
Japan 2018





Sample Itinerary Japan 2018

Tokyo - Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park - Kanazawa - Kyoto - Osaka

11 Days / 10 Nights

2 Persons

Date of Issue: May 26, 2020

May 31, 2018 - June 10, 2018



Introduction

Accommodation	Destination	Duration
The Ritz-Carlton Tokyo	Tokyo	2 Nights
Gora Kadan	Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park	2 Nights
Kanazawa Tokyu Hotel	Kanazawa	2 Nights
The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto	Kyoto	3 Nights
Swissotel Nankai Osaka	Osaka	1 Night

Day 1: The Ritz-Carlton Tokyo, Tokyo (Thu, May 31)

Tokyo

At over 13 million people in the official metropolitan area alone, Tokyo is the core of the most populated urban area in the world. This massive, wealthy and fascinating metropolis offers high-tech visions of the future alongside glimpses of traditional Japan. Huge and varied in its geography, Tokyo Metropolis spans not just the city but also spectacular, rugged mountains to the west and beautiful subtropical islands to the south. The various districts of this phenomenal city vary wildly in character, from the electronic blare of Akihabara to the magnificent Imperial gardens and shrines of Chiyoda, from the lively youth culture mecca of Shibuya to the splendid pottery shops and temple markets of Asakusa. If you don't like what you see, hop on the train and head to the next station, and you will find something entirely different. Tokyo truly has a little bit of everything for everyone.

Day Itinerary

Travel to your hotel by way of the train using your Japan Rail Pass. Take a taxi from the train station for the short ride to your hotel. Relax and then head to the Sky Lounge at the hotel to enjoy your dinner and view Mount Fuji.

Overnight: The Ritz-Carlton Tokyo

As guests arrive on the 45th floor of the Midtown Tower, Tokyo's tallest building, they will find themselves in a magnificent sky lobby that epitomizes one of the premier luxury hotels in this cosmopolitan city – The Ritz-Carlton, Tokyo. Occupying the top nine floors and the first three levels of the 53-story Midtown Tower, this five-star luxury hotel is located in the Roppongi District, which transfixes visitors with both its vibrant night life and centuries-old attractions. The distinctive hotel features more than 247 elegantly appointed guest rooms with stunning skyline views of Tokyo, a world-class rejuvenating spa, acclaimed restaurants and state-of-the-art event venues, all exuding exceptional experiences with artistry, surprise and personalized attention for both business and leisure travelers alike.



Day 2: The Ritz-Carlton Tokyo, Tokyo (Fri, June 1)

Day Itinerary

Your private tour guide will meet you on the 45th floor of the Ritz-Carlton Tokyo. Today you'll walk about 10 miles and enjoy short subway rides to reach off-the-beaten track artisan shops while taking time to explore the grounds of the Imperial Palace, the fashionable street and unique architecture of Ginza, Sense-Ji, Meiji Shrine, and the Shinjuku District. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant while your guide introduces you to Japanese cuisine.

Meet guide on 45th floor

09:00 am - 05:00 pm

Activities

09:00	Private guided tour
	Tokyo
	Tokyo Imperial Palace
	Ginza District
	Meiji Shrine
	Shinjuku District

The Ritz-Carlton Tokyo

As guests arrive on the 45th floor of the Midtown Tower, Tokyo's tallest building, they will find themselves in a magnificent sky lobby that epitomizes one of the premier luxury hotels in this cosmopolitan city – The Ritz-Carlton, Tokyo. Occupying the top nine floors and the first three levels of the 53-story Midtown Tower, this five-star luxury hotel is located in the Roppongi District, which transfixes visitors with both its vibrant night life and centuries-old attractions. The distinctive hotel features more than 247 elegantly appointed guest rooms with stunning skyline views of Tokyo, a world-class rejuvenating spa, acclaimed restaurants and state-of-the-art event venues, all exuding exceptional experiences with artistry, surprise and personalized attention for both business and leisure travelers alike.

Tokyo

At over 13 million people in the official metropolitan area alone, Tokyo is the core of the most populated urban area in the world. This massive, wealthy and fascinating metropolis offers high-tech visions of the future alongside glimpses of traditional Japan. Huge and varied in its geography, Tokyo Metropolis spans not just the city but also spectacular, rugged mountains to the west and beautiful subtropical islands to the south. The various districts of this phenomenal city vary wildly in character, from the electronic blare of Akihabara to the magnificent Imperial gardens and shrines of Chiyoda, from the lively youth culture mecca of Shibuya to the splendid pottery shops and temple markets of Asakusa. If you don't like what you see, hop on the train and head to the next station, and you will find something entirely different. Tokyo truly has a little bit of everything for everyone.

Tokyo Imperial Palace

The Tokyo Imperial Palace is the primary residence of the Emperor of Japan. The buildings on the grounds include the main palace, the private residences of the imperial family, an archive, administrative offices, and museums. The palace with its grounds is located on the site of the former Edo Castle and many of the castle's moats, defensive walls, gatehouses, and turrets still remain.

Official tours of the inside of the grounds lasting 75 minutes are available but must be booked up to a month in advance. The east garden is open to the public and no reservations are required.

Ginza District

Ginza District is Tokyo's best-known upmarket shopping, dining and entertainment district, and, at around 10 million Yen per square km of land, also some of the priciest real estate in Japan. Almost every leading brand name in fashion

and cosmetics is represented here, and the classy beauty parlors, department stores, art galleries, boutiques, cafes, restaurants, and nightclubs offer pleasant and luxurious ways for visitors to spend their time.

Meiji Shrine

Located in Shibuya, Tokyo, the Meiji Shrine is a Shinto shrine that is dedicated to the deified spirits of Emperor Meiji and his wife, Empress Shōken.

The famous Shinto shrine exudes an atmosphere of serenity and is quite austere unlike many other Asian places of worship. Visitors can admire the two gates made of 1,500-year-old cypress, dip their hands at the cleansing station before offering up a prayer, write wishes on little pieces of paper and tie them to the prayer wall, or follow the local tradition of bowing twice, then clapping twice, and bowing once more before tossing some yen into the offering box. On a Sunday morning, visitors have a good chance of seeing a traditional Shinto wedding procession move through the courtyard of the shrine.

Shinjuku District

Shinjuku is a ward of the city of Tokyo with the busiest railway station in the world right in the heart of it. More than two million people per day pass through Shinjuku station via the dozen or so railway and subway lines and a bus station which is conveniently located on top of the station, while subterranean malls, department stores, electronics stores, music shops as well as restaurants and bars surround the station.

The twin towers of the Metropolitan Government Office and some of the tallest buildings in Tokyo, together with a number of hotels stand to the west of the station while the nightlife, dining and entertainment district lies to the east.

Day 3: Gora Kadan, Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park (Sat, June 2)

Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park

Stretching across four prefectures on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park is a vast, awe-inspiring paradise that covers Yamanashi, Shizuoka, and Kanagawa, and the western Tokyo Metropolis of Japan. It is home to the iconic Mount Fuji, a gigantic active volcano that looms over the Yamanashi and Shizuoka Prefectures and is recognised across the globe as the quintessential symbol of Japan. Nature lovers are spoilt for choice in this richly diverse landscape of natural hot springs, sweeping coastlines, towering mountains, crystalline lakes, and over 1000 volcanic islands. Among the plethora of highlights that this endless idyll has to offer, don't miss an opportunity to visit the Fuji Five Lakes set at the base of Mount Fuji, the mountainous town of Hakone, and Izu Islands, a picturesque scuba diving hub.

Day Itinerary

Your Relais and Chateau Rykogan features a room with a private garden and stone outdoor bath. You'll wear your Yukatas (robes) while you wander through the beautiful property. Multi-course meals will be served to you in your room by your personal butler.

Spend the afternoon at the outdoor Picasso Museum.

Activities

Hakone

Hakone

Hakone is a city in Japan that lies within the borders of the Fuji-Hakone-Izu national park in the Ashigarashimo District of Kanagawa Prefecture. Tourists specifically travel here for the spectacular views of Mount Fuji. Other attractions in the area include walks to Hakone Shrine on the shore of Lake Ashi, day-trips through the Hakone Open-Air Museum and explorations to Mount Kintoki to view the ruins of old-Japan. No visit is complete without eating a black egg hard-boiled in the Great Boiling Valley of Owakudani. Legend has it that these eggs add some extra years to your lifespan.

Overnight: Gora Kadan

Gora Kadan is not a hotel, but instead, a traditional Japanese Ryokan. Located on the grounds of the former summer villa of a member of the Imperial family, the building and facilities have earned high praise for its design, being in harmony with the nearby mountains, blending Japanese tradition along with modern design elements. Gora Kadan has two wells from which mineral-rich, hot spring water flows and feeds the open-air baths. The minerals contained in the spring water are regarded as having many healthy qualities promoting general good health, and also, smooth, soft skin.

There is also a pool with an outdoor Jacuzzi on the first floor of the main building.



Day 4: Gora Kadan, Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park (Sun, June 3)

Day Itinerary

Today you'll take the Hakone Tozan Railway to the Kmagatake Ropeway through the mountains to arrive at Lake Ashi. Board a viewing vessel and travel along the lake enjoying magnificent views of Mount Fuji. Visit the historic Japanese Shinto shrine along the lake and enjoy a lakeside lunch before returning to your hotel.

Activities

Lake Ashi
Mount Fuji

Lake Ashi

Lake Ashinoko formed after Mount Hakone's last eruption 3000 years ago. The lake has become the symbol of Hakone, with Mount Fuji in the background. The region surrounding the lake is generally undeveloped, featuring small towns in the east and north and a few lakeside resorts.

Mount Fuji

Mount Fuji is Japan's highest mountain and most famous landmark, lying within the borders of the Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park. It is known as one of the "Three Holy Mountains" and legend has it that Mount Fuji was a samurai training ground. Although the mountain can be seen from certain points in Tokyo, it is best viewed from Hakone, Kawaguchiko, Kamakura, Enoshima or Gotemba. The official climbing season starts early July to mid-September for those who wish to hike the 3776 metres to the top. Sunrise from the summit is one of the most sought after views in Japan. Visitors have a wide selection of hiking trails to choose from including the Yoshida, Subashiri, Gotemba and Fujinomiya Trails.

Day 5: Kanazawa Tokyu Hotel, Kanazawa (Mon, June 4)

Kanazawa

Kanazawa is the centre of culture and commerce in the Hokuriku region and is a favourite getaway for the Japanese. The whole town has been well preserved through the ages and it feels like a modern-day museum with all its castles, geishas and gardens. Visit Higashi Chaya where you will find kimono-clad geishas serving green tea in the courtyards of teahouses during the daytime. Kenrokuen garden gives weary travellers a space to rest or meditate under cherry blossoms and red azaleas. Most of Kanazawa has remained unchanged for centuries, and here you can see where and how Samurai warriors lived from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

Day Itinerary

You'll visit one of the most beautiful gardens in all of Japan, Kenroku-en, where you'll have lunch. Learn about the traditional architecture of pre-modern Japan along Yougetsu Minshuku and visit the artisan shops and stalls.

Activities

Kenroku-en Garden

Kenroku-en Garden

Kenroku-en Garden is located in Kanazawa, Ishikawa, Japan. It is one of Japan's three most beautiful landscape gardens, featuring a variety of flowering trees which provide the garden with a different beauty each season. The spacious grounds used to be the outer garden of the Kanazawa Castle, constructed by the ruling Maeda family centuries ago, it opened to public in 1871.

Overnight: Kanazawa Tokyu Hotel

Adjacent to a bus stop, Kanazawa Tokyo Hotel is 7 minute walk from the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art and a 12 minute walk from the Kenroku-en gardens. The hotel's stylish rooms, have city views, free WiFi, flat screen TVs, mini fridges, as well as tea and coffee making facilities. The hotel features a high-end French restaurant and a Japanese eatery with panoramic city and garden views. Other amenities include a chic bar and a cozy guest lounge.



Day 6: Kanazawa Tokyu Hotel, Kanazawa (Tue, June 5)

Day Itinerary

Today enjoy your private class to learn the art of lacquer ware. Explore the many artisan shops of Kanazawa and castle on your own and then enjoy an authentic Japanese BBQ meal arrange for you by your hotel.

Activities

Kanazawa Castle

Kanazawa Castle

Kanazawa Castle is located next to Kenroku-en Gardena. From 1583 to the end of the Edo Period, the castle, was the seat of the powerful Maeda Clan. It burnt down several times over the many years, most recent of which was in 1881, where only two storehouses and the Ishikawa-mon Gate survived. Visitors can enter the castle's upper floor free of charge, where displays of the gate's history and construction can be seen. Turrets and a long storehouse were rebuilt and feature displays on traditional carpentry, all now open for public viewing.

Day 7: The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto, Kyoto (Wed, June 6)

Kyoto

If you want to explore a city filled with shrines, temples and historical structures, Kyoto should be first on your list. This city has seventeen historic sites that has been proclaimed as World Heritage Sites. Visit Nijo Castle to see an example of Japanese architecture combined with beautiful interior decorating. While you're there take a trip to the Gekkeikan Okura Show to experience the journey of sake-brewing history that include 6120 brewing tools through the ages and a space where you can listen to the recordings of brewing songs of the past. For a magnificent view of Koyoto city travellers stand on Kiyomizu Temple's large wooden verandah that is built suspended over a deep valley.

Day Itinerary

Travel today from Kanazawa to Kyoto using your Japan Rail Pass. Your concierge at the Ritz-Carlton Kyoto has made dinner reservations for you within walking distance of your hotel.

Activities

Kyoto
Kyoto Station

Kyoto

If you want to explore a city filled with shrines, temples and historical structures, Kyoto should be first on your list. This city has seventeen historic sites that has been proclaimed as World Heritage Sites. Visit Nijo Castle to see an example of Japanese architecture combined with beautiful interior decorating. While you're there take a trip to the Gekkeikan Okura Show to experience the journey of sake-brewing history that include 6120 brewing tools through the ages and a space where you can listen to the recordings of brewing songs of the past. For a magnificent view of Koyoto city travellers stand on Kiyomizu Temple's large wooden verandah that is built suspended over a deep valley.

Overnight: The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto

Opened in February 2014 as the first luxury urban resort in Japan, The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto sits serenely on the banks of the Kamogawa river, with sweeping views of the famous Higashiyama mountains. The resort features 134 guest rooms and suites, four restaurants and bars, The Ritz-Carlton Spa, and four different types of banquet rooms ranging from corporate dinners, to meetings, exhibitions and private events. The resort also boasts a unique partnership with Pierre Hermé Paris, creator of Haute Pâtisserie, showcasing popular creations and introducing an exclusive range of signature desserts. Blending the centuries old traditions and rich culture of Japan's ancient capital with modern luxury, The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto brings to life the cultural heart of Japan. The hotel is in close proximity to Kyoto's popular downtown areas including Gion, Pontocho and the city's retail and entertainment district.



Day 8: The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto, Kyoto (Thu, June 7)

Day Itinerary

Your private guide will take you on an exquisite private tour of old and new Kyoto. Visit the Kinkaku-ji (Golden Palace) and Fushimi Inarai Taisha, the famed red gates of the Shinto shrine. Spend your evening on your own strolling the romantic streets of Kyoto.

Activities

Kinkaku-ji
Fushimi Inari Shrine

Kinkaku-ji

Kinkaku-ji is located in Kinkakuji-cho, Kita-ku, in the northwestern corner of Kyoto. It is a beautiful area, with the mountains Kinugasayama to the west and Hidari Daimonjiyama behind it. Kinkaku-ji's Relics Hall (Shariden), commonly known as the Golden Pavilion, is so well known that the entire temple has come to be called Kinkaku-ji, but the temple's official name is Rokuon-ji. It was named after the third Ashikaga shogun Yoshimitsu (1358-1408) and was part of his private Kitayama villa. The gardens of Japanese temples reflect the Buddhist worldview, as do the temple buildings. Simply by visiting a temple and experiencing its environment, one comes into contact with the teachings of Buddhism in a form even more convincing than sermons or lectures on Buddhist doctrine.

Fushimi Inari Shrine

Fushimi Inari Taisha is located in southern Kyoto and is a very important Shinto shrine. The shrine is renowned for its thousands of vermilion torii gates and its network of trails. The trails lead into the forest of Mount Inari, which is 233m high and belongs to the shrine grounds. Fushimi Inari Taisha is dedicated to the Shinto god of rice, Inari. Foxes are said to be Inari's messengers, and many statues of them can be seen all across the shrine grounds.

Day 9: The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto, Kyoto (Fri, June 8)

Day Itinerary

Today your private guide will take you through the Gion District before visiting the Ryoan-Ji, a Zen temple in northwest Kyoto known for its rock gardens.

Activities

Gion District
Ryoanji Temple

Gion District

The Gion District is one of the oldest districts of the city of Kyoto and was created to accommodate visitors to the Yasaka Shrine. This district is now one of the most exclusive geiko districts in Japan – geisha are referred to as geiko in Kyoto. Traditional establishments called machiya (townhouses) or ochaya (tea houses) where patrons have been entertained by geiko since the times of the samurai still exist in Gion. There are numerous modern restaurants, clubs, bars and tourist-orientated establishments that are also popular with the locals.

Ryoanji Temple

Ryoanji Temple is Japan's most famous rock garden. The garden attracts hundreds of visitors every single day. The area was initially an aristocrat's villa during the Heian Period, and was then transformed into a Zen temple in 1450. The meaning of the garden is unclear to the Japanese people, some believing it represents a tiger carrying cubs across a pond, while others believe it represents a more abstract idea, such as infinity. Visitors are urged to find their own meaning in it.

Day 10: Swissotel Nankai Osaka, Osaka (Sat, June 9)

Osaka

Osaka is a large port city and a busy commercial centre on the Japanese island of Honshu, known for its modern architecture, vibrant nightlife and delicious street food. This bustling city features a number of appealing attractions, most notably its restored 16th-century Shogunate Osaka Castle, surrounded by a moat and plum, peach and cherry blossom trees. The city also boasts an impressive array of museums including the National Museum of Ethnology, the Open-Air Museum of Old Japanese Farm Houses and the Japan Folk Crafts Museum. Other must-see attractions include the Universal Studios Japan and the Expo Commemoration Park, which features the iconic Tower of the Sun.

Day Itinerary

Today you'll travel by Japanese rail to Osaka where you'll enjoy dinner from the various offerings in the marketplace.

Overnight: Swissotel Nankai Osaka

Swissotel Nankai, Osaka is a deluxe hotel ideally located in the heart of Namba, Osaka's most exciting entertainment, shopping and dining district. The hotel sits above Nankai Railway's Namba Station offering direct train access to Kansai International Airport and all major tourist attractions such as Kyoto, Nara and Kobe are within easy reach. The 36-storey tower has 546 well appointed guestrooms, including 42 Executive floor rooms and 28 suites with upgraded amenities including Swiss Executive Club Lounge access ensure an unrivaled experience with the ultimate in amenities and in-room technology. Pürovel Spa & Sports offers a selection of spa treatments, fully equipped gym, Jacuzzi, sauna and indoor swimming pool. For gastronomic pleasures, guests can choose from seven restaurants and bar – our signature restaurant Tavola36, complemented with our specialty restaurant - Empress Room Chinese Restaurant, Minami Teppanyaki Restaurant, Hana-Goyomi Japanese Restaurant, NAMBAR 10 SPORTS + BEERS, SH'UN Wine and Dine. The Lounge for afternoon tea and evening cocktails and Swiss Gourmet for take away of the hotel made pastries and bakeries. Our conference and business facilities with one grand ballroom, 18 other multi-function rooms and three wedding chapels are suitably equipped to cater to a capacity of 10 to 1,400 persons.



Day 11: End of Itinerary (Sun, June 10)

Day Itinerary

We hope you had a wonderful trip! Safe travels home and please return soon!

Transport

Journey Information

Date	Train	Agency	Departure Platform	Time	Arrival Platform	Time	Class	Ref
31 May	Train		Narita International Airport [NRT]		The Ritz-Carlton Tokyo			
2 Jun	Train		The Ritz-Carlton Tokyo		Gora Kadan			
4 Jun	Train		Gora Kadan		Kanazawa Tokyu Hotel			
6 Jun	Train		Kanazawa Tokyu Hotel		The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto			
9 Jun	Train		The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto		Swissotel Nankai Osaka			

Urgent Contact Numbers

Company Name	Telephone	Email Address	Contact Person
Campanile College Tours - affiliate of Alpine Travel/Coastline	650-436-2650	estone@coastlinetravel.com	Elizabeth Stone

Service Provider Directory

Service Provider	Ref. Number	Telephone	Address
Gora Kadan			1300 Gora, Hakone, Ashigarashimo District, Kanagawa Prefecture 250-0408, Japan
Kanazawa Tokyu Hotel			Japan, 〒920-0961 Ishikawa Prefecture, Kanazawa, Korinbo, 2 Chome-1-1
Swissotel Nankai Osaka		+81 6-6646-1111	5-1-60 Namba Chuo-ku Osaka 542-0076 Japan
The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto		+81 75-746-5555	Kamogawa Nijo-Hashi Hotori, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-0902 Japan

The Ritz-Carlton Tokyo

Tokyo Midtown, 9-7-1, Akasaka, Minato-ku, Tokyo
107-6245 Japan

Travel Information



Japan is one of the most visited countries in the world and many tourists wax lyrical when they share their travel experiences. The landscape offers an interesting blend of beautiful nature, well kept religious shrines and temples, historical landmarks, modern cities and world heritage sites. The influence of Japan's fascinating cultures and unusual subcultures have such an international impact that foreigners flock here to experience sumo wrestling, traditional tea drinking ceremonies, anime comic art, samurai legends and more. Japan is also known as the birthplace of sushi, aikido and calligraphy. A trip here would not be complete without experiencing the otherworldly music scene and diverse nightlife.

Banking and Currency

Currency

The unit of Japanese currency is yen. Coins are available in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 50, 100 and 500 yen and bank notes in denominations of 1,000, 2,000, 5,000 and 10,000 yen. You can buy yen at foreign exchange banks and other authorized money exchangers. At the international airports, currency exchange counters are usually open during normal office hours. The exchange rate fluctuates daily depending on the money market.

Banking

Banking hours: Monday-Friday 09h00-15h00.

American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard, Visa and other major credit cards are widely accepted in major cities and towns. A pin number may be required to process the transaction. It is advisable to check with your bank to find out if your card will be recognised in Japan. The Japan Post Bank, Seven-Eleven convenience stores and international banks typically accept foreign credit cards.

ATMs at Seven-Eleven stores also accept foreign cards and are accessible 24 hours a day. International banks accept foreign credit or debit cards, and these are hard to find outside of major cities. Bank ATMs are generally open Monday-Friday 07h00-23h00, Saturday-Sunday 09h00-19h00, though some only operate during normal banking hours and on Saturday mornings. Citibank machines are the most likely to have ATMs, and also to accept foreign credit cards (and are usually open 24 hours).

Japan has a strong cash culture, and it is usual to see people carrying large amounts of cash with them because of the low crime rate. It is only recently that credit cards have begun to become more popular. However, travellers may still encounter difficulties with foreign credit cards.

Travellers cheques can be exchanged at most major banks, larger hotels and some duty-free shops. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take traveller's cheques in Japanese Yen or US Dollars.

Travel, Transport and Getting Around

Japan has an efficient public transportation network, especially within metropolitan areas and between the large cities. Japanese public transportation is characterized by its punctuality, its superb service, and the large crowds of people using it.

All Nippon Airways (ANA) and Japan Airlines (JAL) maintain an extensive network of flights covering all of Japan and its islands. There are a few budget airlines too, such as Skymark, Air Do, Solaseed Air, IBEX Airways and Starflyer. Tokyo is serviced by two airports; Haneda (HND) which has both domestic and international flights, and Narita (NRT) for international flights.

Japan has a network of well-connected expressways linking major regions. However, expressway tolls are very high and there is major congestion during peak holiday seasons. Driving is convenient if you are planning to travel outside the major cities to the more remote and scenic regions. It's important to be aware of weather conditions – heavy rain and snow can force road closures. International visitors must have an international license in order to hire and drive a car in Japan. The minimum driving age is 18, and it is advisable to take out car insurance.

Taxis can be expensive, particularly in rush hour (07h30-09h30 and 17h00-18h00) when traffic can be very slow. There is a minimum charge of ¥660 for the first 2km (1.2 miles) followed by ¥80 per 274m (900ft) thereafter, plus a time charge when the taxi is moving at less than 10kph (6mph).

Taxi drivers are very professional, but tend not to speak English, so it is advisable for tourists to have their destination written out in Japanese, together with the name of some nearby landmark. A map may also help, as Japanese streets can be complicated and some taxi drivers will get confused. Hotels can provide this service.

Cycling is a pleasant way to enjoy exploring Japan, and is often faster than using public transport. Bicycle rental is available in all major cities, especially those with major sightseeing attractions such as Tokyo, Kamakura, Kyoto, Nara and Hiroshima.

There are regular long-distance bus services running between all the major regions and cities in Japan. Both daytime and overnight buses are available. It's a cheap way to travel and sightseeing time during the day can be maximised by travelling at night.

Food, Drink and Cuisine Advice

If travelling to the area near the Fukushima nuclear accident it is advisable to take supplies of food and water. Produce from the area near the Fukushima nuclear accident, which is still being sold in some supermarkets nationwide, should be avoided due to the lack of a centralized testing system in Japan for radioactive contamination in food, and discrepancies between Japanese and international standards for safe levels of radioactive substances in food.

Tap water in Tokyo was declared not safe for consumption after the accident, although the government has since stated otherwise. Nevertheless, if travelling with children it is advisable to take precautions. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare website (www.mhlw.go.jp) has updates on contamination levels in tested food. In other parts of Japan, food and drink are generally considered safe.

Only eat raw fish, seafood and meat from recognised establishments, and be aware that there is a risk of parasitic infection and toxins if these foods have not been prepared properly. E-coli food poisoning outbreaks tend to occur in Japan during the warmer months (June-September), and it is advisable to take precautions when consuming perishable foods at outdoor summer festivals, where refrigeration may be an issue.

Japanese cuisine involves fresh, delicate flavours based on seasonal ingredients. Rice, miso (fermented soy bean) soup, tofu (soy bean curd), pickled vegetables and fish are the traditional staples of daily Japanese cuisine. Traditionally, meat was not eaten because of Buddhist beliefs. However, beef, chicken are now also staple ingredients. Fresh seafood is highly valued and Japanese will travel far to eat crab in winter, for example, and *unagi* (eel) in summer. The variety of ingredients, the intensive preparation methods, and the meticulous presentation found in Japanese cuisine is highly impressive.

Sushi, pieces of raw fish on vinegared rice, has become synonymous with Japanese cuisine. The easiest place to try sushi is at a *kaiten-zushi* restaurant, where many varieties pass on a conveyor belt and diners can pick up what they fancy without any language difficulties, and at reasonable prices. More traditional sushi restaurants serve higher quality fish but also charge much higher prices.

The most luxurious dining in Japan is *kaiseki* cuisine – a multi-course banquet that was originally intended to accompany the tea ceremony. *Kaiseki* cuisine is exquisitely presented, reflecting the aesthetics of the seasons and traditional ceramics. A typical banquet will begin with light appetisers and soups before progressing to various steamed, grilled and fried dishes, and ending with a simple rice dish.

A variety of international restaurants are also available, catering for every taste and budget, from French and Italian to Chinese, Indian and Thai. Western dishes in expensive places are usually excellent, but cheaper diner-style restaurants may disappoint. While sake (rice wine) is still regularly served, beer is by far the most popular alcoholic beverage.

Tips are never expected. In some upmarket places, a 10 to 15% service charge will be added to the bill. In some bars, there may be a table or "charm" charge too, which can be quite steep; it's best to enquire in advance if you're in any doubt.

Climate and Weather

The climate varies widely from one region to region. Basically, Japan has four distinct seasons. Spring months are March, April, and May. Summer months are June, July, and August. Autumn months are September, October, and November. Winter months are December, January, and February. Summer is hot and humid in general. During the winter, it snows a lot on the Sea of Japan side, and it is dry on the Pacific Ocean side.

Clothing and Dress Recommendations

The Japanese dress as Westerners do and are quite conservative on the whole, but the youngsters are very daring and you'll see some mad outfits in Tokyo. Pack comfortable shoes for walking that can be slipped off easily when you need to. Holes in socks are not recommended, as you spend lots of time without shoes on - visiting temples, shrines and traditional restaurants etc. As the Japanese *are very petite*, finding clothes to fit in the popular stores can be difficult - so take everything you will need with you. In Japan tattoos are associated with the mafia, and are banned in many places - even a tiny mark may mean you are refused entry. So if you have any, keep them covered with clothing, plasters or special concealer products.

Electricity and Plug Standards

In Japan the standard voltage is 100 V. The standard frequency is 50/60 Hz. The power sockets that are used are of type A / B.

Japanese power outlets are identical to ungrounded (2-pin) North American outlets. While most Japanese outlets these days are polarized (one slot is slightly wider than the other), it is possible to encounter non-polarized outlets in some places.

The frequency of electric current is 50 Hertz in Eastern Japan (including Tokyo, Yokohama, Tohoku, Hokkaido) and 60 Hertz in Western Japan (including Nagoya, Osaka, Kyoto, Hiroshima, Shikoku, Kyushu); however, most equipment is not affected by this frequency difference. A possible exception are timing devices such as clocks.
