Preparing for your trip to Japan

Adventures in the Japanese countryside
Preparing for your trip

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Timetable for travellers

Please check the following list of things to do in the weeks before your trip. If you remember to do the tasks at the right time your tour will run more smoothly.

When you book

- Inform us of any dietary restrictions - it may not be possible to add special requests at a later stage (please see the section below on dietary restrictions).

As soon as you receive our booking acknowledgement

- Ensure that you have given us all relevant personal details.
- Check that your passport is valid.

2 months before departure

- Pay your final balance.
- Check the clothing and equipment list. Contact us if you need any help or advice.

6 weeks prior to departure

- If required, arrange a dental/medical check-up, and arrange prescriptions if required.
- Arrange travel to the airport, making sure you have a contingency plan in place in case of delays or cancellations. Arrange airport parking if required.

2 weeks prior to departure

- Purchase Japanese Yen cash if you prefer to buy from a supplier at home - remember that most cash machines/ATMs in Japan do not accept foreign cards.
Last minute checks

- Passport
- Flight tickets (check flight details)
- Insurance certificate - remember to carry this with you
- Spending money
- Is your baggage within weight limits?
- Baggage labels
- Any sharp objects, such as knives, are packed in main hold baggage
- Guidebooks, maps etc.
- Clothing and equipment

Tickets

Please make sure you have confirmed, round-trip/return air tickets to Japan. When checking in for your flight, most airlines will require you to have either a return ticket, or at least a ticket to a third destination following your stay in Japan. They may deny you boarding if you only have a one-way ticket.

Visas

Nationals of EU countries, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand plus some other countries do not require visas for Japan. Please see the website of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to see if your country is exempt from applying for a visa in advance; http://www.mofa.go.jp/. It is your responsibility to check that you do not need a visa. Oku Japan/belocal.jp cannot accept responsibility if you are denied entry into Japan. You will be given a landing card on your flight to Japan on which you should fill in the address of your first hotel in Japan.

Money

Cash is still the best form of payment to carry in Japan, particularly outside big cities. Smaller shops, restaurants, and bars will usually only accept cash. Japan is a very safe country to travel in, and there is very little street crime. Many Japanese people routinely carry large amounts of cash with them. Furthermore, it can be time-consuming to exchange overseas currency even in Tokyo and Kyoto, especially anything other than USD, AUD, Euros and GBP. The best option is to purchase Japanese Yen cash before you leave home, or on arrival at the airport in Japan. Regular Japanese bank ATMs will not usually accept overseas bank cards or credit cards, although there are some ATMs in large cities that will (note that your credit card issuer will normally charge you a fee for taking out cash on your credit card). Some Post Offices as well as
convenience store ATMs will also give you Yen cash with an overseas card. We recommend you contact your bank prior to travel to advise them of your dates in Japan so they are aware of your plans and do not erroneously block transactions.

**How much money to bring**

You will need to have cash to pay for lunches, dinners which are not included in your tour, drinks with meals, snacks and any gifts you wish to buy. We recommend JPY5,000 per day. Please make sure you have this at the start of your tour.

**Insurance**

It is a requirement of our tours that you are covered by travel insurance for the duration of your trip. You are free to purchase this insurance from any supplier you choose, however for those on walking trips it should cover activities including walking/hiking and emergency evacuation in the event of injury while in mountainous areas. Please bring your certificate of insurance with you.

**Health and Safety**

Japan is one of the safest places to travel in the world and medical services are of a high standard, but it is always wise to be prepared. As already noted, it is essential to take out full medical insurance when visiting Japan, as there are no reciprocal health care agreements between Japan and other countries. Whilst certificates of vaccination are not normally required, travellers who have passed through infected countries may be asked to report to the health office on arrival. The authorities are scrupulous about travellers who have passed through areas with yellow fever. Some of our tours visit remote areas and in the event of serious illness or injury, evacuation could be difficult, so we discourage anyone with serious medical problems from joining our trips. If you are in any doubt about your ability to join a tour, please consult us and your doctor. We recommend that everyone has a physical and dental check-up. Problems such as fillings coming loose and toothache could be troublesome.

**Medicines**

It is advisable to bring with you any medications that you may need while in Japan. Western brands of most medicines are often not available in Japan. Although there are generally good Japanese brands, they are often expensive. Make sure to bring any prescriptions you may have and make sure you know the generic name for the medicine.
Please note: It is illegal to bring over-the-counter medicines containing pseudoephedrine or codeine into Japan.

Vaccinations

No vaccinations are required for entry into Japan.

Water

Water from taps in Japan is safe to drink, although bottled water is widely available if you prefer. Avoid drinking from streams and rivers.

Diseases

There is no malaria in Japan; however mosquitoes can be a mild nuisance in the summer months. It is best to bring an insect repellent if travelling during this period. The risk of travellers acquiring other mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue fever or Japanese encephalitis has been extremely low; you may wish to consult your health professional at home for the latest advice.

Dietary restrictions

We encourage clients to sample the full range of food provided by the inns on our tours whenever possible. The inns are proud of their set menus, which usually consist of a multitude of carefully-balanced and painstakingly-produced dishes. If you are travelling with others, you can easily swap dishes between you at mealtimes so that each member of your party eats what they like best.

Inns are usually happy to provide meat-free meals if we request them at the time of booking. We can also request meals which are meat-free and without fish and seafood, though fish and seafood feature heavily in the standard Japanese diet. If requesting meals without fish and seafood, please tell us if you can still accept soups and sauces containing the traditional fish stock called dashi. It is hard for the inns to produce meals without dashi and choices for vegans are limited.

For those with an allergy to wheat gluten, eating in Japan can be problematic. Soy sauce and miso (used in miso soup) contain gluten. While tofu does not contain gluten, it often is served with soy sauce.

Many inns will do their best to cater for special diets, but please submit requests to Oku Japan at the time of booking. It may not be possible to accommodate requests
made afterwards. Please understand that some smaller inns may not have the facilities necessary to cook for those with special diets.

Looking after yourself when travelling

A few simple precautions will help you stay well on your tour. Japan is not only a safe destination, it also very clean. Personal and public hygiene is an important feature of Japanese society.

- Make sure you hydrate well before, during, and after your international flights. Dehydration can contribute to constipation during the first few days of your trip. Alcohol tends to speed up dehydration, so compensate by drinking water or juice.
- June through September is hot in Japan, and winter can be very dry, so drink plenty of fluids during these seasons.

Climate

Japan has four distinct seasons, and the weather and temperatures change with the seasons.

March is the end of winter with daytime highs of around 15°C but cold nights. There may be snow in the mountain villages. April is very pleasant, with daytime highs of around 15-20°C. Towards the end of May it can become quite hot at lower altitudes (up to about 30°C). The rainy season lasts from the middle of June through to mid-July. You can expect daytime temperatures of about 15-20°C in October, and daytimes are often pleasant and warm into November. Short tropical cyclones can hit Japan between June and October. Mid-July to mid-September is very warm and very humid in most parts of Japan

What to bring

Baggage

We suggest a main, lockable suitcase on wheels or larger rucksack, and a day pack for personal items for sightseeing/walking. The day pack should be at least shower-proof, and if in doubt we recommend using a waterproof stuff bag or plastic bag to keep the contents dry in case of a rain shower.

It is important in Japan to travel light. Buses and trains have limited luggage space and travelling by train often requires carrying luggage up stairs at stations. Japanese
ryokan and minshuku provide a robe (yukata) to wear in the evening, as well as all amenities. Your trip will be more enjoyable and stress-free if you limit the luggage you bring.

On guided tours your guide will arrange baggage forwarding for you. If you are on one of our self-guided tours you may also wish to take advantage of baggage forwarding. Several companies in Japan offer a fast and efficient system of baggage forwarding in Japan ('Takkyubin' is the Japanese brand name of the best-known service). They are reliable, safe and economical. You can send luggage from most hotels and from many ryokan to any address in Japan. The hotel concierge will help you arrange the baggage forwarding and tell you how much to pay. Some smaller local accommodations may not offer the service, but they will direct you to the nearest location where the service is available. When we send you your final itinerary, about three weeks before your departure, we will suggest the occasions where you may choose to forward your baggage; if you are travelling light, then you may not need to use the service.

You need the address to which you are sending your luggage, preferably written in Japanese. Delivery normally takes a minimum of 24 hours (but a minimum of 72 hours to an airport location – the luggage delivery companies have counters at airports where you can collect your bags and then check them in for your homeward flight). Please note you cannot receive your luggage on the same day that you send it, but apart from this limitation, you can specify the time and date you would like your luggage to be delivered. Please make sure that the delivery slip clearly shows your name and the date you will check-in, so the accommodation to which you send the luggage knows when you will arrive.

Most clients on self-guided tours send the luggage on to the next large city (you can specify the exact date and time of delivery up to a week or two ahead), and walk with their day pack. Accommodations provide amenities such as soap, shampoo, hairdryers, and cotton robes called yukata, which you can wear around the accommodation, so you only need to bring your hiking clothing. In addition, shoes are not worn inside, so extra footwear is not needed.

Please note the following general rules when using the baggage forwarding service:

1. Please do not put any breakable items in your luggage such as glass or pottery.
2. Do not send open bags or loose items. Everything should be in a closed suitcase, pack or bag.
3. You pay per bag, so it is more economical to send one larger bag rather than several smaller ones.

All the hotels and inns you will experience on your Oku Japan tour will provide towels. Some will provide towels of a size familiar to us in the west; some Japanese
Inns may simply provide the regular, small Japanese towels about 75cm x 30cm (30 inches x 12 inches). These towels are usually printed with the inn's name and you are usually welcome to take these small towels away with you as a souvenir of your stay. Once you become used to them, you will appreciate their convenience and practicality for travelling. But if you wish to guarantee a larger towel on every night of your tour, then you might like to bring one from home.

Japan is liberal when it comes to clothing, and trendy and/or high tech gear is perfectly normal.

Phones and gadgets

Only ‘3G’ or ‘4G’ phones such as iPhones, Android smartphones, and newer models of Nokia and other manufacturers’ phones will work in Japan. Depending on your carrier, you will ‘roam’ with either NTT Docomo or Softbank on their 3G or 4G networks. If you have an older ‘2G’ phone, it will not work in Japan.

Please note that SIM cards are not available in Japan from the major carriers. B-mobile now offers ‘data SIM’ cards that will work with unlocked overseas phones, tablets, or ‘Mifi’ personal wifi devices. These data SIMs will enable the use of data (internet) but NOT voice. i.e. you will be able to send and receive emails, browse the internet, or use Skype, but not make or receive normal phone calls. When bringing your own phone you will need to use it with your SIM card from home, i.e. ‘roaming’. This can be very expensive.

It is possible to rent Japanese mobile phones, and have them ready when you arrive, usually at Haneda, Narita or Kansai Airports. The rental company will also give you the phone number before you leave home so you can tell friends and family.

Prepaid mobile phones were previously an economical option for visits of over a few weeks or so, but now they are no longer available to tourists and require photo identification showing a Japanese address.

Footwear

The type of footwear you use for walking or hiking is important. You should use boots that you have broken in and know are comfortable. Leather or fabric (e.g. suede/Gore-Tex) boots are appropriate for trips that involve walking or hiking. Ankle support is important, so trainers or similar footwear are not recommended for the longer hikes. Trainers are fine for city walking.
General advice about air travel and baggage allowance

- Confirm your check-in baggage allowance
- Airlines generally allow only one item of hand baggage
- You must bear the cost of any excess baggage charges
- Electrical equipment should not be packed in your main baggage
- Dangerous items, such as penknives and other sharp, lethal, or hazardous implements, cannot be packed in your hand baggage
- Fragile or valuable items should be carried in your hand baggage
- Do not leave baggage unattended at airports or elsewhere
- Never carry anything onto an aircraft for someone else
- If you are at risk from deep vein thrombosis (clotting in the leg veins), you might need to wear compression stockings or take medication. Check the appropriate steps to take with your doctor. Stretch your legs and take the occasional walk around during your flight, and drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids.
## Packing list

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents</th>
<th>✓</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passport</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Air tickets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel insurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel Itinerary</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cash and credit cards</td>
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### Clothing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Light-weight trousers or shorts for walking (tours from April to mid-October)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium-weight trousers (tours from mid-October through to March)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>T-shirts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirts</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comfortable walking shoes or lightweight trail boots</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Trainers/sandals or comfortable shoes for cities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light-weight waterproof jacket (ideally breathable) - tours from May through to mid-October</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium-weight waterproof jacket (ideally breathable) - tours from mid-October through to April</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleece top (Polartec 200 or equivalent weight) - tours from October through to April</td>
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<tr>
<td>Underwear (add thermal base layers for December, January, February)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun hat (tours from April through to mid-October)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smart/casual clothes for air travel and in cities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloves (tours from mid-October through to March)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm hat (tours from mid-October through to March)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandana/handkerchief (in case public toilets have no hand drying facilities)</td>
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### Personal items

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<th>Item</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toothbrush/toothpaste</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Toiletry kit - tissues, shaving kit, deodorant, moisturiser, flannel/washcloth</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunscreen</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Insect repellant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medicines and prescriptions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ear plugs and eye mask</td>
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<tr>
<td>First-aid kit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel wash</td>
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### Equipment

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<th>Item</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camera plus charger, extra film or memory cards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electrical plug/socket adapter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunglasses</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Water bottle</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Folding umbrella</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking poles (a personal choice; most clients manage without)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small torch/flashlight</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Preparing for your trip

Preparing well is the key to a successful trip in Japan. This handbook includes tips on money, health & safety and what to bring.