

# Your Business Trip Guide to Japan



## **Table of Contents**

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Accommodation</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Getting Around</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. Wi-Fi and Using Your Phone in Japan</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5. Money</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6. Business Etiquette</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>7. Interpreters and Translators</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>8. Shopping</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>9. Food and Drink</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>10. Other Useful Information</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>11. Japanese Language</b>	<b>20</b>

## 1. Introduction

Going on a business trip to Japan entails a lot of organization and research. Things you take for granted in your own country aren't always the same in Japan so it is always best to prepare in advance.

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

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

To save you from having to search through the Internet, this report will also provide you with links to relevant websites and apps ([marked blue & underlined](#)) plus many useful tips on navigating areas that may cause potential misunderstandings. Prepared with this knowledge, you should be ready to enjoy a relaxing and successful (business) trip.

## 2. Accommodation

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

### Business Hotels

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

### Traditional Ryokan (Inn)

I advise anyone going to Japan to try and stay in a traditional Ryokan if possible. They really do offer an authentically traditional Japanese experience and are normally set within Japanese gardens, have hot springs or baths, are located in beautiful traditional Japanese houses with sliding doors, tatami floors and futon beds with the most amazing Japanese dining experiences. There are certain rituals involved with staying at a Ryokan: using the baths, wearing the “*yukata*” and slippers. The [JNTO website](#) has information on the etiquette involved.

There are several Ryokan style establishments in the major cities that cater specifically to foreigners, offering fairly cheap accommodation on *tatami* mats with *futons*. Some have shared bathing facilities and are much more informal than the traditional Ryokan. Most owners speak English and they are situated in fairly peaceful parts of the cities, offering a fairly traditional experience of Japan within a bustling metropolis. [The Japan Ryokan & Hotel Association](#) is a good source of information.

Interestingly, the Japanese on-line retailer [Rakuten](#) has a hotel booking line much like Expedia and Lastminute.com. There are some Japanese rooms on [Airbnb](#) which is a viable and popular option for accommodation in Japan, offering a diverse range of listings and the potential for authentic experiences. However, as always, exercise caution as you would if considering this option when traveling alone and respect the local customs.

### **Useful tips:**

**Check national holidays before traveling in Japan or booking an accommodation. Golden Week (end of April to the beginning of May), New Year and Obon (August) can be incredibly busy.**

### 3. Getting Around

#### Streets and Addresses

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

See this example of an address:

〒100-8799  
東京都千代田区丸の内二丁目7番2号  
東京中央郵便局

〒100-8799 (Postal Code)  
Tōkyō-to (Tokyo city)  
Chiyoda-ku (Chiyoda Ward)  
Marunouchi ni-chōme (Maronouchi district number 2)  
nana-ban (Block number 7)  
ni-gō (House number 2)  
Tōkyō Chūō Yūbin-kyoku (Tokyo Central Post Office) Name of the place

<http://www.tofugu.com/japan/japanese-address-system/>

#### Useful tips:

- If you find an address in Japanese in an email or on a website and you want to know its location but cannot read it, you can copy it into Google maps and it will give you the visual point on a map.
- If you are going to a meeting, ask for a pictorial map from the station with landmarks on it- some companies have them on their website.
- See apps below for suggestions on getting around.
- Cities such as Sapporo and Kyoto use a different system.

## Useful Apps for Getting Around

- The recently updated [Navitime for Japan Travel](#) app has maps, information on using the trains, offline Wi-Fi spot search and also gives you access to NTT free Wi-Fi.
- The [MAPS.ME app](#) is an off-line map finder suitable for most smartphones. Download your maps before you go and use off-line.

## Metro in Tokyo

The Japanese metro system is very efficient and fairly easy to navigate—all stations have names in *Romaji* (Roman letters) and there are many signs and maps in English. Unsurprisingly, stations in Tokyo are amongst the busiest stations in the world so it is advisable to really plan your travel in advance and download a map from the [Tokyo Metro website](#). Their website also has an app you can download to help you get round the Tokyo metro and has links to Wi-Fi spots in the stations. As you can see in the accompanying image, each Tokyo Metro Line is represented by a different letter & color. The numbers indicate the station. (G for “Ginza” Line)



### Useful tips:

- If you are using the metro system, be prepared to do a lot of walking.
- Rush hour is very busy - think about sending luggage ahead if traveling to the airport (see section on luggage couriers)
- There are [female-only cars](#) but only during rush hours.

## JR and Private Railways

Japan has a very reliable network of trains including 6 Japan Railway groups that cover the whole of Japan. Tokyo is covered by JR East and you can download maps and timetables from their [website](#). The most useful JR line in Tokyo is the Yamanote line, which does a loop around the city and connects with many metro stations. Dozens of private railways operate in Japan, the most useful of which are listed on this [website](#).

## Pre-paid Tickets

Pre-paid tickets are the easiest to use for foreign visitors. The “Suica” (JR) and “Pasmo” (Metro) cards, can both be used on either systems (JR and/or Metro) as well as on buses around Tokyo. You can also use them to pay in convenience stores and at some vending machines too. The best place to purchase them is at the airports (a refundable ¥500 deposit is payable) where you can get special discounts for foreigners (see below) and then top up at stations. You can also buy at ticket machines displaying the Suica or Pasmo logos. They are used very much like the MetroCard in New York where you just swipe them in and out, but it’s contactless so more like the Oyster card in London. There are fare adjustment machines at every station so you are never caught out and the machines have a switch-to-English button. The minimum top-up amount is ¥1000. These cards can be used across other regions of Japan with certain restrictions so it is best to check their websites:

[PASMO](#)

[SUICA](#)

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

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

## Rail Passes That Can Be Bought Outside of Japan

- Japan Rail Pass

If you are planning to travel long distances around Japan, the Japan Rail Pass is very good value but it can only be bought outside of Japan. It is sold through many travel agencies so it is worth checking the [official website](#) before buying, to make sure you are buying from designated agencies. It offers unlimited use on JR's *shinkansen* super-express bullet trains (except the fastest super-express “Nozomi”), limited-express trains, express trains and local trains as well as JR-affiliated buses throughout Japan. You can buy it for different lengths of time and for different regions in Japan and there is also a “Green Japan Rail Pass”

that allows you to travel in the Green class (1st class) on most trains. In order to use it in Japan, you must validate it upon arrival in Japan at the JR desk at the airports or at the JR Travel Center in Tokyo station. If you just need to make seat reservations, you can do this at any JR Ticket Reservation Counter (*Midori no Madoguchi*) by showing your Rail Pass and Passport. Most reservations have to be made in Japan with one exception - [JR East](#) offers an on-line seat reservation system you can use to book tickets before you come to Japan. It is aimed at those arriving in Tokyo.

- Other Rail Passes

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

#### Discount Tickets Available for Non-Japanese Visitors to Tokyo

- The [Keikyu Haneda and subway common pass](#) can be used on the Keikyu line from Tokyo Haneda Airport to Sengakuji station and includes unlimited rides on the Tokyo subway.
- The [Keisei Skyliner & Metro Pass](#) is a round-trip or one-way ticket to and from Narita Airport plus an open ticket for all Tokyo Metro lines. This specially discounted ticket for foreigners is only available at Narita airport.
- [Tokyo Metro Special Open Tickets for Foreign Tourists](#)

#### Accessibility for Wheelchair Users

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

#### Train Etiquette in Japan

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

#### Shinkansen (High Speed Bullet Train)

Japan has 9 *shinkansen* routes, the most recent of which, the Nishi Kyushu or Nagasaki Shinkansen, came into operation in 2022. They are covered by the



different jurisdictions of the JR network so check the appropriate JR website to find out about the routes and timetables. This [website](#) has a useful map and information on the routes.

### Shinkansen Tickets

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

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

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

### Shinkansen Seat Reservations

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

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

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

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

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

### Getting To and From the Airports

- **Haneda**  
More international flights arriving in Tokyo are coming into Haneda now, which is easily connected to Tokyo by a convenient [monorail ride](#) followed

by easy access to the Yamanote JR line that loops around the city. Alternatively, use the Keikyu line (above) and there are good bus links into Tokyo. Check their [website](#) for access information.

- **Narita**

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

- **Kansai International Airport**

They have [access information](#) on their website (see “pre-paid tickets” section for more information on the ICOCA Haruka ticket)

- **Fukuoka International Airport**

Access information is on the [Fukuoka International Airport website](#).

- **Central Japan International Airport**

This airport near Nagoya has transport links on its [website](#).

### Luggage Courier Services

There are many reliable courier services within Japan that deliver your luggage to and from the hotel/airport. Considering how incredibly economical and convenient their services are compared to other countries, they are widely used in Japan. Some have English websites and on-line reservation systems. Kuroneko Yamato, Sagawa Transport, Japan Post and [JAL ABC](#) are at most airports. Check the airport websites for available services and where to find the desks.

### Low-cost Carriers

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

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

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

[AirAsia Japan](#) Japanese low-cost airline, operating as a joint venture between AirAsia of Malaysia and Japanese partners with Nagoya as main hub

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

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

[Starflyer](#) Tokyo Haneda around Japan

[Skymark Airlines](#) Tokyo Haneda around Japan

[ZIPAIR](#) Tokyo Narita around Asia and North America

## 4. Wi-Fi and Using Your Phone in Japan

### Free Wi-Fi

Japan has made significant progress in providing free Wi-Fi for tourists, especially after the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. While the country was previously known for limited public Wi-Fi access, the situation has improved dramatically. Free Wi-Fi is now widely available at airports, hotels, major JR stations, Tokyo Metro stations, convenience stores (such as 7-Eleven and Lawson), certain branches of Starbucks, and popular shopping districts.

Many free Wi-Fi networks are specifically geared toward foreign visitors, although most require a simple sign-up process. Some networks may ask for basic information or verification, like showing your passport at select locations. It's a good idea to research available Wi-Fi options before your trip to find the most convenient network for your itinerary. Additionally, apps such as [Japan Connected-free Wi-Fi](#) help users find and connect to available hotspots across the country, making it even easier to stay connected while traveling.

### Area Specific Networks

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

### Wi-Fi Apps

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

#### [Japan Connected-free Wi-Fi](#) (NTT)

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

#### [FREE Wi-Fi PASSPORT](#)

SoftBank's Free Wi-Fi Passport service provides free Wi-Fi access for international tourists visiting Japan. Travelers can easily connect to SoftBank's

Wi-Fi hotspots across the country without the need for a Japanese SIM card. The service is available in popular tourist areas, train stations, airports, and various public spaces. To use it, visitors simply need to obtain a Wi-Fi password via SMS by dialing a specific number after arriving in Japan. No pre-registration is required, making it a convenient option for staying connected during their trip.

### Personal Hotspots

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

### Using Your Phone in Japan

Japan no longer supports 3G networks, so if your phone is older than 5 years or doesn't support 4G LTE or 5G, it may not work. Ensure your device is compatible with 4G LTE or 5G networks before traveling. Also, check your mobile plan's international roaming charges, as they can be expensive. It may be more cost-effective and convenient to explore one of the following options:

- Renting a Smartphone

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

- Pre-paid SIM

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

### Working On-The-Go

Although remote working is not as popular as it may be here, there are options available if you need to work on-the-go. This [website](#) has a useful list of cafés in the Tokyo area with free Wi-Fi and there are some drop-in co-working spaces

available, a good selection of which can be found [here](#).

## **5. Money**

Although Japan has a reputation of having a cash culture, credit cards are accepted widely in the major department stores and hotels. However, some less touristy restaurants don't accept credit cards so it is always wise to have access to cash.

### ATMs

Some ATMS do not accept foreign credit card cash withdrawals and not all stay open 24/7 so check ahead if you need to withdraw money while in Japan. You can withdraw cash using international credit cards at [Seven Bank ATMS](#) situated in 7-11 convenience stores 24 hours a day 365 days of the year. You can also use your credit card to withdraw from [Japan Post Bank ATMS](#) - most of which are either in post offices, train stations or supermarkets, although only the major offices are likely to offer 24 hour services. Citibank and AEON also have branches in most airports and cities although their coverage of ATMS is much more limited. As always, check with your credit card provider on the fees involved when using them abroad.

## **6. Business Etiquette**

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

### Introductions and Business Card Etiquette

The Japanese place great importance on initial meetings and greetings where they exchange business cards and bow to each other, observing many hierarchical rules. When dealing with non-Japanese, they may offer to shake hands but still expect to have lots of business cards on hand, preferably of a good quality and with your name and title translated into Japanese. The business card is important in Japan so don't play with it, scribble on it or put it straight into your pocket. If possible, study it intently and place it on the table in front of you at a meeting and put in a cardholder at the end. Japanese people normally address each other by their surnames plus the suffix "*san*" (Tanaka-san) in a business

setting. However, it is becoming more common for them to use their first names with non-Japanese people. Also, when addressing foreigners (you) Japanese usually will use the first name plus the suffix (John-san).

There are some set Japanese phrases commonly used when meeting people - Japanese will appreciate if you tried to use them but it is by no means a necessity. See the “Useful Phrases” section at the end.

### Meetings and Decision-making

Hierarchy and etiquette have an influence on meetings with the Japanese, from where to sit to who introduces themselves first. Japanese meetings can seem very frustrating, as decisions are not usually made there and then. Some companies use *nemawashi* - a form of group consensus based decision-making, which is normally done prior to a meeting and involves all stakeholders. Understandably, this takes some time, so Japanese meetings can seem rather like a waste of time to people more accustomed to using them for presenting ideas and receiving immediate feedback. The Japanese need time to deliberate and discuss, and initial meetings are usually a preliminary to other meetings after further consultation. Direct questions such as “do you like this?” or “do you agree to this?” could result in evasion and discomfort and possibly misleading answers and conclusions. They may soften a “no” to a “maybe” or sometimes a “yes” to avoid causing the other person to lose face and their polite smiles do not always mean things are going well. Be prepared for negotiations and for the pace of conversation to be much slower than at home, especially if using English.

### **Useful tips**

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

### Gift Giving Etiquette

The Japanese use gifts as a way of showing respect and developing relationships so unsurprisingly, gift giving is a central part of Japanese business etiquette. If it is your first visit, it is a good idea to take good quality gifts to the companies you will be visiting. Things that can be shared and are specific to your region such as local snacks or sweets are good as well as gourmet coffee.

There are two major gift giving times in Japan: early July (depending on the region) (*ochugen*) and end of November-mid December (*oseibo*). At these times, people give gifts to family, friends, teachers, colleagues, clients, prospective customers and business associates to show appreciation for people who have helped them and to ask for continued favors in the coming year. Department stores and mail order catalogs make big business out of this and advise on the types of gifts and how to wrap them.

### Greeting Cards

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

### Socializing after Business Meetings

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

### **Useful tips**

- **Have a short speech prepared in English (or Japanese if you are feeling brave) to introduce yourself and where you are from, possibly including some positive comments on your impressions of Japan.**
- **Don't be shy at karaoke - it is the taking part that matters.**

### Networking

You may want to do a spot of networking whilst in Japan to build up those important relationships. Many organizations such as the [American Chamber of Commerce in Japan](#), the [European Business Council](#) and the [Foreign Correspondent's Club](#) offer many great networking events but they may require membership or an invitation from a member. It is worth checking in advance for any events or seminars that may be taking place during your visit. There are



some useful networking groups on [LinkedIn](#) that meet up in Japan. Don't forget your business cards!

## 7. Interpreters and Translators

### Interpreters

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

There is a plethora of Interpreters in Japan - if you are going on a trade mission or to an exhibition, they may provide these for you. The [International Association of Conference Interpreters](#) has some members in Japan and the [American Embassy](#) has a list of specialist interpreters/ translators in Japan if you need legal or medical assistance. If you are on a tight budget, I recommend looking for help on freelance platforms like [Fiverr](#), or asking a Japanese teacher on platforms like [iTalki](#) if they would be open to interpreting.

### Useful tips

- **Don't be alarmed if the Interpreter changes things slightly in a way to fit the cultural context.**
- **Avoid putting them on the spot or asking them to put your Japanese clients on the spot directly.**
- **If possible, allow for breaks (tea break or toilet break) to discuss privately with your interpreter how things are going and check back.**
- **Make sure you brief them beforehand and let them see any PowerPoint presentations you have.**

## Translation services

It is always advisable to get your presentations and relevant marketing materials translated to suit your Japanese audience - consumer tastes and the sharing of information can be surprisingly different in Japan so it is well worth dealing with an expert who understands this. There are certain aspects the Japanese may expect from a cultural viewpoint or from a service aspect that we are not always aware of. Idioms and colloquial phrases can be easily lost in translation and some words or ideas can evoke very different emotions in Japan. There are many translation companies on the market including companies offering services for immediate outputs such as social media and e-mails. Your Chamber of Commerce may have a list of translators they recommend, but the [Japan Association of Translators](#) is a good source of information with some great advice on what to look out for.

### **Useful tips:**

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

## Useful Translation Apps

There are several translation tools available, some offering off-line services and voice translator services. Additionally, all AI chatbots like ChatGPT make it very easy to translate nowadays.

All of the above are certainly useful in helping you to understand things when traveling or for initial business contacts by email, but are not recommended for actual business interactions beyond the first outreach or even negotiations etc.

Generally the best ones for instant voice translation need Internet access, including [Google Translate](#) and [iTranslate](#), available on Android & iOS.

[WAYGO](#) & [Yomiwa](#) can both instantly translate menus and text without internet access. Things are changing all the time as new apps are being developed.

## 8. Shopping

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

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

- 100 Yen shops (100円) -There are thousands of these shops all over Japan and they offer an amazing array of goods ranging from tableware, kitchenware, stationery and dried food - a good place to buy cheap presents to take home. The price including the consumption tax of 10% is actually 110 JPY.
- There are many other big discount stores including the Don Quixote chain (ドンキホーテ) that seem to sell everything and anything. More information on these can be found on the [JNTO website](#).
- Japan is infamous for its range of convenience stores such as 7-Eleven, Lawson, Family Mart and they are, as the name suggests, incredibly convenient, offering courier services, facilities to pay bills, photocopying, tickets for concerts and other events, and have ATMs that accept international bank cards. Some also serve as free Wi-Fi hotspots. The fast food that they sell, including the rice balls (*onigiri*) and pork dumplings (*nikuman*) are often of a very high quality.

### Useful tips:

- **Tipping is not necessary in Japan and will in some cases confuse service staff.**
- **The consumption tax rise in 2019 was from 8% up to 10%**
- **Customer service in most shops, especially the high-end department stores, is of a high standard and the staff on the shop floor may offer to take your money to the cashier personally, bring your change and gift-wrap your purchases. Sometimes this can take some time as you wait for them to return with your change and goods.**

## 9. Food and Drink

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

many people you need a table for.

### Useful tips

- **Try and visit markets and department store food floors at closing time when they reduce the price of food.**
- **Street vendors sell good priced take away *bento* meals too, so eating in Japan does not need to be expensive.**
- **[Tabelog](#) helps you find local restaurants and make reservations**

### Health and Safety Aspects/Emergencies

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

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

## 10. Other Useful Information

### Business Attire

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

## Weather

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

## English Language Magazines

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

## Smoking

Smoking is still permitted in most bars, restaurants, on certain carriages of trains in Japan and in some hotel rooms. Many cafés allow smoking and the smoking area is not always in a separate room. (Starbucks is non-smoking) Smoking is banned on the street in some urban areas and is strictly forbidden on the metro. Look out for the universal no smoking signs or the Japanese characters - 禁煙.

**Last but not least:** The voltage in Japan is same to the US, but different to European countries. So you might need to take an adaptor if you are traveling with EU appliances. Some electrical appliances may not work in Japanese hotels, especially those that have a high-power usage.

## **11. Japanese Language**

The Japanese written language uses 4 character sets.

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

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

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

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

## Useful Phrases for Business

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



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**[info@japanbusinessconsulting.com](mailto:info@japanbusinessconsulting.com) | +1 786 354 5706  
<http://www.japanbusinessconsulting.com>**