

General Travel Information : JAPAN

For essential information about traveling to Japan, we recommend this extensive website (in English).
www.info.go.jp/eng/arrange/essential/index.html

Below, some very important basic tips to help you prepare for your trip.

World Time: GMT +9 hrs

For example: **Nov 3** at 7:30 **AM** in JAPAN is **Nov 2** at 6:30 **PM** EST in North America, or 5:30 PM Central, 4:30PM Mountain, 3:30PM PST. When traveling to Japan from North America, you lose one day and coming back you gain one day.

Country telephone code for Japan: 81

Making calls: Calls made from hotel rooms can be extremely expensive compared to phone card calls. We can help you figure out which type* of phone card to purchase and how to use it (*more than one kind of service/phone). Grey-colored international pay phones can be found at hotels and many public places.

Suggestion: Before your trip, check whether your home/business international or long-distance carrier provides a free international-access-number that you can dial from Japan (often used with a password). You may also want to explore Skype or other VOIP (Voice Over Internet Phone) – these are free as long as you have an internet connection.

Climate / Clothing: Temperatures in Okinawa will be warm during the day, averaging high 70s. As we travel north, especially in Nara and Tokyo areas, temps may be cooler, in low 50s. A light jacket layered over a sweater would be appropriate. There may be some rainy days. Handkerchiefs come in handy, as do packets of tissues when dining in casual restaurants or for drying hands in washrooms. Try wearing comfortable pants or skirts in case we need to sit on a *tatami* mat floor.

Shoes and Socks/Stockings: Shoes should be comfortable for walking. We recommend easy to slip-on/off shoes or sandals when visiting homes/temples/shrines. Wearing socks or stockings is recommended over bare feet. Inside Japanese buildings, slippers are often provided and can be worn anywhere except on *tatami* mats (stockinged feet okay). Socks may be worn if it's difficult to walk in Japanese slippers.

Sitting on the floor: It is customary to sit on the floor inside Japanese homes/temples/etc. If you will need a back support when sitting on the floor or if you will need a stool to sit on, please let us know in advance.

Food: We have arranged a wide variety of cuisine in both high and low styles, from Franco-Japonais, Okinawan, traditional Japanese *kaiseki* style to *bento* box lunch at a train station or pedestrian noodle lunch. Green tea (mostly bag) and coffee (mostly instant) with hot water are provided at most hotel rooms.

Awamori, Shouchuu, and Sake: **Awamori** (___) is an alcoholic beverage indigenous and unique to Okinawa. It is made from rice and, like shochu, is a product of distillation, not of brewing (like sake).

Awamori is typically 60 proof (30% alcohol), although "export" brands (including brands shipped to mainland Japan) are increasingly 50 proof (25%). Awamori is aged to improve its flavor and mellowness. Some brands of awamori (notably Hanazke) are 120 proof (60%) and will catch fire.

The most popular way to drink awamori is with water and ice. When served in a restaurant in Okinawa, it will nearly always be accompanied by a container of ice and carafe of water. Awamori can also be drunk straight, on the rocks, and in cocktails.

Sh_ch (___?) is a distilled beverage native to Japan. It is most commonly distilled from [barley](#), [sweet potatoes](#), or [rice](#). Typically, it contains 25% [alcohol by volume](#) (weaker than [whisky](#) or standard-strength [vodka](#) but stronger than [wine](#) and [sake](#)). **Sh_ch** is produced everywhere in Japan, yet the home of shochu is Kyushu island.^[1]

Money: Non-Japanese ATM cards do **NOT** work in most banks in Japan, the exceptions being CITI Bank and special ATM machines that are few and far between. So when you do encounter an ATM that accepts your card, keep this in mind. There are also Seven Bank ATMs located within the popular 7-Eleven stores spread across Japan. Check the compatibility of your cards. www.sevenbank.co.jp/intlcard/index2.html

Travelers checks or cash foreign currency can be exchanged at most hotels. Credit cards can be used at major stores and restaurants but smaller restaurants and shops only take Japanese yen/cash.

Note: When borrowing money from someone in the group, we ask you to exchange a written 'I.O.U.' with date and name.

Shopping: Although most stores do not offer this service, a few stores may be able to process Sales Tax Waiver Forms for purchases above a certain amount. This form requires your passport. For a reasonable charge, your purchase can be shipped from most anywhere in Japan to your hotel in Tokyo, the last stop before going home. Some places such as the Benesse House Museum Shop or bookstores will sea-mail books/catalogs to your home address, but be sure to insure it. If your package is damaged upon its arrival, refuse the delivery and proceed with your insurance claim. Some hotels will help you with packaging (there is a charge for the box, etc) and with shipping.

For those going to Kyoto: At the old Nishiki market, you can purchase traditional Japanese cooking knives from a famous Japanese kitchen supply store and have them inscribed, but that shop only takes CASH. They also sharpen traditional knives etc. on premises.

Baggage: 2 pieces of baggage per person will be transferred on certain days to our next destination. We will clarify this on the detailed itinerary you will receive in Tokyo. There is a small charge for baggage transfer beyond 2 pieces. Be sure to bring a lightweight overnight bag. We also suggest bringing lightweight, expandable and reusable shopping bags for shopping.

Tips and Tolls: Tips for porters, drivers, and tour guide(s) are included as well as tolls and parking fee on the activities mentioned in the tour itinerary; however, travelers do leave small change and modest tips for taxi drivers or massage therapists or room maids at a Japanese inn or *ryokan*. Past experience shows Japanese room maids are thrilled with personal gifts (see below).

Taxis: On your own, except where mentioned in the tour itinerary. In some instances, however, the group may decide to use taxis to avoid a strenuous walk or cumbersome public transportation. Taxi doors are automatic and are controlled by the driver. Keep away from the door and do not try to open or close it by hand. The door will swing open toward you. Step in, then let the driver close the door. When you arrive at your destination, the door will open automatically. You should not be surprised if the driver does not come out to help you load or unload baggage. All taxis run by meter.

Traffic and Traffic Lights: No jaywalking on red lights. They drive on the left side of the street, please look on your left first when crossing the street.

Personal gifts: Gift giving is an important part of Japanese custom and requires cultural sensibility and understanding of social accord. Jack and Yoshiko will present some gifts to appropriate hosts on behalf of the Long House Reserve Group, however it is advisable for an individual member to carry some items to show a token of appreciation for kindness extended to him/her when the occasion arises. Your gracious gesture is always reciprocated with happy surprise and opens more dialogue.

The suggested items include: something pertaining to where you live such as postcards, placemats and dish cloths with local sites; local sport team's or University memorabilia; local product or assortment of chocolate; exhibition catalogs or outdated special interest magazines on crafts, art, nature; and small exquisite hand craft items or interesting textiles.

Examples of well received gifts in the past: a small art piece made by the artist herself; a Brazilian member once carried a bag of small, polished gem stones/pebbles and let the recipient choose and put in a small gift bag; a small container of maple syrup from a local producer (real maple syrup is sometimes never heard of but many Japanese like 'hotcake

with syrup'); coolest/wild American T-shirts often found at flea markets or secondhand shops; music CDs such as American Blues and Jazz (not for everyone but you will be surprised by their popularity in Japan); quality organic coffee for filter; African trade beads and metal artifacts and handmade textiles such as Kuba raffia velvet and indigo dyed narrow strips; handmade patchwork potholders.

Appropriate packaging is always appreciated. Some gift bags or wraps can be packed separately to keep them fresh. A Danish member once folded glossy magazine pages into origami modules and combined them to create an impressive and well-received package.

Calling cards/ Business cards: It is important you carry them. It is considered impolite not to give your card upon first meeting someone, especially if that person gives you a card and you do not reciprocate. It would be helpful if cards are bilingual; if not, you may want to have someone write your name in Japanese *katakana* so they know how to call you. Yoshiko or our tour guide will help you decipher the Japanese business cards you receive. It's handy to have a business card holder (can be purchased at Muji shop in Tokyo or stationary store). It's helpful to note the date and place on each card as you receive it.

Personal Photo Album or Catalog and Slides: As a nice conversation piece, you may want to bring a small photo album of your home/ office/ studio/ family or a small portfolio or catalog of your business products, artwork. Pictures and maps of where you live are of great interest to Japanese. We can share all this with the group as well. We may have an occasion or two to view slides from our group and local guests. If you would like, please bring up to a dozen.

Electricity: Usual voltage is 100 AC, 50 cycles in Tokyo and most other areas; 110 AC, 60 cycles in Kyoto. Wall plugs are flat, two pronged American type. Most American appliances work in Japan, but may run more slowly.

Hotel Safe: Keep valuables in the safes made available in guest rooms or at the front desk. Just remember not to leave your items behind!

Photocopy of passport: Keep this in your luggage.