

WORLD STUDENT JAPAN



Visiting Japan for the first time:
a guide for students, teachers and tour leaders



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Flat land on Honshu is at a premium. © David McRae



Visiting Japan for the First Time

Japan has a unique culture and amazing natural beauty. Most people find it a very easy experience to visit Japan although the culture is quite different to that of Western countries. When travelling to a culture different from their own, some people can find it a little disorienting. To minimise this it can help to:

- research the culture, geography, history, language and behavioural norms prior to travelling
- express respect by observing cultural expectations
- maintain your own culture without offending others.

This guide is designed for teachers and students visiting Japan for the first time. Core activities may include a visit to a sister school in Japan, tourism and/or a study tour experience for teachers.

Preparation

Tour Leader

[Organising a trip to Japan](#) provides sample forms, a risk management plan, a handbook for students and other great resources for organising a school trip to Japan. The [overseas learning experiences for students ebook](#) or PDF provides great advice and planning documents to support a school visit to Japan.

The following short videos capture elements of the sister school experience and ways in which students have connected with peers in Japan prior to travelling. The videos can be found in [Scootle](#):

- M010662 Connecting to a sister school in Japan
- M010664 The bridge to Japan
- M010670 Japan by iPad.

Participant Guide

Consider preparing a guide for all participants, including:

- group leader contact details, participant list and mobile phone numbers
- itinerary and program
- hotel and accommodation details including international phone codes
- basic words and phrases
- Australian Embassy details in Tokyo
- expenses record
- notes pages.



Many Japanese people like to give the peace sign in photos. ©David McRae



Itinerary

If you are planning an itinerary for a school group, consider the following.

- Provide downtime as well as opportunities to reflect and de-brief as a group and individually.
- Learning from [short term sojourns](#) in China (2011) reflects on the experiences of short in-country China experiences for Australian school students and the challenges that visiting China poses for planners and sojourn leaders in both countries. Some of the findings are applicable to those planning a school trip to Japan.
- Activities such as school visits and homestay require the most energy but potentially provide the most rewards.

The principle of gradual scaffolding is the primary learning rule for planning sojourn activities. Thus whether on tour or visiting a school, learning will be enhanced if students have the chance to repeat an experience and gradually increase their independence within the one environment. (Orton, J & Mansell, D 2011)

Read your way to Japan (teachers)

Books

- *The tale of Genji*: this classic work of Japanese literature was written by the noblewoman Murasaki Shikibu in the early years of the 11th century.
- *The narrow road to the deep north and other travel sketches (1694)*: Matsuo Basho's prose and verse travel diary is considered one of the major texts of classical Japanese literature.
- *A geek in Japan (2010)*: Hector Garcia explores popular and traditional culture in Japan, from manga and anime to the tea ceremony.
- *South of the border, west of the sun (2000)*: this short contemporary novel by Haruki Murakami traces the arc of a man's life from childhood to middle age.
- *Kitchen (1988)*: Banana Yoshimoto's debut novel was an instant success with over sixty printings in Japan alone.
- *Wrong about Japan (2004)*: writer Peter Carey's interests in Japanese history and tradition are contrasted with those of his 12-year-old son who is interested in manga, anime, and technology.
- *The thousand autumns of Jacob De Zoet (2011)*: David Mitchell's historical novel is set in Dejima, Nagasaki in the late 18th century.
- *The Oxford book of Japanese short stories (1997)*: explore a wide range of writers who provide differing perspectives on Japanese culture.
- *A year in Japan (2006)*: this is the quirky description of an American woman's year-long sojourn in Kyoto with great illustrations.

Film

- *Still walking (2008)*: a portrait of a family as they commemorate the death of the eldest son. The films of this director, Kore-eda, provide great insights into contemporary Japanese life.
- *Spirited away (2001)*: directed by Hayao Miyazaki this anime film provides insights into Japanese culture and issues including Japanese folklore, environmental pollution and a sense of nostalgia for the past.

Teachers

You'll get more out of visiting Japan if you know something about the country before you go. Here are some good resources:

- [Asia Education Foundation, Japan](#)
- [Endeavour Language Teaching Fellowship Japan 2013](#) wikispace
- [Japan Foundation](#)
- [Asia Society](#)
- [Tofugu](#)
- [Must love Japan](#) [*]
- [The Japan show](#) podcast [*]

- [The Japanfiles podcast](#) [*]
- [Japan National Tourism Organization](#) [*]
- [japan-guide.com](#) [*]
- [The Japan blog list](#) [*]
- [Center for Japanese Studies](#) [*]
- [A Guide to a First Tokyo Trip](#) [*]

Students

You'll get more out of visiting Japan if you know something about the country before you go. Here are some good resources:

- [Kid's web Japan](#)
- [Japan National Tourism Organization](#) [*]
- [japan-guide.com](#) [*]
- [Asia Society: kids](#) [*]
- [KCP Japanese Language School](#) [*]

The following websites showcase the experiences of two Australian school trips to Japan.

- [Glenunga International High School Japan tour 2013](#)
- [Mount Waverley Secondary College Japan study tour 2014](#) [*]

Read your way to Japan (students)

Books

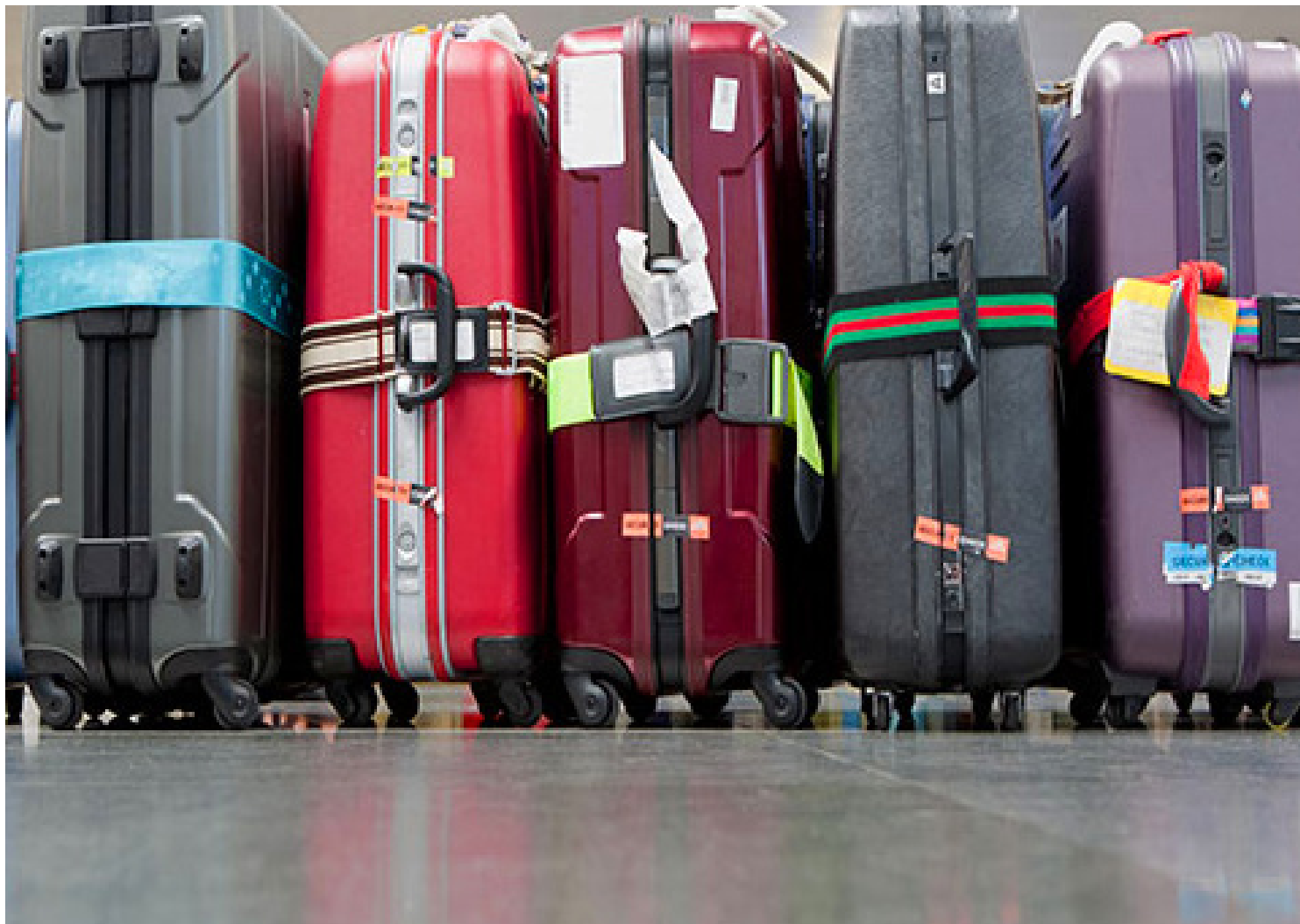
- *Japan diary* (2005): Trudy White's two-part novella explores the personal journeys and cultural discoveries of two secondary students, one from Australia and one from Japan.
- *Tales of the Otori* (2002): Lian Hearn's trilogy is set in a fictional feudal Japan.
- *Tomo: friendship through fiction: an anthology of Japan teen stories* (2011): edited by Holly Thompson, this anthology has themes of Japanese pop culture and teenagers today.
- The *Moonshadow* series by Simon Higgins is a series of action adventure novels as being set in a 'romanticised historical' Japan.
- The *Vermonia* series by Yo-Yo began in 2006, and is an authentic manga series of adventures. They are graphic novels to be read, as in Japanese, from the back to the front and, on each page, from right to left.

Film

- *Spirited away* (2001) is an animated film directed by Hayao Miyazaki. It focuses on Chihiro, a child who falls into a fantastic world and must find her way back to reality and rescue her parents as she makes her way from childhood to adulthood.
- *I wish* (2011) was directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda. A divorce separates two young brothers who go to live in different cities and dream of reuniting.



On Miyajima Island. ©David McRae



What to pack

Pack lightly. There may be times when you'll need to carry your luggage up and down stairs – for instance in subways and some hotels. You can buy most things in Japan if you need them.

- Alarm clock or a watch or phone with alarm
- Clothing
- Favourite toiletries
- Personal medications
- Copies of passport and other documents, such as credit card numbers, embassy contact info, etc (also saved on a USB along with your email account details)
- A small torch or book light for when jetlag strikes
- Comfortable shoes
- A few small gifts for people that you meet along the way. Gifts of toy koalas and kangaroos are always welcomed, as is an Australiana calendar, book or similar gift
- A flip photo book of your school, home and family photos
- Mobile phone/tablet charger

Leave some room in your bags for gifts, shopping and souvenirs that you will acquire while in Japan.

Power adaptors

The voltage in Japan is 100 Volts; in Australia it is 240 Volts. Most chargers of mobile phones, iPods, cameras etc include an automatic voltage converter. Check the label on your charger and if it says 100V to 240V then all you need is a plug adaptor to convert your Australian three plug to a Japanese two plug. Other Australian electrical items in Japan may need a voltage converter as well as the plug adaptor. When purchasing electrical equipment in Japan to bring back to Australia, look for equipment specifically made for the overseas market.

Travel insurance

Don't leave home without it!

Paperwork

Ensure you have copies of your passport details, airline tickets, insurance policy, itinerary and credit card details in two places (eg your hand luggage and your suitcase) as well as with a family member at home, just in case your belongings are lost.

Business cards

It is a good idea for teachers to take business cards when visiting schools. When exchanging cards, stand up, bow slightly and hold your card facing the other person with the fingertips of both hands. When you receive someone else's card, look at it carefully and place it in your wallet (not in your back pocket).





In Japan

Language

Standard Japanese (Nihongo) is used across Japan. There are some regional dialects. Japanese is written using three different writing systems:

- *kanji* (Chinese characters) – used to write words borrowed from Chinese or Japanese words with the same/similar meanings
- *hiragana* – used for words without kanji representation
- *katakana* – used mostly for loan words from other languages

Phrase books and dictionaries will use English script (*romaji*) to represent the phonetic pronunciation of the characters.

There are many smartphone applications which can be used for both learning the language as well as for translation tools.

Etiquette

Understanding the etiquette of Japanese culture will be useful in helping to ensure your interactions with Japanese people are positive. Consider the following:

- It is important to be on time in Japan. If you are to meet someone at a particular time, try to be a few minutes early.
- There is no tipping in Japan. To tip can actually be perceived as insulting.
- Generally people do not eat or drink while walking along the street or catching a train (apart from the *shinkansen*).
- While in public, it is best not to blow your nose, just discreetly wipe it.
- When entering a Japanese home or school, you will be offered slippers to wear inside. Leave your shoes in the *genkan* (entrance).
- When you enter a room covered with *tatami* matting, remove your slippers and step on the mats with your socks or bare feet.
- When going to the toilet at a school or at someone's home, change into the special toilet slippers provided.

Greetings

- When you are meeting someone for the first time, bow and say *hajimemashite*.
- Greet people using their surname and *-san* (eg *Hashimoto-san*) or *-sensei* if they are a teacher (eg *Harada-sensei*). Most Japanese names are written with the surname preceding the given name (eg *Suzuki Tomoko*).
- People don't usually hug or pat each other on the back etc.





Visiting schools

Teachers

Teachers and principals are very highly regarded in Japan so you will be treated with great respect when you visit a school. Your visit to a school is likely to be highly anticipated by staff and students and you may be surprised at the effort the school goes to welcome you.

You may be invited to have green tea in the principal's office. As well as a gift from Australia, you should ensure you take business cards to exchange with staff at the school. [ELTF Japan 2013: gift giving](#) provides some more advice about the etiquette of gift-giving.

Staff and students will probably want to try out their English with you and you may be asked to take a lesson teaching about Australia or teaching English. It's a good idea to take some resources for this such as stories, photos, songs just in case.

Eating out

In Japan the water is safe to drink, whether it is tap water or bottled water. You can refill water bottles at any public fountain safely.

Many restaurants in Japan display plastic or wax replicas of their dishes in a window near their entrance. These are useful if you are unable to read the menu and you can even point to what you would like to order if all other communication fails!

When you enter a restaurant you will be greeted with the expression *irasshaimase* which means 'Welcome, please come in'.

After you are seated you will receive a wet towel (*oshibori*) which you can use to clean your hands before eating.

Teachers may be invited out to a meal with the staff from the school you are visiting. There are likely to be speeches at the end of the evening so pace yourself on the sake.

Kampai!

Here are a few tips for when using chopsticks.

- Do not point with your chopsticks.
- Do not leave chopsticks standing up in the food, especially in rice.
- When you are not using the chopsticks or you have finished eating, lay them on the chopstick holder or across your bowl.
- If you are struggling with chopsticks you can usually ask for a spoon to use instead.





Health and safety

Bring all medication in original packaging and ensure you have a letter from your doctor to cover all prescription medication. Keep all essential medication in your hand luggage just in case your suitcase goes missing. There are not usually any vaccination requirements for Japan.

Personal safety is not generally an issue in Japan. However, although hotels are usually very safe, ensure that your door is locked. You may wish to use the hotel safe to keep your valuables secure.

Traditional Japanese style toilets (squat toilets) are usually found in train stations and public toilets. Often there are both Western and Japanese style toilets available but not always. There are also high-tech toilets in restaurants and hotels which have many buttons. Check the pictures on them carefully to avoid being sprayed, deodorised or dried by mistake!

Apps

At the time of writing, the following Apps come highly recommended:

- HYPERDIA: enter your location and where you'd like to get to, and out comes the best train option for you, along with price details and timings.
- TRAINS.JP: find train routes and schedules in Japan.

Home stay

The homestay experience is usually one of the most daunting but ultimately memorable and unique experiences you can have when you travel. It is normal to be nervous prior to this experience. Here are some tips that will help.

- Take a gift for your host family such as an Australian souvenir, book or calendar.
- Try out your Japanese language skills on your hosts; they will appreciate your efforts.
- Check the etiquette section of this guide for advice about the wearing of shoes and slippers in a Japanese home.
- Getting clean in a Japanese house may be a different but great experience. You may experience architectural differences in the bathroom, different shaped baths, different ways of heating water, and a separation of the function of the bathroom (washing) and the bath (soaking).

The following resources provide advice about baths in Japanese homes as well as the public baths (*onsen*).

- [Culture share: bathing in Japan](#) [*] by Juliette Wade
- [Japanese baths and showers](#) [*]
- [How to take a Japanese bath](#) [*]
- [Dos and don'ts of public bathing in Japan](#) [*]
- [At home in Japan](#) [*] is a web-based tutorial that gives a basic orientation to Japanese culture and society, including some of the dos and don'ts of homestay.



The U or W curve of culture shock?

While a short experience in Japan is unlikely to lead to extreme culture shock, it can be helpful to understand some common responses to being in another culture. The jury is out about whether culture shock can be said to fall into a U or W pattern but it can be useful to acknowledge the potential stages of response and adjustment to being in a new culture. The stages loosely move from the 'Honeymoon' stage, where you are excited to be travelling and encountering new and interesting situations and people, to a 'Distress or negotiation' stage, where you may feel homesick or have encountered something particularly challenging. You are encountering a different culture as well as possibly negotiating the different personalities in the group you are travelling with. Then it is common to build some in-country skills; you have learnt a little language, know how to use the subway or have become a master-bargainer. Sometimes, the curve can continue on return home as you meet varied responses or indifference to the impact of your time in-country.

The following sites provide more information:

- [Culture shock: a challenge of international travel experiences](#) [*]
- [Cross-cultural adaptation](#) [*]



Getting the most out of the experience

Tour leader

Make sure that there are regular opportunities to debrief tour participants and track how they are travelling. De-briefing can include asking participants to do:

- a quick PNI (positive/negative/interesting) either on paper or in discussion over dinner.
- headlines – if you were to create a headline about your day's experiences that captured the most important aspect, what would that headline be?
Discuss how that might differ from what you would have said yesterday?

(Adapted from [Visible thinking](#), Headlines routine © President and Fellows of Harvard College on behalf of Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Shopping

Enjoy shopping in Japan, from the exclusive department stores to the quality *hyakuen* (100 yen) shops that are similar to \$2 shops but with a great range of products including souvenirs and Japanese toys.

Japan has a 5% consumer tax, the price shown on items is usually before the tax. It is not considered appropriate to haggle or negotiate prices.

Most department stores have basements with extensive food halls with every food you can imagine.

Money

Japan is still largely a cash-based society but this trend is gradually changing. It is still important to carry cash as this is the preferred payment method at tourist sites, smaller restaurants and shops, and particularly in smaller cities and rural areas.

The Japanese currency is the yen (¥, *en*). Coins come in 1 yen, 5 yen, 10 yen, 50 yen, 100 yen and 500 yen denominations. Notes come in 1000 yen, 5000 yen and 10,000 yen denominations.

Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs)

Many ATMs in Japan do not accept credit, debit or ATM cards issued outside of Japan. The exceptions are the ATMs found in post offices and 7-Eleven convenience stores. These allow you to withdraw cash using credit and debit cards issued outside Japan including Visa, Mastercard, AMEX etc.

For further details refer to [japan.guide.com: ATM's\[*\]](http://japan.guide.com: ATM's[*]).



These elephants were carved from a design by a man who had never seen a real elephant.

Telephones

Check with your mobile phone provider to see if your phone can be used in Japan. You may need to request international roaming before you leave Australia. Check phone and roaming charges carefully as this can be very costly.

A more economical way for the average traveller to access a phone in Japan can be renting a phone. Rental mobile phones are available from many companies which have kiosks at the airport or these can be booked in advance online and mailed to your hotel.

Transport

Trains are the best way of getting around Japan. 70% of the railways are owned by Japan Railways (JR) with the remaining 30% being owned by a number of other private operators.

Tokyo is connected with most of the other major Japanese cities by the *shinkansen* (bullet trains). The *shinkansen* is a very convenient and cost effective means of transport, particularly if you purchase a Rail Pass before leaving Australia.

You can select a pass with either 7, 14 or 21 consecutive days of travel.

Try to get reserved seats if you are taking trains and you are holding a Japan Rail Pass.

Trains in Japan are extremely efficient and punctual. If your train is the 3.48pm train, don't get on the 3.47 or 3.49!

Taxis can be costly but they may be a convenient alternative in smaller cities and in the countryside where there are less public transport options.

When you return home

Here is an activity to try once you return home.

Connect, extend, challenge

This is a routine for connecting new ideas to prior knowledge.

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| CONNECT | How did the experience of visiting Japan connect to what you already knew? |
| EXTEND | What new ideas did you get that extended or pushed your thinking in new directions? |
| CHALLENGE | What is still challenging or confusing for you to get your mind around? What questions, wonderings or puzzles do you now have about Japan? |

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