

*Travel Information Packet with  
History for your trip to Japan*



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# Transportation

## Train Travel in Japan

Japan has one of the most thorough rail networks in the world, and that network is constantly expanding. It is highly automated, drivers are punctual, and train lines reach to all corners of the country. Furthermore, there are various types of train travel to choose from, including high speed *Shinkansen* (bullet trains) that reach speeds of 188 mph (300 km/hour), special limited expresses, regular expresses, overnight trains, local trains, subways, sightseeing and historical trains, streetcars and even cable cars. Most rails are operated by JR (Japan Rail) but there are also quite a few Private Railway companies. Your JR Rail Pass will only work on JR trains and buses. If you are not sure if you can use your JR Rail pass please ask a station employ.

### JR Rail Pass (if your tour includes one)

After you arrive in Japan, you will need to turn in the “Exchange Order” we sent you to receive your JR Rail Pass. This can be done at Kansai International Airport and you will need to present the staff with your passport indicating that you have entered Japan with a “temporary visitor status” (in other words, as tourists) and are eligible for the JR Rail Pass. Your JR Rail Pass will allow you to use any JR train or bus except for the “*Nozomi*” Trains on the Shinkansen. When you take a *Shinkansen* (Bullet Train) you will need to ride on a “*Hikari*”.

When at a JR station, please note that certain ticket gates are staffed with station employees, and you are required to show your JR Pass to the employee rather than use the automated ticket gate. To make a seat reservation for a limited express or *Shinkansen* (bullet train), please bring your pass and go to a Travel Service Center or a Reservation Office (*Midori-no-madoguchi*) at a JR station. You can see their sign to the right.

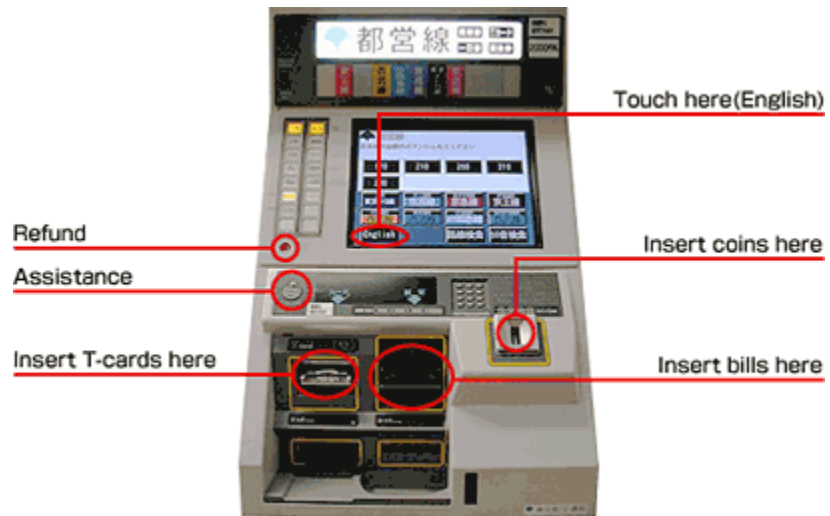


When riding the *Shinkansen*, you don't have to make a seat reservation and can ride in one of the train cars labeled *jiyuseki* (non-reserved); however, you may have to stand if the train is crowded, and if you reserve a seat before the train arrives you are guaranteed a place to sit and you have a good chance of being able to sit by any friends or family you may be traveling with. *Shiteiseki* means reserved seat in Japanese. There are special cars known as “Green Cars” that have luxury seating; unfortunately, you cannot reserve seats in these cars with the standard JR Rail Pass. Also be aware that there are smoking and non-smoking cars. Some limited expresses have only reserved seats, while some have both reserved and non-reserved.

Please note that you may be asked by a conductor to show your ticket/rail pass while riding the train. For more information on limitations, terms and usage of the JR Rail Pass, please visit: <http://www.japanrailpass.net/eng/en001.html>

## Using Ticket Vending Machines on Private Railways

Ticket machines on Private Railways vary in style but are fairly straightforward, and some even have English menus but they can be confusing the first time you use one. If you are not sure what to do please ask a station employee for help.



To purchase a ticket from a Private Railway company look above the ticket vending machine at the map to determine the costs. Next, insert money (coins or bills, although some machines won't accept big bills) and push the corresponding fare button, which will either appear on a screen or on buttons that lights up once the money is inserted.

When you go through the ticket gate, put your ticket into the slot and pick it up on the other side (do not forget it). Ticket gates are often marked with an “X” or an “O”; the former cannot be used, as it is for people going the other way through the gates, so please use the gates marked with an “O”. When exiting through the ticket gate at your destination, put the ticket in the slot and walk through - the ticket will not be returned to you as you leave. If you try to leave a ticket gate, but it closes because you have not paid the proper fare, take your ticket (it will be returned to you) to the fare adjustment machine (which usually has an English language option), put the ticket in and pay the balance shown on the screen to receive a new ticket, which can be used to leave through the ticket gate. Japanese people do this all the time so please do not feel embarrassed if the machine beeps at you.

## Determining Which Trains to Take

The train system in Japan can take you to almost any place in Japan if you know which trains to take. For years we had to look up train times and routes by hand but now we have the internet. The following is my favorite website for figuring out how to get to where I want to go in Japan. All you need to do is put your starting station name in one box and then your destination station in the second box. Choose the time and day you want to leave or arrive and click the search button. This will even tell you if it is a JR train or a private railway.

<https://world.jorudan.co.jp/mln/>

## Taxis

Taxis are a great way to get to and from your hotels or ryokans from the train station especially when you have your luggage. They are clean and not overly expensive.

## **Buses and Streetcars**

Bus travel provides a cheap alternative to trains for long distance travel at the expense of longer travel times. There are a variety of companies that operate highway buses, which often depart from major rails stations. Furthermore, buses allow access to some less populated places that trains do not go to. All seats for highway buses must be reserved ahead of time, and tickets are handed to the driver upon boarding the bus. The JR Rail Pass can be used with JR highway buses.

There are also local and tourist buses in certain cities; for example, it is often much easier to get around Kyoto by city bus, and Nara has a loop line bus for tourists that goes around to many the popular UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Depending on the city, you will enter the bus through either the front or the back (just watch what other passengers do if you are confused). While some buses have set fares, others have fares determined by the distance traveled. Airport buses are also convenient because it can be easier in some cases to board a single bus rather than make train transfers with heavy luggage.

When riding streetcars, you usually enter the vehicle through the rear door and pay into a fare box next to the driver when you get off. As opposed to standard trains, which base the fare on distance traveled, streetcars often have a single, set fare for any distance.

# Money

## **How to Access Money in Japan**

Japan is a cash society, and while some large department stores, restaurants and hotels in large urban areas accept credit or debit cards, most expenses must be paid in cash. Therefore, it is important to bring some money with you when you first enter the country (international airports like Narita and Kansai have currency exchange banks located in the airport) and have a plan for getting money while you are traveling.

## **Post Office ATMs**

Using Post offices ATMs is a very good way to withdraw money while in Japan because they accept foreign VISA, Plus, MasterCard, Euro Card, Maestro, Cirrus, American Express, Diners Card, and JCB cards; there are few other types of ATMs that can be used to withdraw money from foreign bank accounts. Also, Post office ATMs have English menus. Please note that these ATMs are not accessible 24 hours a day - smaller post offices are usually open from 9:00 am till 16:00 (4:00 pm) on weekdays, and larger post offices are often open until 21:00 (9:00 pm) on weekdays and have limited or no weekend hours.

Before departing your country, please make sure that your card can be used in Japan and you know its secret 4-digit or 6-digit PIN number. Also, it is a good idea to check what fees and daily or monthly limits are associated with international withdrawals. These details can be ascertained by contacting your bank. Your bank or credit card company may also be able to tell you the locations of international ATMs you can use in Japan.

## **Using Money in Japan**

Compared to some countries, people in Japan tend to carry larger amounts of cash, since they often have to pay for transportation, food and beverages, shopping, and even lodging in cash. Bills come in denominations of 10,000, 5,000, and 1,000 yen, and coins come in denominations of 500, 100, 50, 10, 5 and 1 yen.

Even though Japan is considered a very safe place for travelers, it is still a good idea to use a money belt or similar travel pouch. Losing your money, credit cards or passport while overseas can create a very stressful situation. You should also carry at least 1 credit card for emergencies. Visa and MasterCard are the most widely accepted cards while American Express is not.

## **Tipping**

Please note that it is not customary to tip in Japan, and that extra fees are often figured into restaurant bills as a substitute. Some nicer restaurants and hotels may add a 10% or 15% service charge to your bill so please ask if there is a service charge.

# Etiquette

In general, the Japanese are very polite to foreigners, who they see as guests, and also very forgiving when you make mistakes. There are, however, two points of etiquette which cannot be overlooked.

## **Unforgivables**

While most things are easily forgiven in Japan, certain points of etiquette must always be observed very carefully:

- Take Off your Shoes when entering a Japanese house. If you see shoes by the entry way then you will need to also take off your shoes. Japanese will not bend on this rule,
- Baths are for Soaking in, Not for Cleaning Yourself. You must wash your body and completely rinse off all soap before entering the bath. The same bath water is shared by all bathers and it is important to keep it clean.

## **Bowing**

When you first meet a Japanese person, a slight bow is usually the best way to greet them. Sometimes you will also shake hands, or shake hands instead of bowing, but it is best to let the Japanese person take the lead in this sense. Furthermore, if you are in business, it is common to exchange business cards with other businesspeople. Sometimes when you meet or get to know people, they will give you gifts – it is best to decline one or two times when they offer you a gift, in order not to seem too grasping.

## **Directness**

In general, Japanese try to avoid being too direct, especially when stating their opinions or criticizing others. Furthermore, they may give you many compliments for being able to use chopsticks or saying even a simple phrase in Japanese; in some countries, this would

be considered flattery and seem artificial, but in Japan it is common courtesy. When complimented, it is polite to downplay your abilities, saying things like “I’m not that good,” or “It’s nothing special”.

### **Sitting at a Traditional Table**

When seated at a low Japanese table on tatami mat flooring it is considered polite to sit *seiza*, which is when you sit with your legs tucked directly beneath you. If this is not possible or too uncomfortable it is fine to sit cross-legged. Most Japanese can only sit in *seiza* for 20 minutes or less. You may also ask for a special backrest which is like a chair without legs. If a chair is required then please ask your hostess. Please be careful and do not hurt yourself.

## **Ryokan Accommodations**

### **Introduction**

Staying at a *ryokan* (Japanese inn) is one of the best ways to connect with Japan and her rich culture. Each *ryokan* is unique and is generally family owned and operated. This means that the service you receive at one *ryokan* will be different at a different *ryokan*. This has good and bad points but overall the experience makes it worthwhile.



### **Heating/Air Conditioning**

*Ryokans*, like Japanese many homes, are not centrally heat but instead each room will have a separate heater/AC to control the temperature which is generally attached to the wall. In colder areas you may even find a portable heater in your room. If you are not sure how to use the heater or air conditioner please ask for help. Also keep in mind that if your room has a private bath and toilet that that room may not be heated or cooled. Hallways and other public areas also may not be heated or cooled.

### **Maintaining Tradition**

If you are staying at an older traditional *ryokan* please keep in mind that it may have been built before indoor plumbing and other modern conveniences were common in Japan. In order to maintain the traditional feel of the inn the current owner may have opted to not add new plumbing, sound proofing, wireless internet or other conveniences that you would find in a modern building. The room also might be a bit drafty and cold. These are all things that add to the charm and experience of staying in a traditional *ryokan*.

### **English**

All Japanese must take English while in school though the focus is on grammar and passing entrance exams. This means that most Japanese can read basic English but as many can speak fluently. The *ryokan* might not have English speaking staff but if you speak slowly without the use of slang or idioms you can generally be understood. If this does not work try writing what you want to say on a sheet of paper. You will also be

surprised at how well gestures communicate. Once again this is also part experience and something that should be looked at with an open mind and heart.

### **Security**

Unlike a large modern hotel, people off the street cannot just wander in to take a look around or use the bathroom. The feeling is kind of like a B&B in North America. The ryokan is reserved for guest (and their friends) who are staying at the ryokan. Because of this, and the general safety of Japan, many ryokan do not have locks on guest room doors. If you have valuables that you would like to keep in a safe please ask the front desk staff. Also many room will have a small safe for you to use.

### **Japanese Style Room**

Your room at the ryokan will be Japanese style meaning that the flooring will be *tatami* (reed mats). When you enter the room you will see a low table with cushions around it. Before you go to bed this table will be moved and your bedding will be prepared in the same location. Your room may contain some or all of the following, depending on the style, design, and expense of the ryokan.

- *agari-kamachi* - after opening the door guests step into this small area and take off their slippers (do not wear your slippers on the *tatami*)
- *shoji* - sliding Japanese doors that separate the *agari-kamachi* from the room
- *tatami* - reed mat flooring
- *zataku* – low, often wooden table
- *zabuton* - sitting cushions
- *futon* - sleeping quilts
- *tokonoma* - an ornamental alcove built into the wall, used for placing flower vases and hanging scrolls
- *oshiire* - a closet for futon sleeping quilts
- *engawa* - enclosed sitting area separated from the room by *shoji*

When you arrive at the ryokan, you may be asked to take off your shoes at the entrance and put on slippers, which are used for walking around inside the ryokan. Your shoes will be placed in the entrance when you want to go outside. If you want to take a short walk near the ryokan, you can also wear the *geta* (wooden clogs), which are sometimes provided for guests.

### **Entering the Room**

After you check in, follow your hostess to your room. When you get to your room, take off your slippers before you walk on the *tatami* (reed mat flooring). If your room has a private bath and/or toilet you may notice that there will be an extra set of slippers that are to be used only in the bathroom.

### **Settling In**

Your room may have a *tokonoma* (an alcove built into the wall used for placing flower vases and hanging scrolls), a enclosed sitting area separated by a *shoji* (sliding door), and several cushions for sitting. Your hostess will show you where to place your luggage. If it rains at night, please be sure to close the outside glass window. Sometimes a maid will



bring tea for you, and you can sit on the cushions, relax and enjoy your tea. The maids may enter your room either unannounced or after quickly knocking during your stay. This is a normal practice at some ryokans.

### **Ryokan Clothing** (if provided)

During your stay, a *yukata* or cotton robe may be provided for you to wear in your room, around the ryokan, and if you want, you can wear it together with your *geta* if you want to take a short walk near the ryokan. If it is cold outside, a *tanzen* (outer robe) may be provided to keep you warm (wear the *tanzen* over the *yukata*). You put the yukata on just like a robe but please make sure you wrap it left over right. The other way is reserved for deceased.

### **Bathing**

Bathing is a very important part of Japanese culture and many Japanese decided which ryokan they will stay at based on the baths that the ryokan offers. Remember that a bathtub in Japan is for soaking and not washing yourself. You must wash yourself and completely rinse off all soap before entering the bathtub.



Before dinner is a good time to take a bath. You may use the bath in your room if one is available, or else you can use the public bath in the ryokan. Personally I recommend using the ryokan's public bath.

When you arrive at the public bath, take off your clothes and leave them with your drying towel in the changing room. Take a small towel and go into the bathing room. The public bath is only for soaking your body, while cleaning your body is done in the area outside the bath. Depending on the ryokan, there may be small stools, soap, shampoo, and a mirror provided for the guests. When you have finished cleaning yourself and there is no soap left on your body, slowly step into the large bathtub. Be careful as these baths can be very hot! If the bath is too hot for you, try to enter it slowly and move as little as possible (the more you move, the more the water is stirred and the hotter it gets). If you have heart trouble or high blood pressure, do not stay in the water for more than a few minutes also please consult your doctor before coming to Japan. Japanese baths can be the best thing to relax after a long day of sightseeing.

All ryokans offer baths that are separated by gender but if bathing with strangers is not your thing then you can ask if the ryokan has a “family bath” where you can bathe in private. This is also nice for couples.

### **Dinner**

Dinners were first offered at ryokans starting back in the Edo period (1603-1867) when warlords were required to travel every other year between their domain and Edo (modern



Tokyo). The Shogun (Generalissimo), who lived in Edo, set up 5 major roads to make travel easier. Along the roads stations were established where travelers could get food and rest at ryokans. In the beginning the ryokans did not offer dinner so young samurai would wander the streets doing what young men do. When ask why they were wandering the streets they would reply that they were just looking for something to eat. Sometimes problems occurred so as a way to get everyone off the streets the Shogun required that all ryokans serve dinner. This got the problem off the streets and started a tradition where ryokans serve dinner. For many Japanese the dinner is the most important part of their stay at a ryokan.

Your dinner will be served either in your room or in the ryokan's dining room. If it is served in your room your maid will bring it to you. Generally this multi-course meal will be served all at once and there will be more than enough to fill even the largest of appetites. If you wish to have more food you may order it but please be aware that an extra charge will be levied. Also if you wish to have any other drinks besides tea there will be an extra charge. The ryokan will not mention the charge until you check out.

Once you have finished eating the maid will return to your room and will clear all the plates. Many times they will also set up your futons (sleeping quilts) at this time.

### **Breakfast**

After a good night sleep you will have breakfast. This is generally served in the ryokan's dining room and it is perfectly acceptable to wear your yukata. The breakfast will be Japanese style though the ryokan may offer a Western style breakfast. If you wish to have a Western style breakfast you must let them know at check in. If you wait until the morning they will not be able change the menu.

### **Front Desk and Curfews**

Front desks at ryokans generally close early as most ryokans are small and family owned. If there is no one at the front desk when you need someone just call out “Sumimasen” and someone will come, assuming that you are asking during normal hours. If you are planning to stay out late, please confirm the curfew time and if there is a way to enter the ryokan after the curfew.

### **Japanese Toilets**

There are two general types in Japan: the traditional Japanese-style toilet (or “squat toilet”) and Western-style toilet.

Often in public restrooms you will find Japanese-style toilets although in many tourist areas you may find at least one Western-style toilet. Hotels and department stores can also be a good place to find Western-style toilet.



Often public restrooms will not supply toilet paper so it is a good idea to carry some tissues with you. In busy cities you will find people handing out tissues with advertising on them and it is a good idea to take as many

as you can. Not only are the practical while in Japan they can also make fun mementos. You can also find tissue vending machines outside of many public toilets.

Here are some tips on how to use a Japanese-style toilet:

- Face the hood of the toilet
- Pull down your pants completely below your knees
- Squat down as closely to the hood as possible. If the toilet is elevated, you need to stand on a raised platform while squatting
- There is usually a small bar to hold on to if you have trouble keeping your balance

In a Japanese home or a ryokan, the toilet and the bathtub are often in separate rooms. If there is a toilet room, guests may find toilet slippers, which are to be worn only inside the toilet room. Leave your regular slippers outside, step inside the toilet room and immediately put on the toilet slippers. When you leave the toilet room, please leave the toilet slippers behind and change back into your regular slippers.

## **Smoking**

Japan is a land of smokers and JT (Japan Tobacco) which is the company that controls over 65% of the tobacco market is owned by the Japanese government so smoking is not discouraged. This means that most hotels and restaurants allow smoking and some do not even have non-smoking sections. If you request a non-smoking room we will do our very best to find one but this is not always possible. Hotels that do not have a non-smoking room available will offer a deodorizing service which helps a bit but you may still smell smoke. We always request non-smoking rooms but hotels often consider deodorized rooms and non-smoking rooms to be the same thing. Things are getting better but Japan is still a land of smokers. We appreciate your understanding.

## **Packing**

### **Luggage**

Most Japanese travel domestically with very small suitcases so it is hard to travel with large suitcases. We suggest you bring two smaller bags rather than one large bag. The luggage space in trains can sometimes be very small. Suitcases with wheels work well, just keep in mind there may be times when they will have to be carried up and down the stairs in train stations or ryokans. Backpacks also work well. We also suggest you bring a collapsible suitcase or duffel bag to carry home any souvenirs you may purchase in Japan. Please try and pack small and leave unnecessary belonging at home. Remember you will be carrying your own luggage throughout the tour and after a while you will feel every ounce. If you forget something you can always purchase it in Japan.

### **Clothing**

You are on vacation so dress comfortably. Casual clothing is fine unless you plan a special dinner someplace where you might want to dress up a bit. Shrines and temples do not have dress codes but since they are places of worship conservative clothing should be worn. The weather in Japan changes often so pack clothes that you can layer to make it easier to adjust your clothes to the weather.

Before you start packing please take a look on the internet to see what the weather is like. For Tokyo see <https://weather.com/en-GB/weather/today/l/JAXX0085:1:JA>

It is a good idea to carry a handkerchief while in Japan. Many restrooms in Japan don't have paper towels or hand dryers so you can use the handkerchief to dry your hands. Do not use this handkerchief to blow your nose as this is considered rude and unclean. Pocket tissues are also a good idea as some restrooms do not have toilet paper.

### **Shoes**

Japan is a land of walking so bring comfortable shoes that you can wear almost everyday. Also remember that it is custom to take off your shoes indoors so shoes that are easy to put on and take off are recommended. Also socks or stockings are a good idea.

### **Appliances/Electricity**

The voltage supply in Japan is 100V throughout the country though the frequency is different. In the eastern part (Tokyo, Yokohama), the frequency is 50 Hz and in the western part, (Osaka, Kyoto) it is 60 Hz. Thus a frequency converter must be used for sensitive equipment when traveling throughout the country. Most modern US appliances will work reasonably well in Japan, but you better check the specification on the back of your appliance or phone the distributor to make sure. For more information about electric appliances in Japan, please see: <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2225.html>

### **Calling Home**

Most tourists want to call home at least one time while they are in Japan but this is not always easy or cheap.

#### **Option 1 Use your cell phone in Japan...**

Many non-Japanese phones work in Japan but your carrier may charge you a data roaming charge which can be very expensive. We recommend setting your phone to airplane mode and turn on your WIFI. Please ask your hotel front desk where you can access free WIFI. Note: Even your cell phone provider says your phone will work in Japan please read all the fine print and understand what the actual costs are.

#### **Option 2 Use your hotel phone...**

Nowadays the in-room phones are mostly used for room service, wake up calls and emergencies. For an international phone call this option would work but this will be very expensive and we do not recommend it.

#### **Option 3 Renting a Cell Phone or Sim Card in Japan...**

This is a convenient alternative, you just pick up the rental phone at the airport when you arrive in Japan and drop it off on the way back home. However please be careful as the rental fee is usually very attractive but the calls can be very expensive and its not ideal for calling overseas. Many rent a phone companies charge over 100 yen per minute for outgoing domestic calls. Here is a list of rental cell phone companies:

<http://www.rentafonejapan.com/>

<http://www.myjapanphone.com/>

<http://www.jrcorp.com/>

[http://www.narita-airport.jp/en/guide/service/list/svc\\_19.html](http://www.narita-airport.jp/en/guide/service/list/svc_19.html)

(These are just listed for your convenience and not a recommendation of service, please research carefully.)

#### **Option 4 Use Skype or Facetime to call...**

If you are at a WIFI spot you can use your computer, smart phone (iPhone, Android...), or iPad to make free calls with Skype. You can also use Skype to make cheap calls to land lines around the world. At Japanese Guest Houses and Rediscover Tours we use Skype to contact each other between the US and Japan. It works great and if the person you are calling has Skype then it is all free. Once you are away from the WIFI area make sure that you put your smart phone or other device on airplane mode.

## Sightseeing Guidelines

### **Major Religions in Japan**

The two main religions of Japan are *Shinto*, the native religion based around nature and multiple gods, and Buddhism, imported from India through Korea and China. The following are brief descriptions of the two religions and explanations of what to do when visiting *Shinto* Shrines (*jinja*) and Buddhist Temples (*otera*).

### **Shintoism**

The Shinto religion is the native religion of Japan, and the word '*Shinto*' means 'way of the gods'. There are many *kami* (gods) and they often take the form of things close to life and nature such as trees, mountains, rivers, wind, rain, and fertility. People also become *kami* after they die and are worshiped as ancestral gods by their relatives.



Gate in front of a Shinto Shrine

In *Shinto*, people are believed to be essentially good. Therefore, the evil people do is caused by evil spirits. As a result, the purpose of most Shinto rituals is to keep away evil spirits by prayer, purification, and offerings to the *kami*.

*Shinto* is deeply rooted in the history of the Japanese. During the Meiji Period (1868-1912), *Shinto* was officially recognized as state religion but after World War II the state and the *Shinto* religion were officially separated.

### **Visiting a Shinto Shrine (*jinja*)**

Shinto shrines are the homes of *kami* and therefore places of worship. Shrines are visited during special yearly events such as '*oshogatsu*' (New Year's holiday) and festivals. People also visit shrines to pay respect to *kami* and pray for good fortune.

Throughout the year there are countless festivals held all over Japan to celebrate such events as the coming farming season, the harvest or important local historical events. Some festivals are small, local festivals while others are huge and attract people from all over Japan. If you are lucky enough to experience such a festival, or *matsuri*, it will be an event you will always remember.

How should you behave when visiting a shrine? It is not much different than visiting a church or cathedral. Visitors are expected to behave respectfully and to dress appropriately. Near the shrine's entrance you will find a purification fountain. Pick up the ladle lying over the small well, fill it with the water provided, and rinse both hands. Then transfer some water into your cupped hand, rinse your mouth and spit the water beside the fountain. You are not supposed to drink the water directly from the ladle. Many people however only wash their hands or simple do not perform this purification ritual.

At the offering hall, throw a coin (any amount will do) into the offering box, bow deeply twice, clap your hands twice, bow deeply once more and pray for a few seconds. If there is some type of gong, use it before praying in order to 'wake up' the gods.

Visitors are usually allowed to take pictures at shrines but watch for signs banning photography, just in case. Sacred objects representing the *kami* are stored in the inner chamber of the shrine where they cannot be seen except on very special occasions.

## **Buddhism**

In the 6th Century, Buddhism made its way into Japan through Korea and China. Unlike Shintoism, Buddhism has a founder, Gautama Siddhartha, and the religion is based on his teachings. At first, there were some conflicts between Buddhism and Shintoism, but eventually the followers of both religions learned to live together in relative harmony.



Buddhist Temple

Throughout history Buddhism gained political influence: during the 8th Century, it was this influence that prompted the move of Japan's capital from Nara to Kyoto (to escape the overbearing Buddhist political influence in the former capital).

The first branch of Buddhism introduced to Japan was Mahayana Buddhism but this was soon followed by other sects of Buddhism from China such as the Tendai sect (805 AD), the Shingon sect (806 AD) and the Zen sect (1195 AD). Other popular sects like Jodo (1175 AD), Jodo-Shinshu (1224 AD) and Nichiren (1253) developed in Japan as well.

Today in Japan about 90 million people consider themselves Buddhist but the religion does not strongly affect people's everyday life, except on certain occasions like funerals.

### Visiting a Buddhist Temple (*otera*)

As with Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples are places of worship and visitors should behave respectfully and dress appropriately. Every town in Japan has a temple. Some cities like Kyoto have thousands of temples.

Visitors can show their respect at a temple by throwing a coin (any amount will do) into the offering box in front of the main hall and then quietly saying a short prayer. When entering temple buildings, as a sign of respect you may be required to take off your shoes. Leave your shoes on the shelves at the entrance or take them with you in plastic bags provided at some temples.

At some temples, visitors burn incense in large incense burners. The smoke from the incense burners is believed to have healing power or to make you more intelligent.

Temples store display sacred Buddhist objects which you can purchase. Photography is usually permitted on the temple grounds. It is not allowed indoors at some temples so visitors should watch for signs.

## Japanese Language

Despite English language being a required part of Japanese education, many Japanese do not speak much or any of the language. The most likely to understand you are university students, and they will best understand you if you speak slowly, clearly, and perhaps even write out your questions if they don't understand. However, since you are visiting their country, it is polite to try to speak in Japanese when possible. Furthermore, it will add to your cultural experience, and the people you meet will be very appreciative that you took the time to learn a little bit about their language before coming to Japan. The following are some basic Japanese phrases and terms that may be useful to you as you travel:

### Greetings

Meaning	Alphabet	Japanese
It's nice to meet you. My name is...	<i>Hajimemashite, [your name] desu</i>	はじめまして
Good Morning	<i>Ohayou gozaimasu</i>	おはようございます
Good Afternoon	<i>Konnichiwa</i>	こんにちは
Good Evening	<i>Konbanwa</i>	こんばんは
Good Night (before going to bed)	<i>Oyasuminasai</i>	おやすみなさい
Goodbye	<i>Sayounara</i>	さようなら

## Useful Phrases

Meaning	Alphabet	Japanese
Yes	<i>Hai</i>	はい
No	<i>Iie</i>	いいえ
Yesterday	<i>Kinou</i>	昨日
Today	<i>Kyou</i>	今日
Tomorrow	<i>Ashita</i>	明日
Excuse Me/ Pardon Me/ I'm Sorry	<i>Sumimasen</i>	すみません
Please (when offering something)	<i>Douzo</i>	どうぞ
After You (when telling someone to go ahead of you)	<i>Douzo</i>	どうぞ
Please (when requesting something)	<i>Kudasai</i>	下さい
Thank You	<i>Doumo arigato</i>	どうもありがとう
You're Welcome	<i>Dou itashimashite</i>	どういたしまして
I can't speak Japanese	<i>Nihongo wa dekimasen</i>	日本語は出来ません
Do you speak English?	<i>Eigo ga hanasemasu ka</i>	英語が話せますか
I'd like to buy...	<i>...o kaitai desu</i>	...を買いたいです
How much does it cost?	<i>Ikura desu ka?</i>	いくらですか
I'll take this one	<i>Kore wo kudasai</i>	これ下さい
Can I have a receipt?	<i>Ryoushuusho o itadakemasuka?</i>	領収書を頂けますか
Is it okay to take a picture?	<i>Shashin o totte mo ii desu ka?</i>	写真を撮ってもいいですか
Where is the restroom?	<i>Toire wa doko desu ka?</i>	トイレはどこですか

## Asking Directions

Meaning	Alphabet	Japanese
Where is...?	<i>...wa doko desu ka?</i>	...はどこですか
Tourist Information Office	<i>Kankouan'naijo</i>	観光案内所
Post Office	<i>Yuubinkyoku</i>	郵便局
Bank	<i>Ginkou</i>	銀行
Train Station	<i>Eki</i>	駅
Public Telephone	<i>Koushuu denwa</i>	公衆電話
Police Box (small neighborhood public safety buildings)	<i>Kouban</i>	交番
Hotel	<i>Hoteru</i>	ホテル
Ryokan	<i>Ryokan</i>	旅館
Buddhist Temple	<i>Otera</i>	お寺
Shinto Shrine	<i>Jinja</i>	神社



## Transportation

Meaning	Alphabet	Japanese
Train	<i>Densha</i>	電車
Bus	<i>Basu</i>	バス
Subway	<i>Chikatetsu</i>	地下鉄
Train/Subway Station	<i>Eki</i>	駅
Bus Stop	<i>Basutei</i>	バス停
“Bullet Train”	<i>Shinkansen</i>	新幹線
Boat	<i>Fune</i>	船
Tourist Boat	<i>Kankousen</i>	観光船
Ferry	<i>Ferii</i>	フェリー
Ropeway	<i>Roopuwee</i>	ロープウェー
Streetcar	<i>Romen densha</i>	路面電車
Airplane	<i>Hikouki</i>	飛行機
Airport	<i>Kuukou</i>	空港
Reserved Seat	<i>Shiteiseki</i>	指定席
Non-Reserved Seat	<i>Jiyuuseki</i>	自由席
Smoking Seat (on a train, in a restaurant)	<i>Kitsuenseki</i>	喫煙席
Non-Smoking Seat (on a train, in a restaurant)	<i>Kin'enseki</i>	禁煙席
Limited Express	<i>Tokkyuu</i>	特急
Express	<i>Kyuukou / kaisoku</i>	急行 / 快速
Semi-Express	<i>Junkyuu</i>	準急
Local (stops at every station)	<i>Kakueki teisha</i>	各駅停車
Ticket	<i>Kippu</i>	切符
Reservation and Information Office (at a train station)	<i>Midori no madoguchi</i>	みどりの窓口
When Does It Depart?	<i>Itsu shuppatsu shimasuka?</i>	いつ出発しますか
When Does It Arrive?	<i>Itsu touchaku shimasuka?</i>	いつ到着ですか

## Emergencies

Meaning	Alphabet	Japanese
I need a doctor	<i>Isha ga hitsuyou desu</i>	医者が必要です
Please call an ambulance	<i>Kyuukyuuasha o yonde kudasai</i>	救急車を呼んで下さい
It hurts here (point)	<i>Koko ni itai desu</i>	ここに痛いです
Where is the hospital?	<i>Byouin wa doko desu ka?</i>	病院はどこですか
Help me!	<i>Tasukete!</i>	助けて!
I'm allergic to...	<i>...ni arerugii ga arimasu</i>	…にアレルギーがあります
I'm ill	<i>Kibun ga warui desu</i>	気分が悪いです

# Safety Tips

Although the crime rate is quite low in Japan, as a tourist you are more of a target than the average Japanese person. While many people rarely find themselves in threatening situations while traveling in Japan, it is always a good idea to use common sense in any situation.

- Use a money pouch to keep your money, passport, credit cards and other important items in.
- If you lose something, check with a nearby police box or station lost-and-found to see if it has been turned in.
- If you lose your passport, please go directly to the nearest embassy or consulate of your country. It might be a good idea to look these up ahead of time.
- Japan is an earthquake-prone country, so please be careful and try to remain calm if one does occur. It is best to head for the nearest doorway or supporting pillar. Smaller rooms are in general more stable than larger ones in the event of a large quake. Hotels in Japan have evacuation maps posted, and there are public evacuation areas in all Japanese cities. If you are at the beach, please leave the shoreline and beware of *tsunami* title waves following a quake. Although Japan has very advanced technology for detecting and dealing with quakes, they still pose a real danger. Television will broadcast information following an earthquake, and in case of a major disaster, emergency broadcasts will be aired over the radio in English and other foreign languages in some areas (76.1 FM in Tokyo, 76.5 FM in Kansai).
- Riding trains around constantly, and traveling in general, can be very hard on the body because of the amount of walking, bag carrying and stair climbing that is required. Please be sensible and give yourself enough time to rest each day.
- There are many instances of low clearance when walking through stations, entering doorways, etc. Please watch your head, even if you are not exceptionally tall by your country's standards.
- Most trains stop between 23:00-00:30 (11:00 pm – 12:30 am) each night, depending on the area you are in. If you plan on staying out late, please take a look at the train time tables beforehand to avoid getting stranded at night. Also check to see if your ryokan has a curfew.
- Women have to be more careful when traveling in Japan, as crimes such as sexual harassment, molestation and attempted rape are more common than theft in Japan. Although some will tell you it is safe to walk alone at night, use common sense and don't do anything you wouldn't do at home. Be especially careful when spending time in the entertainment districts at night, as drunken men may see a foreign women and think it is acceptable to verbally or physically harass or assault her. If you are being followed, please go to a safe, public place, or look for a Koban (police box) which is a neighborhood public safety building run by the municipal police.
- Molestation on trains has become more of a problem over the years in Japan, and to combat it, special cars have been introduced that only allow women to ride

during peak transit hours. They are clearly marked with signs on the train cars and sometimes on the platforms, so please try to use these to your advantage.

- Other precautions you would normally take at home still apply while you are abroad. Rather than worrying, learn about the possible risks ahead of time and be prepared so you can fully enjoy your trip. As in many other countries, emergency numbers can be called for free from a public phone. For the police dial 110, and for fire or ambulance dial 119.

### Emergency Contact Numbers

- Police: 110
- Japan Helpline: 0120-461-997 (provides help in English any time)
- United States Embassy: 03-3224-5000
- Australian Embassy: 03-5232-4111
- New Zealand Embassy: 03-3467-2271
- British Embassy: 03-3265-5511
- Irish Embassy: 03-3263-0695
- Canadian Embassy: 03-5412-6200
- Hospital Information: 03-5285-8181

**Each traveler is different and we all have our own ways of packing. The above is just some points that we have found helpful while traveling in Japan.**



# A Very Brief History of Japan

To better understand and enjoy your tour of Japan we feel that it is important to have a basic understanding of its history. This is just an outline and there are many great books and websites that can give you a more detailed history, but this will give you a start. For more information please visit your local book store as they will have a good selection of books.

Japanese history can be broken down into periods which are:

Early Japan until 710 AD  
Nara and Heian Periods 710-1192  
Kamakura Period 1192-1333  
Muromachi Period 1338-1573  
Azuchi-Momoyama Period 1573-1603  
Edo Period 1603-1868  
Meiji Period 1868-1912  
Taisho and Early Showa Period 1912-1945  
Taisho and Early Showa Periods 1912-1945  
Showa and Early Heisei Periods 1945-present



## **Jomon Period (13000 BC to 300 BC)**

The people of the Jomon Period were generally gatherers, fishers and hunters. Clothing was generally made of bark as weaving technology had not been discovered. A great deal of pottery has been unearthed dating back to this age. Weapons were made of shell, bone and wood.

## **Yayoi Period (300 BC to 250 AD)**

Rice was first cultivated during the Yayoi Period after being imported from China. Metallurgy was also introduced and developed. A basic kind of regional government, called “*kuni*” or “*koku*”, was established along with a class system, and landownership. One of the most well known figures of this time was a queen named Himiko who collected mirrors among other treasures from Korea and China. Pieces of her treasure are still being unearthed today.

## **Kofun Period (300 AD to 538 AD)**

A more centralized power emerged as Japan entered into the Kofun Period. This period was named after the large keyhole shaped tombs found near Nara in the Kansai area. This new country was called Yamato after the Yamato Province near modern Nara Prefecture. Yamato extended from Kyushu to the Kinai plain of Honshu. The emperor was the ruler during this period though the Soga clan held all of the political power and



*Nintoku Tomb, Sakai, Osaka*

the emperor only acted as a symbol of the state to perform Shinto (religious) rituals. The capital was also moved from city to city.

### **Asuka period (538 to 710)**

Buddhism was introduced to Japan from the Korean peninsula in either 538 or 552 and was promoted by the ruling class. Prince Shotoku was said to support Chinese ideas and authored the Seventeen Article Constitution about morality and political principles. It is also thought that writing was brought in from China at this time as well as Confucian and Tao principals. In 607 a letter from the “Emperor of the Land Where the Sun Rises” (Japan) was sent to the “Emperor of the Land Where the Sun Sets” (China). This show of equality between Japan and China did not sit well with the Chinese emperor. It was the first time that the word Nihon (日本), which means land of the rising, sun was used.

### **Nara and Heian Periods (710 – 1185)**

Nara was established as Japan first permanent capital in 710 and modeled after the Chinese capital. Buddhist monasteries quickly established themselves and gained political influence. In order to protect and keep the emperor in control the capital was moved to Nagaoka-kyo (southern part of Kyoto prefecture) in 784 and then to Heian (modern Kyoto) in 794.

During this time Japan was able to take Chinese ideas and adapt them to better fit the Japanese people and lifestyle. Kana characters (あいうえお) were developed and made the creation of Japanese literature possible. Up until this time they used Chinese characters to represent Japanese sounds. Today a mixture of Kanji (平安時代 – Heianjidai – Heian Period), Hiragana (すし - sushi) and Katakana (スパゲッチー - spaghetti) are used. Hiragana is a phonetic alphabet used for Japanese derived words and Katakana is also phonetic but is used for foreign derived words. Often Kanji and Hiragana are used in the same word like 食べます – tabemasu which means “to eat”.



*Kamatari Fujiwara*

Land and tax reforms named *Taika* were also developed. These reforms taxed farmers to the point of poverty and many of them had to sell their land and become tenant farmers of wealthy land owners. Aristocrats and Buddhist monasteries were granted tax immunity. As a result tax revenue decreased and power shifted from the central government over to large land owners.

The Fujiwara Clan was able to gain control and intermarried with the imperial family cemented their power for centuries. Many smaller land owners had to hire *samurai* to protect them which was the birth of the military class.

The Fujiwara Clan was able to maintain power until 1068 when emperor Go-Sanjo decided that he would not allow himself to be controlled like a puppet. Emperors ruled Japan from 1068 to 1156 when Kiyomori Taira came into power.

After Kiyomori Taira death 2 families struggled for power; Taira and Minamoto. This struggle was called the Gempei war and lasted from 1180 to 1185. Yoritomo Minamoto took power after eliminating all potential rivals including family members. Once gaining control he moved the capital to Kamakura (in modern day Kanagawa prefecture), his home city, in 1192 and the Kamakura Bakufu was born.

### **Kamakura Period (1192 – 1333)**

Yoritomo ruled until he died in 1199. Upon his death, quarrels for power began between the Kamakura Bakufu and the Imperial court of Kyoto. They ended with the Jokyu disturbance in 1221 when Kamakura's Hojo regents took control. Generous gifts of land to powerful people created a large and loyal support base and the Imperial court lost almost all control. Samurai now became the leading social class with Confucian and Buddhist ideas setting the moral code and rebellions were quickly brought under control.

During this time the Mongols wanted to expand their control over Japan and attempted an invasion in 1274. The Mongols were strong enough to defeat Japan if it was not for bad weather during the attack which caused them to retreat and give up. After the first invasion attempt the Japanese decided to prepare for the next invasion. The Mongols staged a second attempted in 1281 which also failed thanks to the weather. It was said that Japan was protected from invasion by the gods who sent the *kamikaze* (divine winds) to protect them. Because the Mongols retreated and were not defeated there were no spoils of war. So all the loyal men of Kamakura were never repaid for their efforts which helped to bring down the Hojo regents in 1333 when emperor Go-Daigo was able to re-establish imperial power.

### **Muromachi Period (1338 – 1573)**

The rule of the emperor did not last long due to the impractical and outdated administration system which did not gain the loyalty of the large land owners. Takauji Ashikaga, originally a loyal servant of the emperor, now challenged and took over the capital of Kyoto and appointed himself shogun. Because of this Go-Daigo fled south and established a new court in Yoshino. In Kyoto a new emperor was appointed which was possible because of a succession dispute between two lines of the imperial family. The two imperial courts fought until 1392 when the southern court finally gave in.



*Kinkaku-ji, Kyoto*

While Yoshimitsu Ashikaga (the builder of Kinkaku-ji in Kyoto) was shogun the Muromachi Bakufu were slowly losing control over the outlying provinces. Though thanks to better trade with Ming China, Japan's agriculture techniques improved and a new inheritance system made it possible for markets to develop and new social classes to be born.

During the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries members of the land owning military families known as the *jisamurai* were able to gain control over provincial constables and establish control. These new feudal lords were called *daimyo* and ended up breaking Japan up into many different autonomous governments. Daimyo often fought each other to increase their influence and power. These were the years of civil war called *Sengoku jidai*.

In 1542, the first Portuguese traders and Jesuit missionaries arrived bringing with them both firearms and Christianity. Buddhists were not happy about this but the feudal lords tolerated the Portuguese because of the new war technology they brought.

The feudal lords kept on fighting until in the mid 1500's when Nobunaga Oda made the first big steps toward unifying Japan. In 1568, he was able to capture Kyoto and finally overthrew the Muromachi Bakufu in 1573.

### **Azuchi-Momoyama Period (1573 – 1603)**

Once Kyoto was captured, Nobunaga Oda continued to eliminate his rivals including various Buddhist sects. In 1582 Nobunaga was assassinated by general Akechi. General Hideyoshi Toyotomi reacted quickly, defeated Akechi and took power for himself. He then took over the Northern Provinces, Shikoku and Kyushu. In 1590 he defeated the Hojo clan in Odawara, and Japan was united again.

Hideyoshi brought Japan under absolute control. He destroyed many castles and confiscated weapons from everyone except the samurai class. While samurai could carry swords they were no longer allowed to work and had to live in castle towns. This made it almost impossible for samurai to gain wealth and oppose the government. He also expelled all Christians and made it illegal to be a Christian.

After uniting Japan, he dreamed of adding China to his control. This was a miserable failure, and in 1598 the last Japanese were sent back to Japan in the same year as his death in 1598.

Ieyasu Tokugawa then gained control against the wishes of Hideyoshi who tapped Hideyori to be the next shogun. This was the start of the most peaceful time in Japanese history called the Edo period.

### **Edo Period (1603 – 1867)**



*Tokugawa Family  
Crest*

This period started with Ieyasu Tokugawa taking power and formally becoming shogun in 1603. Tokugawa Shogunates continued to rule Japan in relative peace for over 250 years.

Ieyasu moved the military capital (the imperial capital stayed in Kyoto) to Edo (modern Tokyo) and managed to gain support by generously giving out land and the best domains to *daimyo* (feudal lords) who supported him. He controlled the daimyo by requiring them to spend every second year in Edo. The daimyo's families were required to stay in Edo like hostages. The daimyo had to

spend a great deal of money traveling back and forth to Edo and maintaining two residences. This made it very hard for them to gather enough funds to wage a war and also limited their ability to gain support in the home domain.

Five main roads (*Gokaido*) were established between various domains and Edo to make it easier for the Daimyo and other travelers. The most important of these roads was the Tokaido which ran from Edo to Kyoto and was dotted with 53 stations. At these stations travelers could rest, get food and other supplies. *Ryokans* (Japanese inns) of various ranks were also constructed. Prostitution and drinking quickly became problems, so the government required all *ryokans* to serve dinner and breakfast to their guests. This meant that no one really had a good reason for being out after dark. While this is no longer a law, the tradition continues today and is a big part of the whole *ryokan* experience.

In 1615 Ieyasu captured Toyotomi clan's castle in Osaka and defeated the last of his rivals. Peace prevailed and samurai began to educate themselves in literature, calligraphy, tea ceremony and other arts as their warring skills were no longer necessary. Many of them also became homeless as they could not find employment and were not allowed to work. The movie "Shichinin no Samurai" (7 Samurai) directed by Akira Kurosawa will give you an idea of how some samurai lived.

Japan also became more and more isolated. In 1633 Shogun Iemitsu forbade foreign travel and in 1639 he took it a step further by reducing contact to the outside world and only limited trade with China and the Netherlands at Nagasaki was permitted. Foreign books were also outlawed until 1720 when the ban was lifted.

During the years of isolation Japan was basically peaceful and the government was steady though this did not last. The decline of the government came about for several reasons. One was the government's coffers became low so taxes were raised. The rise in taxes led to riots among the farmers who were hardest hit. Natural disasters also played a hand as Japan is located along the ring of fire and has many earthquakes. The social hierarchy also was strained as the merchant class (lowest class) became rich and more powerful. Since the merchant class had the money they were able to make loans to samurai and the government which made the top class (samurai) dependent on the lowest class (merchants).



*Satsuma Samurai*

Toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the outside world was looking to establish trade and other relationships with Japan. Most of the attempts did not success until Commodore Perry of the US forced the doors open in 1854 with his Black Ships. This trade remained limited until the Meiji Restoration in 1868 when the Tokugawa government handed power back to the Emperor Meiji.



## Meiji Period (1868 – 1912)

The main thrust of the Meiji Period was to Westernize as Commodore Perry's visits exposed Japan military weakness. The Japanese knew that if they did not modernize their military, government and society as a whole that they would be a second class nation. This was clearly demonstrated to them when the West forced them to sign unfair treaties.

The imperial capital and Emperor were formally moved from Kyoto to Tokyo and power was transferred from the Tokugawa Bakufu to Emperor. While the Emperor formally held power the real power was wheeled by a small group of nobles and former samurai known as the genro.

The new government knew they needed to make Japan democratic with equality for all people. Of course the samurai class had the most to lose as many of their privileges were stripped. The feudal lords (daimyo) lost all of their land and a prefectural system was established. This caused unrest among them and intense nationalism. Of course they approved of modernizing the military but they also demanded that principles of Confucianism and Shinto (national religion) be taught in the new public education system. The education system was based on the French and German example but they wanted to make sure that the Japanese spirit was also included in the curriculum.

The economic system also needed to be changed from an agrarian one to a modern industrial one. To accomplish this many of Japan's best minds were sent overseas to study and foreign experts were invited to Japan to teach.

Westernization was moving very fast and was very expensive. Powerful family businesses called *zaibatsu* were encouraged and became vertical monopolies that controlled all aspects of business and the economy. The four biggest *zaibatsu* were Mitsubishi, Mitsui, Sumitomo and Yasuda. Since the government did nothing to control them these four companies ruled the Japanese economy until the end of World War II. All 4 of these companies still exist today but they do not have nearly as much power as they once did.

Japan's military gained strength and conflicts arose between China and Japan over Korea which led to the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895. Japan's modern military was able to defeat China and new territory was added to its holding. Russia, France and Germany thought Japan took too much and force Japan to return all the seized territory excepted for Taiwan. This was called the Triple Intervention and caused Japan to rethink and



intensify its military modernization and build up. The Japanese people viewed this intervention as being unfair as Western nations were able to take land after a conflict.

Once again conflicts of interest in Korea saw Japan up against Russia in 1904-1905. Japan won and gained more territory but most importantly Japan's international prestige increased. In 1910 Japan completely captured Korea. This success fueled nationalism and self confidence.

In 1912 Emperor Meiji died. Along with him so did the age of the elder statesmen (genro). The Emperor Taisho took office in 1912 but was not in the best of health and died Christmas day 1926.

### **Taisho and Early Showa Periods (1912-1945)**

Emperor Taisho took office and the government shifted from the elder statesmen (genro) to a parliamentary system with democratic parties. This shift in power is often called Taisho democracy.



Emperor Showa (known in the West as Hirohito) became the emperor at the age of 25 with his reign ending on January 7, 1989. During his reign Japan changed a great deal from a nation out to prove its power to nation that denounced war.

During WWI Japan joined the Allied powers though only played a minor role in East Asia. After the war Japan proposed amending a "racial equality clause" to the covenant of the League of Nations. This was rejected by the United States, Britain and Australia. Japanese faced racial discrimination time again since the West forced it to open its borders in the 1800's. In fact the US government passed the Exclusion Act of 1924 which prohibited further immigration from Japan. This did not sit well with Japanese and fueled nationalism which helped the military gain almost complete control of the government by 1930.

Japan's military continued to gain territory in China. In 1932 the Kwantung Army (Japanese armed forces in Manchuria) formally established "Manchuko" as an independent state. The state was ruled by a puppet government headed by the last Chinese emperor. Since Japan was heavily criticized for its actions in China it withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933.

The Chinese were still fighting for independence and the second Sino-Japanese War started in 1937. National pride continued to grow and Japanese soldiers saw themselves as

far superior to the Chinese. This led to severe war atrocities including the Nanking massacre and others.

In 1940 Japan gained control over French Indochina (Vietnam) and joined the Axis powers of Germany and Italy. In response the United States and Britain blocked all shipments of oil to Japan. Since Japan is very poor in natural resources they decided to capture oil rich Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) and to start a war with America, Great Britain and the Netherlands.

On December 7, 1941 Japan attacked the US fleet in Pearl Harbor. This gave them a terrific advantage and they were able to expand control over much of the Pacific and procure much needed resources including oil.

The Battle of Midway was the turning point of the war. From June 1942 on Japan started to lose territory. The bloody war continued until on August 6, 1945 the first atomic bomb was dropped over Hiroshima and a second atomic bomb was dropped over Nagasaki on August 8. The Soviet Union entered the war against Japan on August 9, 1945. Then on August 14 Emperor Showa finally surrendered and WWII in the Pacific was finished.

### **Showa and Early Heisei Periods (1945-present)**

Japan's defeat in WWII devastated the heart and soul of Japan. Almost all of its major cities (excluding Kyoto which was saved due to its beauty and historical value) were destroyed. Most of the territory it gained since the Meiji Restoration was lost. Food was short, people were tired but there was a lot of work to do.

Japan's war machine was destroyed, and a war crime tribunal was conducted. In Japan suicide is considered honorable so 500 military officers committed ritual suicide just after the surrender to show remorse for losing the war. There was also an attempted coup d'état by die-hard army fanatics who wished to continue the war until the last man.

In 1947 a new constitution went into effect which took all power away from the emperor and made him strictly a figurehead. The most significant part of the constitution was Article 9 which forbade Japan from leading a war or maintaining a military. The occupation ended in 1952 and Japan decided to establish a Self Defense Force in 1954. Article 9 is still enforced as the SDF is only used for self defense of Japan though today some people are fighting to change this article to allow Japan to create an offensive military.



*Downtown Osaka*

General MacArthur wanted to spread out control so that a handful of people could not take control again. The corporate monopolies known as zaibatsu were broken up, education was decentralized, and land reform was put into place.

During the Korean War, Japan was called upon to supply much that we needed for the war effort. This spurred economic growth and increased Japan's standard of living. After the war Japan's economy continued to grow until the Economic Bubble of the late 1980's and early 1990's.

The Economic Bubble saw land prices, wages and buying power increase with no end in sight. Loans were taken out with land and other assets as collateral and often the same collateral was used for numerous loans. When the bubble burst many borrowers could not pay off loans. Lenders were forced to foreclose but there was nothing to foreclose on. Banks and other lenders were forced to write off huge amounts of uncollected loans. Land and housing prices dropped to the point where people could not pay off their loans even if they sold their property. In the early 1990's a condo in a suburb of Osaka could sell for over 70,000,000 yen (about US\$ 700,000) but by the early 2000's a seller could only get about 35,000,000 yen (about US\$ 350,000). Today, thanks to a lot of hard work and spirit, Japan's economy is recovering and the people have a high standard of living again.

The people of Japan have faced enormous hardship but have always had the strength and spirit to overcome them. It is an amazing country that I hope you will fall in love with as so many people have.