

-In Japan they use a website called Tabelog for restaurant reviews and getting reservations. They do not use Yelp, open table, or google reviews as regularly. If you really want to go to a specific restaurant, try to get a reservation on Tabelog a few days before. You cannot get a reservation the day of for restaurants there often.

-Wear nice shoes, lots of walking. Get a room with a bathtub, your body will thank you.

-Pack light, we traveled we a backpack each to carry on the flight and a personal item. You will be going up and down so many stairs that a roller-bag will probably suck.

-If you have a ton of coins, you can go to a 711, buy something and throw all your coins in the slot. It will give you back change if you have more coins than the cost of the item. Helps to get rid of coins you don’t know what to do with if you are buying alcohol/snacks.

-No tipping anywhere, tipping is considered disrespectful.

-Do not be loud on trains, people prefer silence.

-Always have hand sanitizer, many bathrooms do not have soap.

-GET GOOGLE TRANSLATE. You can take pictures of menus, signs, or anything else to translate. You can also download the language so you can use it when you don’t have service.

**TRAINS**

-Download the Suica app. The app is red with flowers. Set up your account and add it to your apple wallet. You can use apple pay to add money onto your suica card which is used for trains and subways. It will show you your remaining balance. You can also use your suica funds at convenience stores like apple pay. I would set this up during the flights there or before you leave.

-Some trains have reserved seating, and you will need an express ticket. You get into the station using your suica but then need an express ticket. Some trains have reserved cars only meaning you "should" have a ticket before boarding and the automated speaker will say a limited express ticket is required to board. If you do not have a ticket yet just get on board and buy a ticket from the attendant. Do not miss a train just because you don’t have a ticket yet. Worst case you end up standing instead of sitting.

-We traveled by train the entire trip. Google maps will tell you which platform and car to take. It helped us a lot. Google maps is better than apple maps.

**TOKYO**

-We loved staying in the Shinjuku area. We loved walking around and seeing all the lit-up streets.

-We walked to the Imperial Palace and went to the Gardens, lots of history, very pretty, go.

-Went to Shibuya crossing, was cool to see. But after that, that was pretty much it for us. If you love to shop brand names, it is a good area. We watched the crossing from the magnet building. You get into the elevator and go to the roof floor to enter. We did not get Shibuya sky tickets (you need those months in advance, we didn’t get them). The building we went to was fine enough for us. You pay a cover and get a drink. We went to the building where Shibuya sky is located. They had a foodie floor where we got some great udon. I will link it under food.

-Go to Meiji Jingu park. Beautiful scenery and some shrines. Walked through on the way to Shibuya.

-Go to Golden Gai: has a ton of cool small bars that seat four to ten people. There are different themes for each bar. We liked Aces bar, no cover and the owner was really nice.

<https://tokyocheapo.com/food-and-drink/quick-guide-golden-gai/>

https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant\_Review-g14133667-d6180750-Reviews-Ace\_s-Kabukicho\_Shinjuku\_Tokyo\_Tokyo\_Prefecture\_Kanto.html

Hotel

-Hotel Gracery (Godzilla head hotel): cool place with a nice location. Super small rooms, but it was fine because we were out a lot. It was also close to the Omoide Yokocho listed under the food section.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/wB7UVL3vWLX8919p6?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

Food

# - Tsurutontan Udon Noodle Brasserie Shibuya: amazing udon place in the Shibuya Scramble Square

https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant\_Review-g1066456-d19306932-Reviews-Tsurutontan\_Udon\_Noodle\_Brasserie\_Shibuya-Shibuya\_Tokyo\_Tokyo\_Prefecture\_Kanto.html

-Omoide Yokocho (you have to go), they have the best yakitori stalls. There are two streets that are filled with different food stalls. You can bounce around or stay at one. This is a great place for pictures as well. 10/10 recommend. We came back here to eat several times. Every stall is different, they are all so good.

[Omoide Yokocho](https://g.co/kgs/XugHMLT)

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/mF5Cf91j3jeHTRUM6?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

-Tsukiji Market-fish, desserts, steak, coffee, matcha, whatever you dream of… it is here. Go early, so good.

-Yurakucho Kakida: amazing set sushi menu. About 15+ pieces of nigiri. Can feel a bit touristy, but amazing fish and you pay a set amount for food and drinks. They give you so much food too, lots of variety. Then you get more pieces of your favorite fish at the end.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/WS9FgJU68kd6SrD1A?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

-Fu-unji Ramen: waited one hour, but really good. We thought it was worth it. Lots of locals waiting in line.

<https://www.fu-unji.com/>

**KYOTO**

Yes, it is touristy. But, it is still worth seeing in my opinion. I loved it. We automatically woke up between 5-6 when we first got to Kyoto. We would just go to the tourist sites early in the morning and then wander or relax the rest of the day without an agenda. Kyoto is broken down into different "districts". We visited the Gion, Fushimi Inari, and Arashiyama areas and loved them all.

Gion District

-Go to Hōkan-ji Temple (Yasaka Pagoda) early in the morning or at dusk. Less people. Or make a reservation at a hotel roof top bar called K36. It is a long wait if you don't have a reservation. You can see the Pagoda from the bar on the roof and the photos and views are stunning.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/iz7h1MeE2zMN2UaM6?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

-There are famous streets around there with restaurants and shops, here are the street names: Hanamikoji Street (famous Geisha street), Sannenzaka, or Ninenzaka. If you wander away from these streets, you will find some cool shots and shops and places to eat. If you are at the top of Ninenzaka street there is a building with three white umbrellas. There is a cool local guy that paints miniature paintings for a good price. We got some cool souvenirs of temples we visited and our Japanese birth flowers for like 100 yen each. You should at least go see him. He sits at a table near the front of the store.

-Walk all around the Gion area, you will see so many things. A great place to wander the old streets.

-Kiyomizu-dera temple: go here when you are in Gion area near all the above locations. Such an amazing temple that overlooks the city.   
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/8g6NaHvfhuiJQRfh6?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

-We woke up early this day and got to the above neighborhood around 6am, it was so peaceful and nice to walk the empty streets without being shoulder to shoulder with people. GO EARLY AND GET IT DONE. It is like a half day worth of stuff. Seems like a lot, but it is all close together in one area.

Hotel

-Crystal Gion Hotel: we loved this hotel, and it was affordable. It was in old town Gion. About a 12-minute walk from the Hōkan-ji Temple (Yasaka Pagoda). Close to the subway/train station. We stayed here for four nights and went to the other districts in Kyoto. They also had breakfast included.

Food

-If you are walking around Gion temples and famous streets, go to: Hanamichi. A cute lady runs this restaurant, and the food is so good.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/kRLaGHZK7Ca6pH7R7?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

-Lorimer Kyoto-: wild brunch with fish and tons of random seasonal samples.

-Sushi and Bar Spot: near Gion hotel. 100-dollar omakase with a bar that seats about ten people. 100% recommend. Fish and sushi chef were amazing.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/boHjxe9wTS6c5oBD6?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

-Nishiki Market: souvenirs, fish, meat, desserts, all in a market. Pretty cool to check out. Had some of the best clams and scallops. They are everywhere.

-Go to Pontocho! This is a district in a small alley way with a ton of cool restaurants and bars. Found a good Kobe beef place listed below.

-Kobe beef at Pontocho-noichi (pricy, but if you want certified kobe beef, this is a good spot for it).

[Ehttps://kisshokichi-kyoto.com/pontochonoichi/?fbclid=PAZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAadw6ZyYQmtvZlpsMVn2Pm4uPNua8VGFKqgpCydBZQjPMkjewiGSCFPEXoCLtg\_aem\_pK5dWa4\_t6okG2AnpaSAeg](https://kisshokichi-kyoto.com/pontochonoichi/?fbclid=PAZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAadw6ZyYQmtvZlpsMVn2Pm4uPNua8VGFKqgpCydBZQjPMkjewiGSCFPEXoCLtg_aem_pK5dWa4_t6okG2AnpaSAeg)

Arashiyama District

-We went to the monkey park and the bamboo forest. Bamboo forest has a cool park on the side that is way better than the bamboo forest itself. Can walk down along the water if you keep going south past the park. Was so pretty and would recommend. The monkey park was a hike up the mountain to an overlook of the city. Beautiful views and the monkeys are just free roaming. If you like monkeys and views, it is worth it. We loved walking around that area along the water. It was really pretty. Lots of shops and restaurants. We got beers and walked around for a while.

Food

-Taisho Hanana: Sea bream sashimi restaurant that you HAVE TO GO TO. So good. There will probably be a line but grab a beer from a 711 and wait in line. It is so worth it.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/XEGE148kmfDx5Jdu8?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

Fushimi Inari District

Loved the Fushimi Inari shrine. Was an uphill hike with a ton of orange torii gates. It is super busy with tourists. There are some paths you can go down that are less crowded. Overall, I loved it and thought it was cool. We found some abandoned areas where we were completely alone. Look for areas that have random torii gates and no one around. There was a sign outside one path we went down that said it was not a through loop. We walked down this crazy area that turns into a hike, and we walked that all the way down instead of going back out the shrine. It popped us out into a residential area, and we walked ten minutes back to the shrine to get food. It was cool to see the neighborhoods in the area. Tons of street food and shops at the bottom. We liked the area.

Food

-Inari Douhachi: Really good and cheap udon in Fashimi Inari area

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/wdDCpFcVHFu63qVF8?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

**KINOSAKI**

One of my favorite places in Japan. Seriously, you have to go. It is an onsen town with seven public onsens that are gender separated. You could book a private onsen for like 60 dollars. We did not want to leave. It was so calm and quiet. Beautiful scenery. We did spend more at an onsen hotel that had two of its own private onsens in the lobby with a sauna and cold plunge. We stayed two nights at Nishimuraya Hotel. This was a lifesaver for us after walking around Kyoto and Toyko. Our bodies were hurting. This town is quiet and sooo pretty. It is pricey, but you won’t regret it. We paid for the chef’s seasonal dinner, and it was one of the best meals we had. Looking back, we wish we did the two nights at the Nishimuraya Hotel and then moved to another hotel in the town for another night or two. We just loved being able to relax and not run all over the place.

-We took a cable car up to the top of the mountain and walked down. There is a café at the top where you can get coffees, beers, and hot dogs? Hot dogs are a big thing over there.

-Gina Pizza: a great Italian place with some great pasta and pizza.

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**OSAKA**

Stay in the Namba area if you want to be close to Dotonburi and Kuromon Market. Our hotel was about a 10–15-minute walk to these places. Osaka is an amazing city to eat a lot of good food. We went to the aquarium; they have whale sharks. Buying tickets in advance is wise. Otherwise, you might be waiting for two hours (like us).

APA Namba Ekamai Hotel-too many people, heat wouldn’t turn off. Super small room, but we were barely there, so it was fine. I would not book there again at that specific hotel but loved the location. If you can stay in that area, you should.

Food

Dotonburi (Insane food district) we ended up spending a lot of time here because of all of the amazing food options.

-Teppan Jinja (teppan-grilled skewers) must try, seriously so good if you want different beef, chicken, pork options. We went here twice because the hype is real.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/oZA1gKZa3yrzASRz8?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

-Can’t go wrong with the street food here. We tried a lot of places.

-Takoyaki and pufferfish are huge there. Takoyaki places have the huge octopus sculptures on the outside of the buildings. There are a lot of good stands out there. We went to one right next to Teppan Jinja and it was good.

Osaka Kuromon Market (best market ever if you love fish)

-Suehiro- great sushi and hand rolls. Has a grab and go or sit down at the bar.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/KLm6x9DAAkLwQVFR9?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

21-33, Nippombashi 1-Chōme

Chuo, Osaka, Osaka

Japan 542-0073

-Entoki Kuromon- best tuna, serves nigiri sampler of different parts of the tuna. This booth will live in my mind and heart until the end of time.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/M8eTX6B1BPgQPQSa6?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

<https://entoki.com/>

-We ate at so many stalls. The above two were our favorites. Everything else was good. But not as amazing as those.

**KANAZAWA**

I would go back to Kanazawa again. It is beautiful and is like a less crowded Kyoto. If you don't want to go to a tourist city, go here! There is a massive castle in the middle of the city. The Kanazawa Castle. You can tour different parks of it and buy tickets to a garden next to it that is stunning.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/PfDwtB21FuRiFfae8?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>  
  
Hotel

Tokyu Stay Kanazawa: We loved it and it was super affordable, the location was good too.

<https://www.google.com/travel/search?ts=CAEaSQopEicyJTB4NWZmODMzNmZjYTc0NTJiZjoweGRjMzhkYjkyMWJlYWMzNzESHBIUCgcI6Q8QBxgbEgcI6Q8QBxgcGAEyBAgAEAAqBwoFOgNVU0Q&qs=CAEyFENnc0k4WWFyMzZIeXRwemNBUkFCOAJCCQlxw-obkts43EIJCXHD6huS2zjc&utm_campaign=sharing&utm_medium=link_btn&utm_source=htls>

Food

Uva Uva: Italian food  
We found this place wandering. It is an Italian/Japanese fusion. We did a set menu, and they had seasonal ingredients. They had an Italian sashimi and tempura. They did a squid pomodoro that was good. The owner is a cute lady that is a sommelier. She showed us some great wines.

<https://uvauva-romanza.jp>

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/tWkANjJui7gXxfE69?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

Ramen Mikoshi: was ok.

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/eNz3MgzFC1qVyQVEA?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

Furansu Cocktail Bar

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/9VQVbYkng9vMkxoJ6?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

Higashi Chaya District: an old town district with shops, bars, and restaurants. There is a river that runs by it that is beautiful to walk down. We did a sake tasting and got Donburi bowls.

Fukumitsuya Higashi (Sake Bar)

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/dkmm6chdRkLFs9cF8?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>

Higashiyama Yoshi

Donburi Bowls-so good

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/MqEARfKoKxf56u6h9?g_st=com.google.maps.preview.copy>