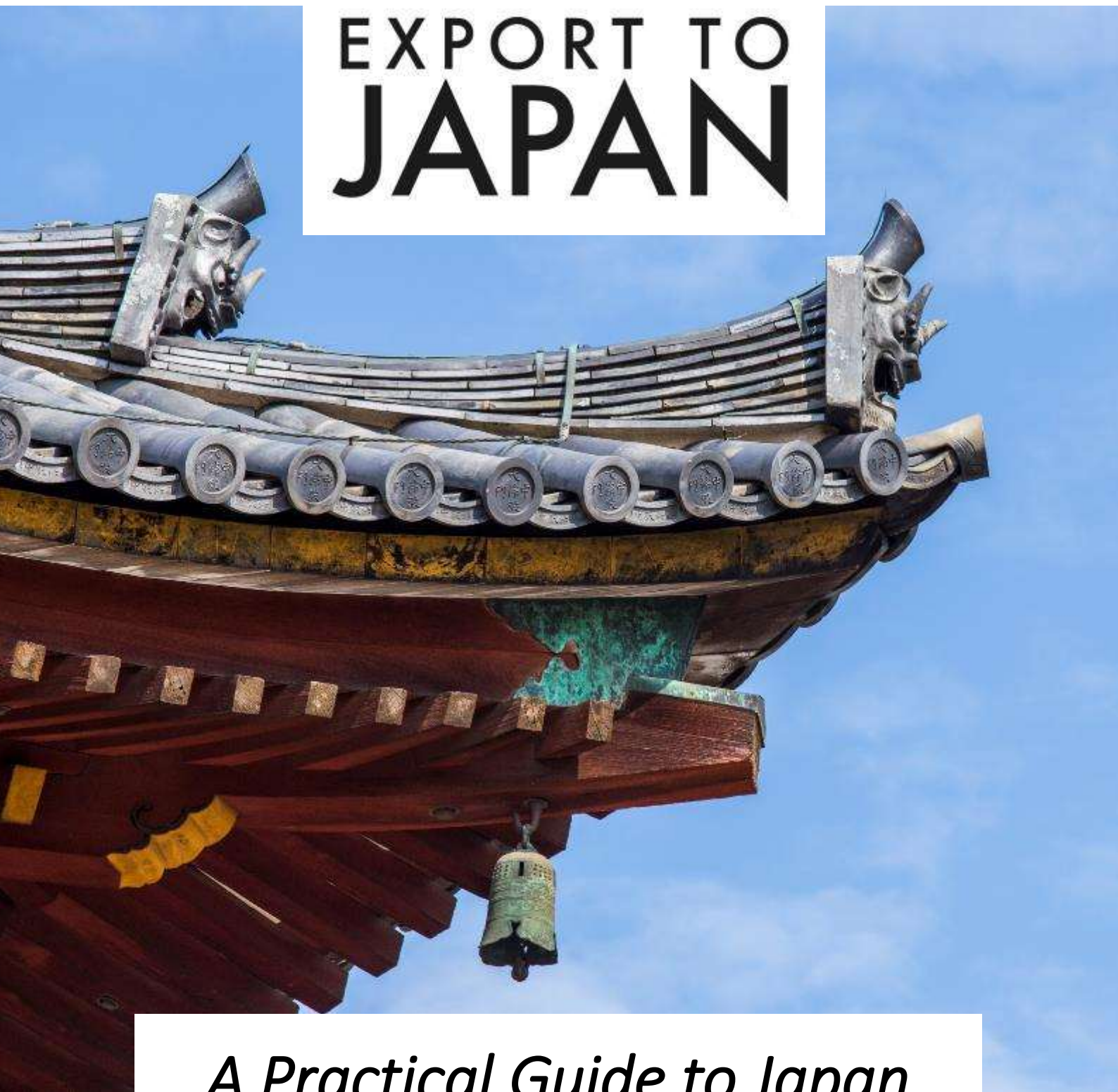




EXPORT TO JAPAN



A Practical Guide to Japan



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Introduction

Going on a business trip to Japan entails a lot of organisation and research. Things you take for granted in your own country are not always the same in Japan. It is always best to prepare in advance.

This guide gives you all the practical, up-to-date information you will need to take the stress out of that preparation covering topics such as:

- Where to stay.
- How to get around Japan.
- How to get discounted tickets.
- Staying connected with your phone and Wi-Fi.
- Using interpreters and translation services.
- Ensuring smooth communications in your business meetings.
- Useful phrases to use.

To save you from having to trawl through the Internet, this report will also provide you with links to relevant websites and apps plus many useful tips on navigating areas that may cause potential misunderstandings. Armed with this knowledge, you can enjoy a relaxing and successful business trip.



About Export to Japan

Export to Japan is a not-for-profit organisation founded in July 2013 as the result of a unique partnership between private and public sector organisations. Our founding partners are the Department for Business & Trade (DBT), the British Chamber of Commerce in Japan (BCCJ), British Airways and Business Link Japan.

Our mission is to be the number one resource for companies wishing to do business in Japan, and help companies succeed in one of the world's richest economies. We are doing this by providing access to trusted and up-to-date market insights, trade shows, business opportunities and events.

For much more in-depth advice on how to do business in Japan, to learn from other UK companies on how they succeeded in this market, or detailed information about your particular business sector, visit www.exporttojapan.co.uk

Japan at a glance

Capital: Tokyo

Population: 125.6 million (UN 2022)

Currency: Yen

Time Zone: GMT +9 (+8 on British Summertime)

International phone code: +81

Domain extension: .jp

Main business centres: Tokyo, Osaka, Yokohama, Nagoya, Sapporo, Kobe, Kyoto, Fukuoka, Kawasaki and Hiroshima

Japan since the COVID pandemic

Japan took to a very conservative approach to controlling the virus, with strict border control and mitigation measures imposed on the population. Temperature testing, hand sanitiser and mask wearing became the norm. Measures to control the spread of the continued mutation and variants of coronavirus are still in place, despite overall guidance being relaxed. Here are some points to be aware of:

Mask wearing

Although it was always a seasonal mainstay in Japan to wear surgical masks when suffering cold symptoms, a more consistent wearing of masks took hold under COVID. A relaxation of mitigation guidance stipulates that wearing a mask is now optional, advised for those exhibiting symptoms. However, at time of writing many Japanese people consider it courtesy to wear masks at all times when in public. Be prepared for looks of disapproval if you are not wearing a mask when out in the open.

Hand sanitiser & temperature checks

Many establishments continue to ask that hand sanitiser be applied on entering, and have a dispenser at the door. Although relaxed across much of Japan, some venues insist on a temperature check when you arrive. Best option is to oblige. If you do have high temperature or show significant symptoms, the advice is to stay at your accommodation until they subside – however, it is not mandatory and often impractical.

Accommodation

Japan has a vast array of accommodation available, ranging from deluxe hotels to simple capsule hotels. Most of the larger hotels have bi-lingual websites and English speaking staff. Many of the tourist guidebooks have a good selection and the [Japan National Tourist Organisation \(JNTO\)](#) website has booking sites and information on the variety available.

Business Hotels

In the main cities, business hotels are convenient and quite reasonably priced with all the basic facilities needed including Wi-Fi and in some cases, meeting rooms. They are usually near railway stations and the major chains are Toyoko Inn, Route Inn, APA Hotel, Super Hotel, Daiwa Roynet Hotel and Dormy Inn.

Traditional Ryokan (Inn)

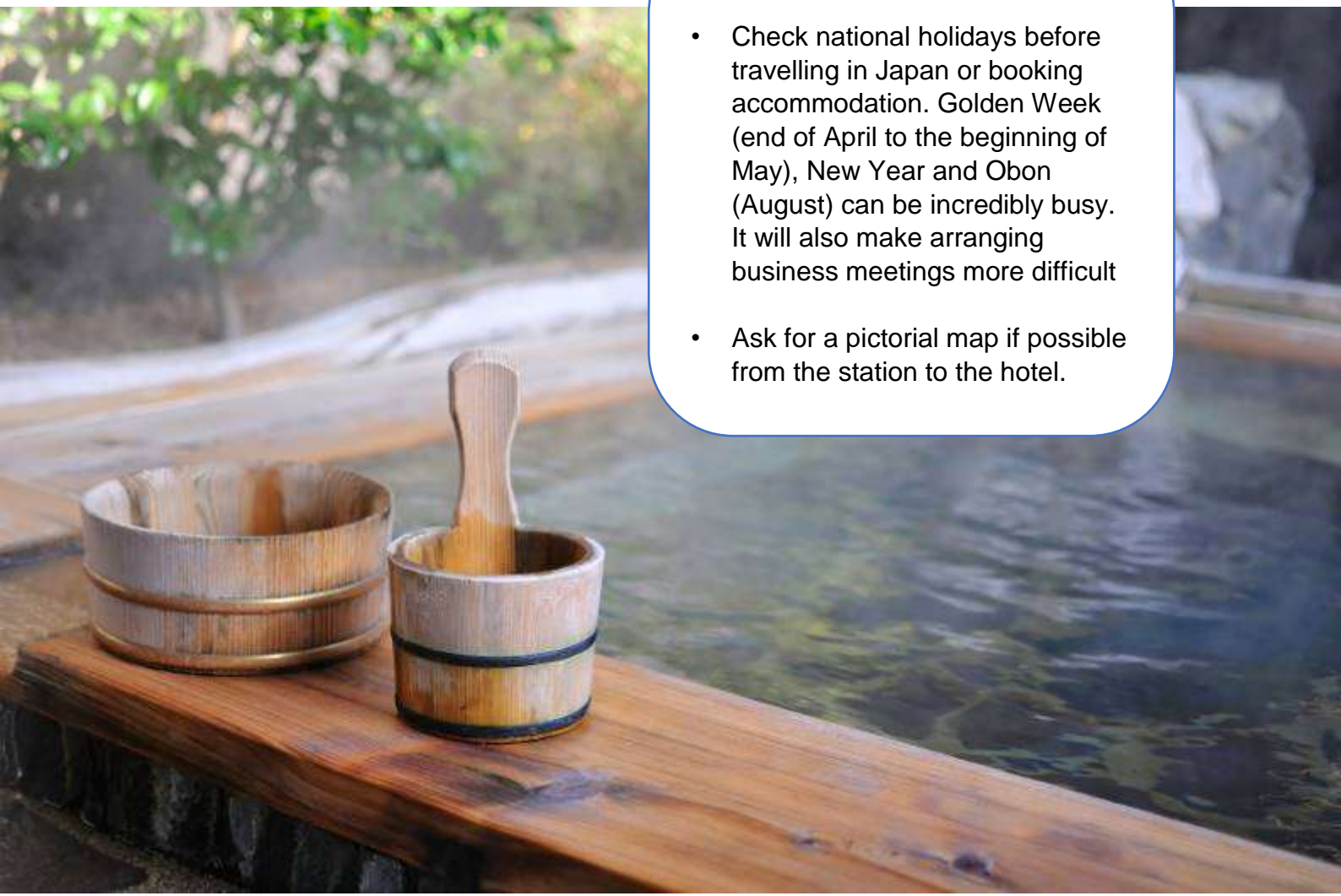
A Ryokan offers a traditional Japanese experience and is normally set within Japanese gardens, has hot springs or baths, is located in beautiful traditional Japanese houses with sliding doors, tatami floors and futon beds with amazing Japanese dining experiences. There are certain rituals involved with staying at a Ryokan: using the baths, wearing the “yukata” and slippers. The JNTO website has information on the etiquette involved.

Major cities have some Ryokan-style establishments catering specifically to foreigners, offering value accommodation on tatami mats with futons. Some are more informal than traditional Ryokan, and often have shared bathing facilities. Most owners speak English and they are in peaceful parts of the cities, offering a traditional experience of Japan within a bustling metropolis. [The Japan Ryokan & Hotel Association](#) is a good source of information.

Japanese on-line retailer Rakuten has a hotel booking line much like Expedia and Lastminute.com. There are some Japanese rooms on Airbnb, where families offer rooms in their homes, in some cases to increase their contact with English speakers. However, as always, exercise caution as you would if considering this option when travelling alone and respect the local customs.

Useful tips

- Check national holidays before travelling in Japan or booking accommodation. Golden Week (end of April to the beginning of May), New Year and Obon (August) can be incredibly busy. It will also make arranging business meetings more difficult
- Ask for a pictorial map if possible from the station to the hotel.



Getting Around

Streets and Addresses

In Japan, only the major roads and streets are named and houses are not numbered in the same way they are in the UK. Cities are divided into towns (*machi*), which are then divided into wards (*ku*). These wards are then divided again into areas (*chome*) and then divided again into blocks (*ban*) and numbers (*go*). Sounds confusing but Japanese people can be very helpful if you ask for directions and have been known to accompany you to your destination!

See this example of an address:

1. 〒100-8799 2. 東京都 3. 千代田区 4. 丸の内二丁目 5. 7 番 6. 2 号 7. 東京中央郵便局	1. 〒100-8799 2. Tōkyō-to 3. Chiyoda-ku 4. Marunouchi ni-chōme 5. nana-ban 6. ni-gō 7. Tōkyō Chūō Yūbin-kyoku	1. Postal code 2. Tokyo city 3. Chiyoda Ward 4. Maronouchi district number 2 5. Block number 7 6. House number 2 7. Name of the place
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[This old article](#) offers more of an explanation, and mentions the different system used in Sapporo and Kyoto.

Useful tips

- If you get the address in Japanese, you can input it into Google maps and it will give you the visual point on a map.
- If you are going to a meeting, ask for a pictorial map from the station with landmarks on it- some companies have them on their website.
- The recently updated [Navitime for Japan Travel](#) app has maps, information on using the trains, offline Wi-Fi spot search and also gives you access to NTT free Wi-Fi.



Subway in Tokyo

The Japanese subway system is very efficient and fairly easy to navigate. All stations have names in *Romaji* (Roman letters) and there are many signs and maps in English. Unsurprisingly, stations in Tokyo are amongst the busiest stations in the world so it is advisable to really plan your travel and download a map from the [Tokyo Metro website](#). Their website also has an app you can download to help you get round the Tokyo subway and has links to Wi-Fi spots in the stations. A different letter, colour and number represent each Tokyo Metro line.

Useful tips

- If you are using the subway system, be prepared to do lots of walking.
- Rush hour is very busy - think about sending luggage ahead if travelling to the airport (see section on luggage couriers).
- There are female-only carriages during rush hour.

JR and Private Railways

Japan has a very reliable network of trains including 6 Japan Railway groups that cover the whole of Japan. JR East covers Tokyo and you can download maps and timetables from their website. The most useful JR line in Tokyo is the Yamanote line, which does a loop around the city and connects with many metro stations. Dozens of private railways operate in Japan, the most useful of which are listed on [Japanese Trains \(japan-guide.com\)](http://japanese-trains.jp).

Pre-paid Tickets

Pre-paid tickets are the easiest to use for foreign visitors. The “**Suica**” (JR) and “**Pasmo**” (Metro) cards, can both be used on either systems (JR and/or Metro) as well as on buses around Tokyo, like the Oyster card in London you just swipe them in and out. You can also use them to pay in convenience stores and at some vending machines too!

They are now available to add to your smartphone – some clear details for downloading the relevant app and applying credit are on [this site](#).

You can still purchase physical cards from stations, the best place to do this as a visitor is the airports (a refundable ¥500 deposit is payable) where you can get special discounts for foreigners (see below) and then top up at stations. You can also buy at ticket machines displaying the **Suica** or **Pasmo** logos. There are fare adjustment machines at every station so you are never caught out and the machines have a switch-to-English button. The minimum top-up amount is ¥1000. These cards can be used across other regions of Japan with certain restrictions so it is best to check their websites: [PASMO](#) / [SUICA](#)

More information on purchasing JR rail tickets as well as pictures of the ticket machines and relevant buttons can be found on the [JR East website](#).

Other regions have their own version of these pre-paid passes - in the Kansai region the ICOCA card is used and can be purchased alongside a “Kansai Airport Express Haruka” ticket at a discount for foreign travellers from the [JR West website](#).

Rail Passes That Can Be Bought Outside of Japan

Japan Rail Pass

If you are planning to travel long distances around Japan, the Japan Rail Pass is very good value but it can only be bought outside of Japan. It is sold through many travel agencies so it is worth checking [the official website](#) before buying, to make sure you are buying from designated agencies. It offers unlimited use on JR's shinkansen super-express trains (except the

super-express “Nozomi”), limited-express trains, express trains and local trains as well as JR-affiliated buses throughout Japan. You can buy it for different lengths of time and for different regions in Japan and there is also a “Green Japan Rail Pass” that allows you to travel in the Green class (1st class) on most trains. In order to use it in Japan, you must validate it upon arrival in Japan at the JR desk at the airports or at the JR Travel Center in Tokyo station. If you just need to make seat reservations, you can do this at any JR Ticket Reservation Counter (Midori no Madoguchi) by showing your Rail Pass and Passport. Most reservations have to be made in Japan with one exception - [JR East](#) offers Japan an on-line seat reservation system you can use to book tickets before you come to Japan. It is aimed at those arriving in Tokyo.

Other Rail Passes

There are various other regional passes you can purchase before coming to Japan. More information on these can be found on the [JNTO website](#) or you can purchase them through this [International Rail website](#).

Discount Tickets Available for Non-Japanese Visitors to Tokyo

The Keikyu Haneda and subway common pass

Used on the Keikyu line from Haneda Airport to Sengakuji station and includes unlimited rides on the Tokyo subway.

The Keisei Skyliner & Metro Pass

A round-trip or one-way ticket to and from Narita Airport plus an open ticket for all Tokyo Metro lines. This specially discounted ticket for foreigners is only available at Narita airport.

Tokyo Metro Special Open Tickets for Foreign Tourists

Accessibility for Wheelchair Users

Not all stations have lifts. The JNTO website has some information on this and this website, [Japan Accessible Tourism Center](#), offers useful information on getting around the whole of Japan.

Train Etiquette in Japan

There are signs and announcements on all trains asking you not to speak on your mobile phone or disturb other passengers. The silent mode on their phones is actually called “Manner Mode” to reinforce this. This is very indicative of Japanese society, where consideration of the effect of your behaviour on others is very important. The Tokyo metro website has a dedicated page on [Things to Consider](#) when using the subway and a dazzling array of “manners” posters telling people not to put make-up on, not to drip wet umbrellas all over and not to leave rubbish on the train.

Shinkansen (High Speed Bullet Train)

As of October 2022, Japan operates 10 Shinkansen lines – with a further 3 under construction. They are covered by the different jurisdictions of the JR network so check the appropriate JR website to find out about the routes and timetables. [This website](#) has a useful map and information on the routes.

Shinkansen Tickets

There are 3 classes of tickets: Standard Class, Green Car (1st class) and Gran class. Just in case you are wondering, this is not for those with Grandchildren but actually is a premium class, only available on some trains. Supplements are payable on Green and Gran Class.

If you are not using a Japan Rail Pass (see above) you can buy shinkansen tickets at JR ticket offices. In order to purchase a shinkansen ticket, you need the following information:

- Number of travellers
- Date of travel
- Departure Station
- Destination Station
- Ordinary or green car
- Reserved or non-reserved seat

Shinkansen Seat Reservations

Some routes have reserved and non-reserved seats although some lines require seat reservations. With a Japan Rail pass, making a reservation is free. Otherwise you will have to pay a supplement. You can make a reservation a month in advance either at a JR ticket counter, at a vending machine (not with Japan Rail Pass) or online if you have a Japan Rail Pass via the [JR East website](#).

For a seat reservation, the following additional information is required:

- Train name (e.g. Hikari) and train number or departure time
- Preference of smoking or non-smoking seat, if available

Useful tip: If you don't speak Japanese, write this information down on a piece of paper and hand it over to the person behind the counter.

Check out the [Jorudan](#) website for a useful English route planner across all train lines. [Hyperdia](#) is another popular route planner.

Getting To and From the Airports

Haneda

Nearer to the city, Haneda is easily connected to Tokyo by a convenient monorail ride followed by easy access to the Yamanote JR line that loops around the city. Alternatively, use the previously mentioned Keikyu line and there are good bus links into Tokyo. Check their website for access information.

Narita

From Narita, there are various options to get into Tokyo including express train options such as the Narita Express and the Keisei Skyliner, which both include Suica tickets too. Check out the airport's website for further information on all the options available or see the section on discounted tickets for foreigners for special offers on the Keisei Skyliner.

Kansai International Airport

They have access information on their website (see "pre-paid tickets" section for more information on the ICOCA Haruka ticket)

Fukuoka International Airport

Access information is on the Fukuoka International Airport website.

Central Japan International Airport

This airport near to Nagoya has transport links on its website.

Luggage Courier Services

There are reliable courier services that deliver your luggage to and from the hotel/airport. Compared to other countries their services are incredibly economical and convenient, and they are widely used in Japan. Some have English websites and on-line reservation systems. Kuroneko Yamato, Sagawa Transport, Japan Post and JAL ABC feature at most airports – check the airport websites for available services and where to find the desks.

Low-cost Carriers

Recently, there has been an increase in the number of low-cost carriers flying within Japan and Asia- most have websites in English.

[Peach](#) – Routes across Japan (including Okinawa) Hong Kong, S. Korea & Taiwan

[JetStar](#) – Has flights across Japan, Asia, Australia and New Zealand

[AirAsia](#) Japan

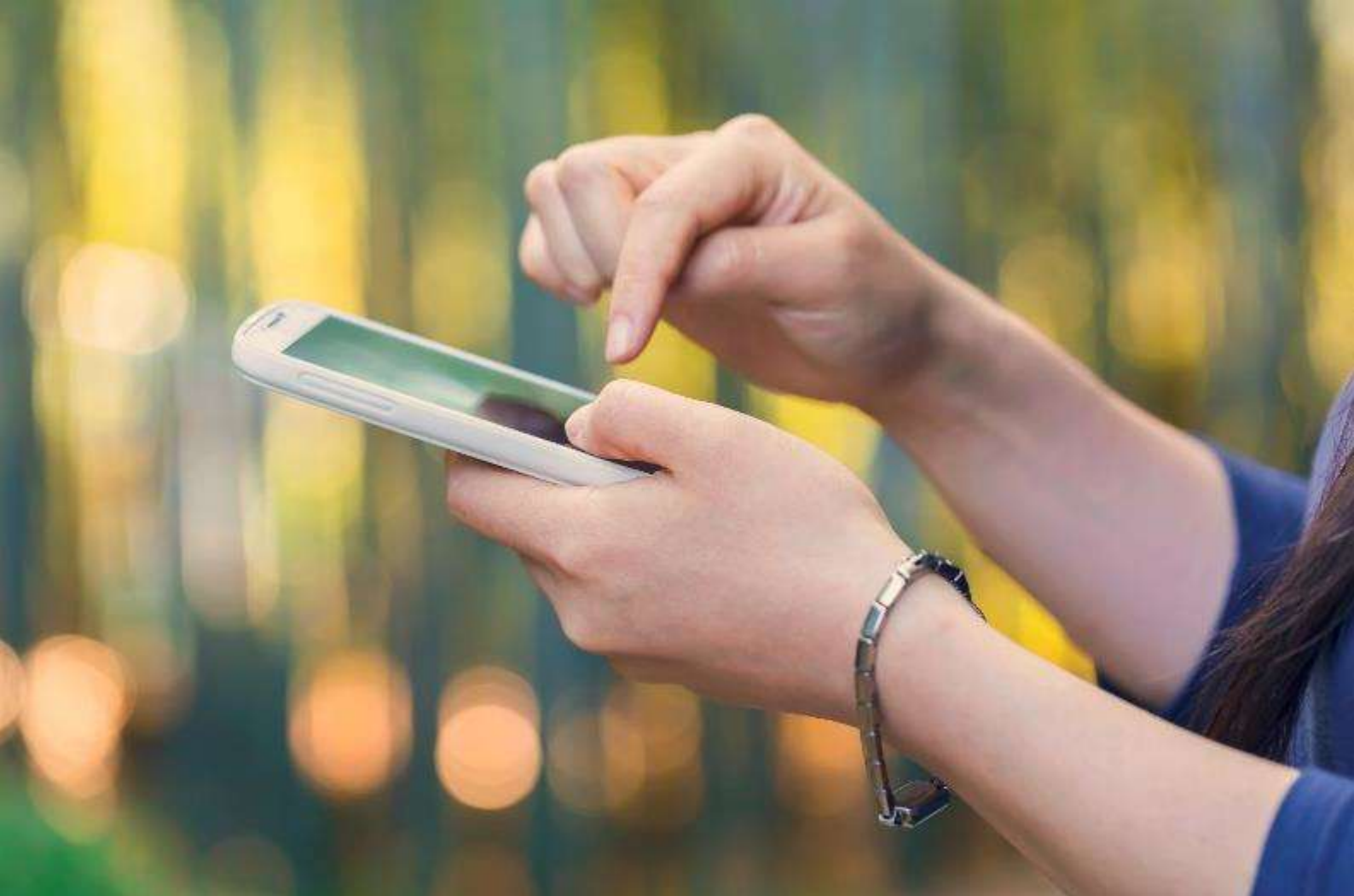
[Airdo](#) (Hokkaido International Airlines) – Website in Japanese, operates flights between Hokkaido and Tokyo

[Solaseed Air](#) – They have special fares for non-Japanese travellers flying from Haneda around Japan

[Vanilla Air](#) – Flights between Japan and Taiwan

[Starflyer](#) – Tokyo Haneda around Japan

[Skymark Airlines](#) – Tokyo Haneda around Japan



Wi-Fi and Using Your Phone in Japan

Free Wi-Fi

Although Japan has lagged behind on its provision of free Wi-Fi to tourists or those with non-Japanese SIM cards, Tokyo's winning bid for the 2020 Olympics acted as a catalyst for improving this situation. Whereas once, free Wi-Fi access was limited to the airports upon arrival, it is now available in hotels, major JR stations, convenience stores, Tokyo metro stations, as well as quite a few coffee shops and shopping areas in Tokyo. There are a number of free networks, especially for foreign visitors, although most of these require sign-ups or in some cases registering at certain locations with your passport. It is worth doing your research before you go so you know which option suits your schedule best.

Area Specific Networks

- NTT EAST offers free 14-day Wi-Fi across 40,000 Wi-Fi spots for foreign tourists across East and Northern Japan when you register at their centres across Japan.
- The [Keikyu Corporation](#) has recently launched free Wi-Fi for foreign visitors that you can register for at Haneda Airport and use in many Wi-Fi hotspots.
- Osaka, Kobe and Kyoto also have free Wi-Fi systems that require registration and are limited to certain areas. [See here](#) for a more comprehensive list and explanation of the services available.

Wi-Fi Apps

These apps allow you register in advance to get access to many networks:

[Japan Connected-free Wi-Fi](#) (NTT) – This free app allows you to connect to Wi-Fi networks with roughly 92,000 access points at international airports, main shinkansen and JR East train stations, including Tokyo Station, along with all Tokyo Metro and Toei Subway stations, major sightseeing spots, and certain convenience stores around the country.

[Travel Japan Wi-Fi](#) – This free smartphone app offers users free web access at 60,000 “basic area” access points nationwide. If you enter a Premium Code – available from partner municipalities and companies across Japan, including Japan Airlines, Odakyū Group, and Bic Camera – the application can also be used to connect for free to over 200,000 Wi2 300 “optional area” access points, which usually require a fee. You will also be able to access sightseeing recommendations from these partner bodies.

Personal Hotspots

Personal hotspots (also called MiFi, portable hotspot, personal Wi-Fi, pocket Wi-Fi, etc.) are small, battery-powered devices that use the cellular phone network to create a local wireless network. They are easy to set up, provide reasonably fast Internet, work anywhere there is cell phone service, allow multiple devices to connect at once and are relatively inexpensive. Personal hotspots are available to rent at major Japanese airports or via the Internet for delivery to your home or hotel. More information can be found [here](#).

Using Your Phone in Japan

Japan has recently rolled out 4G and most smartphones seem to work ok, but it is worth checking with your mobile provider whether it will work in Japan as they must be compatible with a Japanese mobile phone network. Also check the roaming prices on your contract as they can be very expensive. It is sometimes easier to explore one of the following options:

Renting a smartphone

Several companies offer smartphones for rental that include unlimited data and Wi-Fi tethering, effectively turning them into personal hotspots. This can be good value as the devices serve as both a rental phone and as a means for connecting to the Internet on the go. Both iPhone and android models are available to rent at major Japanese airports or online for delivery to your home, hotel or pick up on arrival at the airport.

Pre-paid SIM

Some companies are now offering pre-paid SIMs for visitors to Japan for data only including the [Wi-Ho card](#) from Telecom Square Inc., [EconnectJapan](#), [B-mobile](#) or [NTT](#), which does a 7-day or 14-day option. These can be picked up at airports and offer a great alternative to taking a chance on your own mobile roaming charges. Check on the websites to make sure your phone is compatible.

Working On-The-Go

Since the pandemic, there has been a rapid rise in remote working or 'telework'.

There are now quite a number of co-working spaces. A selection of drop-in co-working spaces can be found [here](#) (last updated 2017). Many offer comfortable café-like surroundings, and some offer options for hiring office space for meetings, such as [WeWork](#).

There has also been a big rise in the number of cafés in the Tokyo area with free Wi-Fi. [This list](#) is a good starting point, but by no means comprehensive – there are many more free WI-FI spots since last updated.

Money

Although Japan has a reputation of having a cash culture, credit cards are increasingly accepted, particularly in Tokyo. However, some less touristy restaurants and small shops don't accept credit cards so it's always wise to have access to cash.

ATMs

Some ATMs do not accept foreign credit card cash withdrawals and not all stay open 24/7 so check ahead if you need to withdraw money whilst in Japan. You can withdraw cash using international credit cards at [Seven Bank ATMs](#) situated in 7-11 convenience stores 24 hours a day 365 days of the year. They also have a useful [Japan ATM Navigation](#) app on their website, which allows you to search for ATMs. You can also use your credit card to withdraw from Japan Post Bank ATMs - most of which are in either post offices, train stations or supermarkets, although only the major offices are likely to offer 24 hour services. Citibank and AEON also have branches in most airports and cities although their coverage of ATMs is much more limited. The [Mastercard website](#) has a useful list of ATMs in Japan where its card can be used, which also links through to the 4 banks named above. As always, check with your credit card provider on the fees involved when using them abroad.



Business Etiquette

Although Japan is a very fascinating country with friendly people, it does have a reputation of having a mysterious, impenetrable culture built around etiquette dating back to the days of the Shogun. Although the Japanese place a lot of importance on etiquette and doing things the “correct” way, as a foreigner, you are not expected to follow all the intricate rules and speak their language fluently. However, it is worth finding out about etiquette if considering doing business with Japan, as it will help build up respect and trust and will foster a better understanding and less frustration.

Introductions

The Japanese place great importance on initial meetings and greetings where they exchange business cards and bow to each other, observing many hierarchical rules. When dealing with non-Japanese, they may offer to shake hands but still expect to have lots of business cards on hand, preferably of a good quality and with your name and title translated into Japanese.

Japanese people normally address each other by their surnames plus the suffix “*san*” in a business setting. However, it is becoming more common for them to use their first names with non-Japanese people. There are some set Japanese phrases commonly used when meeting people - it is appreciated if you tried to use them but it is by no means a necessity. See the “Useful Phrases” section at the end of the report.

Business Card Etiquette

Business cards, known as *meishi*, are a vital element of initiating business relations so make sure to bring plenty with you when coming to Japan. It is usually expected that you provide business cards for every member of the Japanese team.

It is useful to have a double-sided business card – one side in English and the other in Japanese, but English only cards are fine. If including Japanese, it is important to make a good first impression so make sure that translations are accurate and the design matches the English version.

Hold the bottom of the business card with two hands when giving and receiving, showing respect as you do so. Line them up on the table in front of you during the meeting and put them away in your wallet/ purse, bag or card case before you leave.

Avoid writing on the business cards or putting them in your pocket. A business card is considered a symbol or extension of the person and their business so the way you present and treat your own and those of others is very important. Mistreatment of a business card can cause offence.

Attire and Body Language

Dress code for business meetings is formal, although this may be a bit more relaxed during the summer months when “Cool Biz” season starts and business casual dress is acceptable. Good sense and good manners go a long way.

Seating

There is often a seating plan so wait to be seated. It is useful to be aware that seating is usually arranged according to seniority and an important status is granted to guests. Hierarchy generally plays an important role in Japanese business culture so it's worth bearing this in mind when meeting Japanese teams.

Meetings and Decision-making

Hierarchy and etiquette have an influence on meetings with the Japanese, from where to sit to who introduces themselves first. Some companies use *nemawashi* - a form of group consensus based decision-making, normally done prior to a meeting and involves all stakeholders.

When making a pitch, allow plenty of time for questions of clarification, and try not to be frustrated if these can seem bafflingly detailed or process-orientated. It's rarely effective to press hard for an on the spot call at a meeting even if the most appropriate/senior person is present.

Japanese firms often need time to build an internal consensus and often don't react well to perceived external pressure. A “no” may be softened to a “maybe” or sometimes a “yes” to avoid causing the other person to lose face and polite smiles do not always mean things are going well.

Useful tips

- If you are doing a PowerPoint presentation, consider getting it translated beforehand (see section on Translators) and send it over in advance so the Japanese side know what to expect.
- Use visuals and figures to aid the communication process.
- Speak clearly, at a slower pace than usual and avoid colloquial speech.
- Give time for breaks and allow your hosts to discuss points in Japanese.
- Be prompt and on time for meetings - allow enough time to navigate your journey.

Be prepared for negotiations and for the pace of conversation to be much slower than at home, especially if using English. It may take several meetings before any final decision is reached.

Gift Giving Etiquette Japan

The Japanese use gifts as a way of showing respect and developing relationships so unsurprisingly, gift giving is a central part of Japanese business etiquette. If it is your first visit, it can be a good idea to take small but good quality gifts to the companies you will be visiting. Things that can be shared around and are specific to your region such as local biscuits, sweets or. However, be aware that it may cause embarrassment if they don't have a reciprocal gift so liaising with someone in advance about this would be advisable.

Greeting Cards

Japanese people send greeting post cards twice a year; New Year cards are called *nengajyo*, and those in summer (end of July until mid August) are called *shochu mimai*. These are usually pre-printed but can be custom-made to include pictures or company logos with set phrases.

Socialising after Business Meetings

Socialising and relationship building with business partners is very important and if you are going to Japan on business and have meetings with potential clients, you will probably be invited out for a dinner as their guest. This is a wonderful way to get to know your hosts and is indeed a very important part of business negotiations. Such is the importance within Japanese corporate life that they have coined the phrase *nommunication*, taken from the verb *nomu* meaning “to drink” and *communication*. After initial speeches and formalities, these dinners are very relaxed and enjoyable, plus the standard of food in Japan is normally very high. Alcohol usually plays a large part and it is etiquette for someone to pour for you and you pour for someone else. If you don't want to get too drunk, leave your cup mostly full, as it will certainly be replenished if you keep draining it. These dinners are then sometimes followed by a second party, which may well include karaoke.

Useful tips

- Have a short speech prepared in English (or Japanese if you are feeling brave) to introduce yourself and where you are from, possibly including some positive comments on your impressions of Japan.
- Don't be shy at karaoke - it is the taking part that matters.
- Most food in Japan contains meat or fish, it is important to let your hosts or programme coordinator know in advance if you are vegetarian, vegan, or have any other dietary requirements.

Networking

You may want to do a spot of networking whilst in Japan to build up those important relationships. Many organisations such as the [British Chamber of Commerce in Japan](#) and the [Foreign Correspondent's Club](#) offer many great networking events but they may require membership or an invitation from a member. It is worth checking in advance for any events or seminars that may be taking place during your visit. There are some useful networking groups on [LinkedIn](#) in that meet up in Japan. Don't forget your business cards!

Interpreters and Translators

Interpreters

Before you choose an interpreting option, be aware of differences in communication between Japan and the UK and how this can affect your negotiations. Japanese communication can be quite indirect and high context, resulting in lots of reading between the lines, an avoidance of putting people on the spot and a reticence to refuse or say no directly. Potentially, this can cause confusion in communications. If the Japanese people who you are dealing with have experience of speaking English and dealing with cross-cultural negotiations, this may not be an issue at all. However in some cases, you may wish to hire an Interpreter who understands how to navigate this and who is sensitive to cross-cultural misunderstandings. This person should be experienced in dealing with both styles of communication - they can read between the lines but also directly convey the message to you.

There is a plethora of Interpreters in Japan - if you are going on a trade mission or to an exhibition, they may provide these for you. [The International Association of Conference Interpreters](#) has some members in Japan and the FCO has a list of specialist interpreters/ translators in Japan if you need legal or medical assistance.

Useful tips

- Don't be alarmed if the Interpreter changes things slightly in a way to fit the cultural context.
- Avoid putting them on the spot or asking them to put your Japanese clients on the spot directly.
- If possible, allow for breaks (tea break or toilet break) to discuss privately how things are going and check back.
- Make sure you brief them beforehand and let them see any PowerPoint presentations you have.
- Don't be afraid to ask the interpreter's impression of how the meeting went afterwards – they can often help you understand the cultural context and what might have been left unsaid.

Translation services

It is always advisable to get your presentations and relevant marketing materials translated to suit your Japanese audience - consumer tastes and the sharing of information can be surprisingly different in Japan so it is well worth dealing with an expert who understands this. There are certain aspects the Japanese may expect from a cultural viewpoint or from a service aspect that we are not always aware of. Idioms and colloquial phrases can be easily lost in translation and some words or ideas can evoke very different emotions in Japan. There are many translation companies on the market including companies offering quick API services for immediate outputs such as social media and e-mails. There are translation companies featured on the [Export to Japan](#) website and your local UKTI branch or Chamber of Commerce may also have a list of translators they recommend, but these are by no means exhaustive.

The [Japan Association of Translators](#) is a good source of information with some great advice on what to look out for.

Useful tips

- Use a native speaker of Japanese for translating into Japanese (most translation companies do this automatically).
- It may be advisable to have it checked by a different translator too.
- Make sure you speak to the company about your needs and the tone you want to convey but be open to cultural advice from an expert. Don't expect the translator to work cold with no context.
- If you are using specialised terminology, find a translator who operates in your industry area.
- Use recommendations wherever possible.
- Allow enough time for the work to be done thoroughly and professionally and be prepared to answer lots of questions.

Translation Apps

There are several translation apps available, some offering off-line services and voice translator services. They could certainly be useful in helping you to understand things when travelling around or shopping but are not recommended for business

interactions. Google translate has improved over the years, and generally the best apps for instant voice translation need Internet access, including Jspeak-Japanese Translator, available on google play and app store. WAYGO & Yomiwa can both instantly translate menus and text without internet access. DeepL and I-translate are also quite useful.

Shopping

Discount stores, Convenience Stores, Drug Stores and Tax-free Shops

Discount stores are now major players in the Japanese retail sector as consumer behaviour is changing.

100 Yen shops (100 円) – There are thousands of these shops all over Japan and they offer an amazing array of goods ranging from tableware, kitchenware, stationery and dried food - a good place to buy cheap presents to take home. The price including the consumption tax of 10% is actually 110 円.

There are many other big discount stores including the Don Quixote chain (ドンキホーテ) that seem to sell everything and anything. More information on these can be found on the [JNTO website](#).

Japan is infamous for its range of convenience stores such as 7-Eleven, Lawson, Family Mart and they are, as the name suggests, incredibly convenient, offering courier services, facilities to pay bills, photocopying, tickets for concerts and other events, and have ATMs that accept international bank cards. Some also serve as free Wi-Fi hotspots. The fast food that they sell, including the rice balls (*onigiri*) and pork dumplings (*nikuman*) are often of a very high quality.

Useful tips

- Tipping is rarely done in Japan and in some cases confuses service staff.
- Consumption tax rose in 2019 to 10%. Many shops still display the prices before tax and after tax.
- Customer service in most shops, especially the high-end department stores, is of a high standard and the staff on the shop floor may offer to take your money to the till personally, bring your change and gift-wrap your purchases. Sometimes this can take a long time as you wait for them to return with your change and goods.



Food and Drink

Finding good food and drink in Japan is not an issue - there are so many varieties of food and the standard is generally very high. However, it can be daunting when most signs are in Japanese and some menus are too, although in the major cities, there are translations. Use recommendations from guidebooks and be willing to point lots. The fast food in Japan is good value and tasty - *gyudon*, *yaki niku*, *ramen*, *udon* and *katsudon* are a few recommendations. Lunch times can be busy in these places as eating out is an urban salaryman's treat. Upon entering a restaurant, don't be alarmed when the staff shout greetings of *irashaimase* (welcome) at you - they will then ask how many people you need a table for.

Vegetarian and Vegan food is becoming easier to find with a trend for plant-based options in many restaurants and cafés. Nevertheless, Japanese food mainly contains meat or fish, if it is not stated as vegetarian or vegan it's best to check.

Useful tips

- Try to visit markets and department store food floors at closing time when they reduce the price of food.
- Street vendors sell good priced take away bento meals too, so eating in Japan need not be expensive.

Health and Safety Aspects/Emergencies

Although Japan comes out in many surveys as one of the safest countries in the world, there is still crime and the need to exercise caution when carrying money and travelling alone.

Things to be aware of

- Any form of drug use or possession is severely punishable in Japan
- Earthquakes are a fairly common occurrence in Japan and there are various websites with information on what to do in such cases. There is a [free app](#) that is connected to the Japan Tourism Agency that will notify you of earthquake and tsunami alerts.
- The British Embassy in Tokyo and the Consulate in Osaka both have emergency helplines.
- The emergency number to call for police is 110, and 119 for fire and ambulance. The Tokyo International Communication Committee has useful links on what to do in an emergency.
- Japan has an advanced healthcare sector and there are several English-speaking doctors, especially in the main urban areas. Japan Health Information (JHI) and the JNTO websites have up-to-date information on access to healthcare and what to do if you are ill.

Other Useful Information

Business Attire

Although things are changing slowly, it is still quite normal, especially in very corporate environments, for people to dress conservatively in Japan. Of course, different industries may have more relaxed dress codes but it is advisable to err on the conservative side when making your first visit and avoid extremely bright or casual clothes. Tights may be an option for women, given that you may be expected to take your shoes off in some restaurants, and clean and matching socks are a good idea for men.

Weather

The weather can have an effect on your business trip, depending on where and when you go to Japan. Summer can be incredibly humid and although the government launched an annual “cool biz” initiative where workers can take their ties off and wear shorter sleeved shirts at certain times of the year, it can be very uncomfortable moving around major cities at this time. Most shops and restaurants are air-conditioned in the summer. The Japan Meteorological Agency has an English page with reliable forecasts and there are several apps available to download. You can buy incredibly cheap plastic umbrellas at most convenience stores, and most hotels, shops and offices have plastic holders you are supposed to put them in before entering the shop.

English Language Magazines

There are also English magazines you can find in the English language sections of bookshops, and most of them have websites too. Metropolis magazine and Kansai Scene have good articles relevant to the expat community, including information on local restaurants and what's on.

Smoking

Smoking in bars, café's and trains has only recently been phased out. You may still encounter some bars accepting smokers, and some cafes may still have a separate smoking room. Smoking is banned on the street in some urban areas and is strictly forbidden on the metro. Look out for the universal no smoking signs or the Japanese characters - 禁煙. There are often sealed smoking rooms in shopping centres and cordoned off smoking areas on some main streets.

Voltage and plugs

The sockets are flat two-pin – so bring the relevant adapter. It is important to know that the voltage in Japan is different to the UK. Be warned: some electrical appliances may not work in Japanese hotels, especially those that have a high-power usage.

Japanese Language

The Japanese written language uses 4 character sets-the 2 phonetic ones are *hiragana* and *katakana*, *kanji* uses Chinese characters and *romaji* uses roman characters to spell out Japanese words. *Romaji* is used widely in stations and airports in Japan so it is not necessary to learn the characters before you go.

However, it is well worth learning the 5 basic vowel sounds as they are so much easier than English vowel sounds and once you know them, you can pronounce most *hiragana* and *katakana* words easily and impress your hosts using the useful phrases below. As a general pronunciation guide, a is pronounced as 'ah' between the 'a' in "father" and the one in "dad", i as in 'eat', u as in 'oo' in soon, e as in 'hay', without rounding off with the y and o as in 'oh'. All *hiragana* characters end with one of these vowel sounds apart from 'n'. All the consonants resemble the English version apart from 'r', which is a rolled combination of r, l and d. In *romaji*, some vowels are elongated either by adding – after the vowel or above it ~.

Please be aware that since there are fewer sounds than in the English language, some foreign names may be difficult to pronounce in Japanese. If possible, get your name translated into *katakana* on your business card. Some people attempt to use *kanji* for their name as it looks very impressive but be warned - each *kanji* has at least two alternative pronunciations and may have certain connotations-some more desirable than others.

There are many layers of language used in Japan depending on your status, who you are talking to you (your senior or junior) and in some cases, on whether you are a man or a woman. The basic rule is to use humble language when referring to yourself or your family and honorific when talking to someone else. Don't worry though as a beginner you won't be expected to master the finer details. The Japanese are very appreciative of any attempt to speak their language-try to take praise on your linguistic skills at face value though!

Useful Phrases for Business

<i>Hiragana</i>	<i>Romaji</i>	<i>English</i>
1) よろしくおねがいします	yoroshiku onegaishimasu	Please treat me well
2) はじめまして	hajimemashite	Nice to meet you
3) _____と もうします	_____ to mo-shimasu	My name is _____
4) _____です	_____ desu	My name is _____
5) すみません	Sumimasen	Excuse me
6) ごめんなさい	Gomennasai	Sorry
7) わたしはイギリスじんです	watashi wa igirisu jin desu	I am British
8) ありがとう ございます	arigato- gozaimasu	Thank you very much
9) どうも	do-mo	Thanks
10) どうぞ	do-zo	Please/Here you Go/Go Ahead
11) どいたしまして	doitashimashite	You are welcome
12) _____は どこですか？	_____ wa doko desu ka?	Where is the _____?
13) おげんきですか？	o genki desu ka?	How are you?
14) げんきです	genki desu	I'm fine.
15) はい	hai	Yes
16) いいえ	iie	No
17) いらっしゃいませ	irasshaimase	Welcome
18) いただきます	itadakimasu	Bon appétit
19)おいしいですね	oishi- desu ne	It's delicious
20) ごちそうさまでした	gochiso-sama deshita	Thank you for the food
21) おつかれさまでした	o tsukare sama deshita	Thank you for your hard work
22) おはようございます	ohayo- gozaimazu	Good Morning
23) こんにちは	konnichiwa	Hello
24) こんばんは	konbanwa	Good Evening
25) おやすみなさい	oyasuminasai	Goodnight
26) さよなら	sayonara	Goodbye
27) じゃね	ja ne	See you later (casual)
28) またね	mata ne	See you later

29) えいごをはなしますか？	eigo o hanasemasu ka?	Do you speak English?
30) にほんごをはなせません	nihongo o hanasemasen	I don't understand Japanese
31) わかりますか？	wakarimasu ka?	Do you understand?
32) わかりません	wakarimasen	I don't understand
33) わかりました	wakarimashita	I understand
34) むずかしい	muzukashi-	difficult
35) すごい	sugoi	amazing
36) たのしい	tanoshi-	enjoyable
37) おもしろい	omoshiroi	interesting
38) あつい	atsui	hot
39) さむい	samui	cold
40) そうですね	so-desu ne	I see/I am listening

Notes on useful phrases

1) This is the most commonly used phrase in Japan and used very often in business and when conveying to the other person you are somehow in their debt. You also hear it used at the end of self-introductions.

3) This is a very polite way of introducing yourself.

4) This is the most common way acceptable from a non-native speaker.

9) This is a casual way of saying thank you, often used by men, but also has other uses.

14) The Japanese rarely use this as a direct no - there are many indirect ways to refuse things in Japanese!

17) You will most likely hear this when entering a shop, restaurant or bar. The owners usually shout it out.

21) This is usually said at the end of a hard day's work/at the end of doing business.

22) Good morning is used until about 11 am, then hello and from about 6pm, good evening.

26) There are many ways of saying goodbye depending on context-this is used especially when departing is final.

40) Often used in conversations to indicate that someone is listening. Desu ne can also be added to adjectives - "atsui desu ne" means "it's hot isn't it."

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