

JAPAN

Information Pack

1. Visas

British, EU and US nationals can visit Japan for up to three months without a visa. It is not necessary to apply for a visa waiver in advance. Note that you will usually be asked to provide evidence of a return or onward ticket on arrival in Japan. Your passport should be valid for the proposed duration of your stay.

2. Tickets, flight protection, check-in

a) Tickets

Confirmation of your flight reservation will already have been sent to you or will be sent shortly. Your full ticket will be sent to you when we have received your final payment. (This must be made not later than 8 weeks before departure).

b) Flight and holiday protection

Your holiday is protected by our ATOL Licence No. 3145. This ATOL is issued by the CAA and ensures your money is safe before departure, and your safe repatriation. For your part you must strictly observe the conditions attached to your flight tickets, and the conditions given with your booking form. G&M International are also fully bonded in compliance with English package and travel regulations as set out by the DTI and in compliance with Article 7 of the EEC Directive regulating tour operators and package travel.

c) Airport check-in

Most airlines now offer on-line check-in and we strongly recommend this. Otherwise check-in before departure is normally 3 hours ahead of flight time. Please check your luggage allowance before travelling. NB if taking internal flights, your luggage allowance will be considerably less (usually in the region of 15kgs) and must be in a soft sided bag.

d) Airport taxes

The UK departure taxes will be included in your invoice. There will also be relevant fuel, security and local departure taxes added to this.

3. Health and immunisation requirements

You are advised to contact your GP/travel nurse around 8 weeks before your trip to check whether you need any vaccinations or other preventive measures. Vaccinations that may be recommended include: Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Japanese encephalitis, Tetanus, Tick-borne encephalitis (certain regions only).

Medical facilities in Japan are excellent throughout the country, but the cost of treatment is high. Ensure you have adequate travel insurance to cover the cost of any treatment, and contact your insurer ASAP if you receive any medical care whilst in Japan.

4. Currency

The local currency is the Japanese Yen (JPY). Japan is predominantly a cash society, and while most major credit cards will be accepted in hotels, you will often find they are not accepted in shops or restaurants.

Your Financial Protection

All monies paid by you for the air holiday package shown [or flights if appropriate] are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 3145.

For more information see our booking terms and conditions.

Foreign issued debit cards and credit cards are usually accepted by the ATMs found in Japanese Post Offices or in convenience stores; high-street ATMs, on the other hand, may not accept international cards. Note that ATMs usually close from 9pm and **on weekends** – it is always wise to carry a supply of cash and not to rely on your credit card while travelling in Japan. Many first-time travellers are often surprised at the scarcity of ATMs.

Travellers' cheques are no longer widely accepted.

5. *Tipping*

There is no culture of tipping in Japan, and no situations in which you will be expected to tip – this applies even in restaurants. Compulsory service charges are, however, levied in some hotels and restaurants.

6. *Weather*

The typhoon season runs from Jun to Dec with most activity between Jul and Sep. The southernmost regions of Japan are usually the worst affected.

The monsoon rains occur throughout the summer, affecting much of southern and central Japan, including Tokyo and Kyoto. The heaviest rains occur Jun-Jul and during the Sept typhoon season. August often sees a lull in the rains. During this period, temperatures in Kyoto and Tokyo can be as high as 35°C.

The most pleasant months to travel in central and southern Japan are late October to May, when the weather is typically cool, clear and dry. The autumn 'koyo' and spring 'sakura' seasons are particularly popular times to travel, due to the seasonal colours.

Conversely, in the northernmost regions of Japan, including Hokkaido, the summer is the most pleasant time to travel, with typically dry conditions and temperatures ranging from 20-28°C. During the winter months, many of the national parks in Hokkaido close.

7. *Medication*

If bringing prescription medication into Japan, it is necessary to complete and submit an import application form (available from your Japanese embassy), ideally one month before travel.

A number of common over-the-counter drugs are banned in Japan, including many allergy medicines, mild painkillers including codeine, and Vicks inhalers. If in doubt, check with the Japanese embassy before travel.

8. *Special requirements*

If you have special requirements such as a vegetarian diet please inform us in advance.

9. *Local customs and etiquette*

While Japanese culture has a reputation for being rigid in its etiquette, Japanese people are generally very forgiving of travellers who may be unfamiliar with the local customs, particularly those settings that are uniquely Japanese. That being said, most social faux pas are easily avoided, and being aware of the basic etiquette for any given situation can help ensure that your travels are as easy and as free of embarrassment as possible - for you and your hosts! Here are some key points to remember:

Household etiquette - When entering homes in Japan, it's expected that you remove your shoes and change into slippers (always provided at the entrance). Moreover, there are different

slippers to be worn in the bathroom, so don't forget to change from your house slippers and into the provided bathroom slippers - and then back again! - when entering and leaving the washroom. This applies not just in private homes, but in temples, ryokan/minshuku and even in many traditional restaurants.

Dining etiquette – Please don't be shy about asking for a knife and fork if you are uncomfortable using chopsticks. Many restaurants, unless traditional, will provide them without you needing to ask. The Japanese words for knife (“naifu”) and fork (“fōku”) are derived from the English, and staff will understand your meaning if you ask in English.

In sushi restaurants, only chopsticks are provided, but it is not considered impolite to eat with your hands (though the right hand is preferred). At traditional sushi restaurants, sushi shouldn't be dipped in soy sauce, though sashimi (raw fish) may be.

And, while you'll be forgiven for not knowing these rules, sticking chopsticks into food and leaving upright, passing food with chopsticks, or pouring your own drink, can be considered rude.

Bathing etiquette - Japanese onsen, or hot spring baths, are an attraction for many visitors to Japan. They're also, as a uniquely Japanese setting, unfamiliar territory for most travellers, so being aware of the basic etiquette in advance will help you to avoid embarrassing blunders.

Onsen vary greatly, from the small communal baths you may find in a family-run minshuku, to the luxury, Roman-esque bath complexes comprised of multiple baths of varying temperatures that you can find in higher-end onsen resorts. But the basic etiquette is always the same.

The most important rule to remember is that you always shower (with soap and shampoo) before entering the baths, and never afterwards. Then, when entering the baths, ensure that you don't bring anything with you - no soap, no shampoo, and especially no swimming trunks! Towels, however, are ok.

Cover up with a towel when exiting and entering the bath, and avoid the temptation to swim or splash.

If you're uncomfortable with the prospect of shared washing facilities, consider booking a room with an en-suite bathroom – many onsen resorts and ryokan will also offer an en-suite option – or a private onsen. Where not available, you may prefer to wash early evening or morning when the baths are less likely to be in use.

Public transport etiquette - Eating on trains is frowned upon in Japan, as is talking on the telephone. There are no designated "quiet" carriages on Japanese trains; rather, all carriages are quiet carriages.