

25 TRAVEL TIPS FOR JAPAN

1. SAFE AND CLEAN FUN

Japan is extremely safe, with one of the lowest crime rates in the world. You can walk on the streets and not be afraid. The country is also hospitable, clean, prompt, polite, efficient, friendly, and you can drink the tap water.

In regard to safety, many foreigners have wonderful stories of returned lost wallets. Hopefully, you will not have to report such an incident to the police, but if you do, you will find a "Koban" or Police Box at most train stations and major city intersections.

In regard to cleanliness, you will find that most cities in Japan do not have garbage cans along the streets. This is because the Japanese do not eat and walk at the same time. Therefore, they do not produce trash such as paper coffee cups, ice cream wrappers, or chip bags, while strolling along a thoroughfare. If YOU have such trash, carry it with you (always good to tote an empty trash bag) until you find a garbage receptacle -- usually at locations that sell such snack items or next to the ubiquitous vending machines. When you DO find the trash receptacles you will notice that there will be separate bins for regular trash vs. aluminum cans and glass and plastic bottles. Throw the recyclables in their appropriate slot.

2. MONEY MATTERS

- a. You should have enough yen to get to the hotel the first night.
- b. You will get **the best exchange rate** for your money if you **purchase yen upon arrival into Japan using your American ATM card.** Citibank operates ATM machines at Narita, Haneda, Nagoya, Fukuoka, and Chitose (Sapporo) Airports, as well as at numerous locations around Tokyo and in other parts of Japan. For exact ATM locations -- including maps -- log onto Citibank Japan's website www.citibank.co.jp (Click on "English", and then "Branches and ATM's"). You will have no problem using a foreign ATM card at Citibank, and Citibank ATM's are open 24 hours
Note: Kansai Airport has no Citibank ATM, but there are six ATM's that accept a foreign VISA card at Kansai Airport.
- c. Seven Bank ATMs (<http://www.sevenbank.co.jp/intlcard/index2.html>), open 24 hours and located at 13,000 7-11 convenience stores across Japan accepts: Visa/PLUS, MasterCard/Cirrus (210 JPY fee for withdrawal), American Express.
- d. You can also obtain currency at over 20,000 **Post Offices ATMs** nationwide. The post office's ATM network accepts foreign issued credit and debit cards, including: American Express, Cirrus, Diners Club, MasterCard, PLUS and Visa. These even have an English-language button. But, this option is only available when the post office is open, usually 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays. However, Tokyo and Kyoto Central post offices, located at **Tokyo Station's Marunouchi Exit**

(<http://japanvisitor.blogspot.com/2007/05/tokyo-station.html>) and at **Kyoto Station** (<http://japanvisitor.blogspot.com/2006/12/kyoto-station.html>) to your left as you leave the main exit respectively, are open Monday-Friday 9am-9pm, Saturday 9am-7pm and Sunday 9am-7pm.

- e. **Buy Dollar Traveler Checks before you go.** You will get a **better exchange rate** when exchanging **dollar travelers' checks for yen than dollar bills for yen.** Plan on exchanging enough for one day each morning before leaving your hotel. Don't plan on bringing travelers checks with you to purchase items or meals at shops or restaurants.
- f. Japan is a **cash society**, especially in rural areas. Credit cards are fine in large establishments in Tokyo and Kyoto, but even in these cities, small hotels, inns, shops, and restaurants only accept cash. And, you will need cash for buses, taxis, trains, and admission to all museums, sights, temples, and shrines.
- g. You can also exchange money in commercial banks or in most Western-style hotels where you are a guest. You can also get money using a VISA card. You can find the locations of ATM's that accept VISA cards by logging onto VISA's website at www.visa.com (Click on locations in Japan).

When using your VISA card at Japanese ATM's remember Two things:

- VISA ATM's will give you a cash advance, not a direct withdrawal from your checking account.
- These ATM's may not be open 24 hours.

3. TRAVEL INFORMATION

Upon Arrival into Narita or Kansai International Airports, visit the Japan National Tourist Organization's Tourist Information Center (TIC) for free advice, brochures, maps, and information for last minute details on your trip. Narita TIC is located on the arrival floor in both Terminals 1 & 2 at Narita Airport and is open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week. Kansai TIC is located on the arrival floor of Kansai International Airport and is open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. seven days a week.

Japan also has a network of 200 local information offices near train stations or in city centers across the country:

http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/essential/v_office/v_office.php

Advance travel and sightseeing information can also be found on the Internet. Some good sources include the following:

<http://www.japan-guide.com/>

<http://gojapan.about.com/>

<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/>

These “practical travel guides” really help with specific locations and special interests:
<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/rtg/index.html>

Tokyo:

<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/TRAVEL/09/30/tokyo.overview/index.html>

http://edition.cnn.com/CNNI/Programs/mycity_mylife/

<http://www.yamasa.org/japan/english/destinations/tokyo/index.html>

<http://www.metro.tokyo.jp/ENGLISH/POLICY/tourism.htm>

<http://www.tcvb.or.jp/english/index.php>

4. WHAT’S HAPPENING NOW?

Some great English-language sources for what to do up-to-the-minute in major Japanese cities:

Tokyo:

Metropolis Magazine: <http://metropolis.co.jp/default.asp>

Tokyo Notice Board: <http://www.tokyonoticeboard.co.jp/>

Osaka & Kyoto:

Kansai Time-Out: <http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=kansai+time+out>

Kyoto:

Kyoto Visitors’ Guide: <http://www.kyotoguide.com/>

Fukuoka:

Fukuoka Now: <http://www.fukuoka-now.com/>

5. TRAVEL BY RAIL

- a. The All-Japan Rail Pass is available in 7, 14, and 21 day varieties, and is one of the best bargains for traveling in Japan. As an example: a regular round-trip train ticket from Narita Airport to Kyoto costs more than an entire Seven Day Rail Pass. The Japan Rail Pass is accepted on all "Japan Railway" operated trains, buses, and one ferry (Hiroshima area to Miyajima), anywhere in Japan, including all Shinkansen "Bullet" trains EXCEPT the Nozomi Super Express.

There are also local rail passes for regions, such as: the JR East Pass, the JR Central Pass, the JR West Pass, the Sanyo Pass, and the JR Kyushu Pass that can be more cost effective if you are traveling only within one region of Japan. **The regional passes can be purchased in Japan** by showing your foreign non-resident passport. However, **the All-Japan rail pass must be purchased before leaving your home country** and is only available to non-Japan residents.

Note: The All-Japan Rail Pass also affords you an additional 10% discount on Japan Railway Group owned hotels.

- b.** Train Punctuality -- Trains almost ALWAYS depart ON TIME. So, if your train is scheduled to depart at 9:52, it will depart at 9:52. Moral of the story, DON'T BE LATE.
- c.** Purchasing Shinkansen (Bullet Train) Tickets -- If you do not have a rail pass, but wish to purchase a Japan Rail ticket - including Bullet Train tickets – be advised that only railway travel centers run by major travel agencies accept credit cards and that these centers are usually found only at major railway stations. However, another option for using a credit card is through the concierge desk at upscale Western-style hotels. They will purchase the tickets for you adding only a small service fee.
- d.** Purchasing Subway Tickets -- Most subways are not part of the Japan Rail system, and thus, are not covered by the Japan Rail Pass. However, subways are not expensive. Charges are by distance, but the average subway ride in Tokyo is about \$1.50 (equivalent to the cost of a subway ride in New York). Signs at most stations are in Japanese and English, except as you go out to the more suburban regions. If you are not sure how much to pay, you can purchase the minimal fee, and then add on fare at the end of your journey. If you need a receipt be advised that you must purchase your ticket from the station attendant's window and ask for a receipt at that time. Say "Re-Sheet-To Kudasai" (Please give me a receipt.) and they should understand what you want.

Line Connections: Tokyo has 13 subway lines run by two different companies: **Toei Subways** and **Tokyo Metro**. Thus, not all subway lines are connected. If you have to switch subway lines in the middle of your journey, you may have to buy a NEW TICKET. Finally, always remember to keep your subway ticket for the duration of your train ride. You cannot get out of the subway without a ticket.

Subway Passes:

A bewildering variety of subway Day Passes are available. A good bet is the Toei and Tokyo Metro One-Day Economy Pass, which costs ¥1,000 and provides a day of unlimited travel on all subway lines. If you are going to be in Tokyo for more than a day, you might consider Pasma, in effect since March 2008. Pasma is a rechargeable smart card for Tokyo's railway and subway companies. There is a 500 deposit to obtain the card, and the card can be filled with from 1,000 to 10,000 yen at ticket vending machines or up to 20,000 yen at Tokyo metro train station offices. To use, hold the card close to the card reader when passing through the ticket gate. Do not insert it into the slot. For more information see: <http://www.tokyoMetro.jp/global/en/ticket/pasmo.html>

6. DISCOUNT INTRA-JAPAN FLIGHT

Many people don't realize the great distance occupied by the islands of Japan. Okinawa is situated on the same latitude as Miami, Florida, while Hokkaido Island maintains the same latitude as Quebec, Canada. Therefore, if you wish to travel from Tokyo to Okinawa, for example, it will be necessary to purchase a domestic flight within Japan. If you fly Japan Airlines or its One World partner American Airlines or ANA or its Star Alliance partner United Airlines internationally between North America and Japan, you can save more than 30% on the cost of your intra-Japan domestic flight by purchasing your domestic ticket at the same time as and in conjunction with your international ticket on the same or code-shared carrier.

These fares called the "Visit Japan Fare" or "Yokoso Japan Fare" can be a considerable cost savings for international travelers carrying a foreign passport.

For more information see:

Japan Airlines and One-World Partners: <http://www.jal.co.jp/yokosojapan/>

ANA and Star Alliance Partner carriers:

<http://www.ana.co.jp/wvs/us/e/travelservice/reservations/special/visit.html>

7. GETTING FROM THE AIRPORT TO DOWNTOWN

Tokyo City is located about 100 km or 60 miles West of Narita Airport. And Osaka City is located 50 km or 31 miles from Kansai Airport, which is situated on a manmade island in Osaka Bay.

Getting from Narita or Kansai Airports to downtown Tokyo, Osaka or Kyoto **does not have to be difficult or expensive.**

- a. **If you have a Japan Rail Pass**, your pass covers the cost of the Narita and Kansai Express trains. Simply go directly to the JR station located at the airport, validate your pass, and proceed to your destination. If you have any questions, representatives at the JNTO TIC airport offices can assist you.
- b. **If you do not have a Japan Rail Pass**, comfortable and convenient **airport limousine buses** are available for less than \$30 one way. These motor coaches will transport you and your luggage directly to most hotels in Tokyo from Narita Airport or Osaka from Kansai Airport. Buses are also available from Kansai to the main railway station in Kyoto. You can then take a short ride taxi from Kyoto station to your Kyoto hotel. The limousine bus kiosks are easily identifiable with English signage on the arrival floors of Narita Airport Terminals 1 & 2 and Kansai Airport. There are different buses operating to different areas of the city. JNTO offers schedule information for limousine buses free of charge. Also, for schedule information from Narita to and from Tokyo, English information can be found on line at <http://web.archive.org/web/20020213072259/> <http://www.narita->

airport.or.jp/limousine (Click on either "From Narita Airport" or "To Narita Airport" for details in English).

- c. Private Car -- Besides taxis, several private car transfer options are available:

Tokyo: Tokyo Airporter – <http://www.tokyoairporter.com/>

Kansai: Yasaka Taxi offers shuttle services to and from Kyoto and Kansai International Airport – <http://www.yasaka.jp/taxi/shuttle-e/>

For additional information visit:

Narita Airport Official Site: <http://www.narita-airport.jp/en/>

Kansai Airport Official Site: <http://www.kansai-airport.or.jp/en/index.asp>

8. WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT TAXIS

- a. Taxis are clean and comfortable, offering white-glove service, lace seat covers and sometimes even lace curtains.
- b. Taxis are expensive but fine and convenient for short trips – especially if you are traveling with several people.
- c. A red light in the front window means the taxi is available.
- d. There are different prices for different size cars -- the larger, the more expensive. The smallest also have small luggage space, because the gas tank is in the trunk. A standard-size taxi can hold up to four passengers -- one person in the front and three in the back seat. There is no extra charge for each additional passenger.
- e. Enter the taxi through the left rear door; let the driver open and close the door automatically for you.
- f. Most of the taxi drivers do not speak English, so it's a good idea that you write down the name of the location where you are going or the direction the driver should travel on a note and show it to him. If it is possible for you to have a hotel concierge or someone who writes Japanese print the address for you that will be very helpful.
- g. Tipping is not required.

9. RENTING A CAR

I do not recommend renting a car for travel to or within big cities. Trains are faster (the Shinkansen "Bullet" train runs at 180 miles an hour), more comfortable, and much more efficient. You must obtain an international drivers' license before you go (visit your local AAA office in the USA). Gasoline is expensive; highway tolls can be double or even

triple that seen in New York City, and you will no doubt encounter traffic. Furthermore, transportation moves ON THE LEFT in Japan. That is, the Japanese drive on the "British side" of the road, so you need to make turns from the opposite lane and look "the other way" before entering an intersection. In addition, rental car fees run between \$80-\$100 a day, plus insurance. Because of these difficulties, many travelers ask about renting a car WITH DRIVER. This may be convenient, but be advised that Japanese salaries are among the highest in the world. A car with driver can easily cost \$500 per day, depending upon the region.

To find out more details on rental car costs, with and without a driver, in your region of interest, look on the following company sites:

<http://www.budgetrentacar.co.jp/english.htm>

<http://www.nipponrentacar.co.jp/service/general.htm>

<http://www.carrentalexpress.com/rez/mazda-rent-a-car-japan/rates>

<http://www.mazda-rentacar.co.jp/europcar/10off.html>

<http://rent.toyota.co.jp/en/index.html>

On Hokkaido (Japan's Northern-most main island), traffic on the highways is minimal; there is good English signage, and rather infrequent train service. Therefore, if you wish to drive in Hokkaido, JNTO will do their best to assist you. However, in other rural areas, and on the back roads even in Hokkaido, keep in mind that street signs on small, rural roads will probably not be written in English. Therefore, if you do not read Japanese, you should purchase a bilingual atlas, such as this one:

<http://www.stanfords.co.uk/stock/japan-road-atlas-81945/>

The Japan Automobile Federation (JAF) publishes an English guide to driving in Japan called "Rules of the Road". This is available at JAF offices throughout Japan.

http://www.jaf.or.jp/e/index_e.htm

10. TIPPING

You Do Not need to TIP cab drivers, porters, or waiters. In more upscale establishments, a service charge will be added to your bill. You CAN, however, tip your tour guide (about \$10 per day) and the Head Maid at a ryokan (Japanese-style inn), especially if special requests are made. Present the Head Maid with an envelope containing approximately 5,000 yen in cash AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR STAY.

11. ANY USE OF THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE IS MUCH APPRECIATED

The best way to ask a question in English is to PRINT IT CLEARLY. Students in Japan study English for at least six years, but few master conversational English, and many

Japanese are too shy or embarrassed to try to speak English. When asking for help, try to start with a student or a business person. It will also help if you have a small phrase book. The Japan National Tourist Organization publishes a free pocket language phrase book called "The Tourist Language Handbook." This is available by emailing JNTO via their North American website: www.japantravelinfo.com

12. SITTING ON THE FLOOR

If you'll be visiting someone's home, attending a tea ceremony or dining in an upscale Japanese restaurant, you'll want to practice SITTING ON THE FLOOR before you leave. The proper way to sit is with your knees tucked under your thighs. But, since many Americans find this difficult and even painful, it is acceptable to sit cross-legged "Indian-style". However, it is NOT acceptable to sit with your legs stretched out in front of you.

13. BOWING AND WAVING

Bowing should become a habit -- for greeting people, thanking people, and saying good-bye. When you are leaving always wave, and keep waving until you don't see your host anymore. They will do the same.

14. SHOES

Shoes are considered dirty, and you will take them off when you enter most private inside spaces. Whenever there is a "step up," especially on to polished wooden floors or "tatami" (straw mats), take off your shoes. Many restaurants and temples will provide a shoe cupboard for you to place your shoes into.

When using the restroom in a place where you have already taken off your shoes, there will be SPECIAL RESTROOM SLIPPERS to put on inside the facility area. These slippers are to be left in the restroom when you are finished. DO NOT WEAR these slippers out of the restroom into the common area!

15. BUSINESS AND PERSONAL CARDS

Everyone in Japan exchanges "meishi" or name cards. It is not only business etiquette; it is a matter of politeness, and you should not travel without a name card to give to someone you meet. The cards are considered an extension of the yourself, and should be treated with honor and respect. When you give someone a card you should hold it with two hands, and try to deliver your card underneath the card you are receiving, demonstrating your deference to the other person. After receiving the card you should examine it, and repeat the person's name. If you then sit down for a meeting or to share a friendly cup of tea or coffee, place the card in front of you, so that you can refer to it. Do not simply put it away in your pocket. Keep your cards in an attractive card holder that reflects their importance. Finally, if you can have your cards printed in Japanese on the reverse or with some Japanese on the front that will be very much appreciated. The Japan

National Tourist Organization can provide information on companies that can print business or personal cards in Japanese.

16. GIFT GIVING

Taking a small gift when you visit someone is a Japanese tradition. Common gifts are usually chocolates or alcohol, but everywhere you go in Japan -- especially in train stations -- you will find shops selling local delicacies. These shops will wrap your gift beautifully as part of the service. If you are visiting friends, business associates, or local artists or craftspeople, you may want to take some small gifts from the U.S. -- fine crafts, specialty foods, books. All items should be wrapped or presented in an attractive bag. Gifts for more informal meetings can include: t-shirts or baseball hats from your hometown or even local memorabilia -- such as maple syrup from Canada, a miniature White House bank from Washington D.C., or a statue of liberty clock from New York City.

17. ENGLISH SIGNAGE

Many foreigners worry about traveling around Japan on their own because they cannot read Japanese. This is NOT A PROBLEM, especially in the big cities. In Tokyo, most of the subway stations have signs in English and Japanese. Most trains even have onboard LCD displays indicating the upcoming stop in Japanese and in English. On the bullet trains, announcements will be made in Japanese and in English. In Kyoto, the buses even announce the stops in English and offer LCD displays. Finally, you will see a lot more English signs than you expect, just because the Japanese find it very trendy to use English in signs and brochures. Often, a brochure will be written in English on the outside, but pay attention; the inside can be completely written in Japanese.

18. WELCOME CARDS

There are currently ten different discount "Welcome Cards" in Japan. These include:

- Northern Tohoku Welcome Card (on Northern Honshu):
- Mt. Fuji Welcome Card to The Fuji/Hakone/Izu region in Yamanashi, Kanagawa and Shizuoka Prefectures
- Narita Area Welcome card
- Tokyo Museum Guide (discounts to 12 Tokyo Museums)
- Tokyo Handy Guide/Map with discounts
- Tokai Welcome Card to central Japan
- Kobe Welcome Card
- Kagawa Welcome Card (northern Shikoku Island)
- Kitakyushu Welcome Card (on Kyushu)
- Fukuoka City Welcome Card (on Kyushu)

When presenting the "Welcome Card," foreign visitors receive discounts on attraction and museum entrance fees, meals, souvenir shops, and accommodations. Some facilities

even offer free gifts to "Welcome Card" holders. Visit the following website for information on obtaining welcome cards and services and discounts offered:
www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/essential/welcome.html

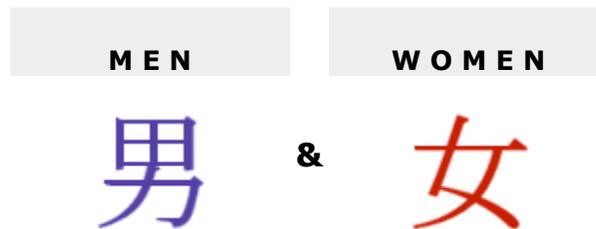
19. RESTROOMS

Depending upon where you travel in Japan you may encounter a traditional "Japanese-style" toilet. These can be found in public restrooms in shopping malls, train stations, and in small town "minshukus" (family run inns). These commodes are at floor level. To use, face the hump.

In a location with several toilets there may be a Western toilet as indicated on the door, and if there is a queue, line up by stall. On the Shinkansen (bullet train) go for the handicapped stall. This is always a Western-style toilet.

In public restrooms, you may need to be prepared with a travel pack of tissues. These packages are often handed out free (with advertisements on the reverse) as you walk along major thoroughfares in the large cities, such as Tokyo and Osaka.

So, you don't make a mistake and walk into the wrong door, especially when traveling in rural areas, memorize the Kanji for



On the other hand, Japan is recognized for its extremely high tech toilets. In upscale hotels and ryokans (high-end Japanese inns), and even many upscale restaurants, you will find toilets with heated seats -- a blessing on a cool, autumn day -- along with an array of other buttons that spray water to wash you, air to dry you, etc. There is a good chance you will miss these when you return to the USA.

20. HIRING A GUIDE

Many first-timers to Japan, and even those who frequent the country often but do not speak the language, inquire about hiring a guide. Licensed guides are extremely knowledgeable, having studied for years and passed exams on all areas of Japan, not just one local region. Because of their expertise, they usually charge more than \$300 per day. Information on obtaining a licensed guide can be obtained from the Japan Guide Association or the Japan Association of Certified Guides:

www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/essential/guideservice.html#professional

If you do not need very detailed information, and are looking more for a bilingual resident to show you around, you can sign up for a Goodwill Guide! There are now over 46,000 registered volunteer guides. They represent 76 associations in 47 cities/regions across Japan that are part of the SGG "Systemized Goodwill Guide" service.

Appointments must be made at least 24 hours in advance, longer if possible, especially during busy seasons. Usual guiding hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Guides can meet you at your hotel or at a pre-arranged meeting location. Travelers are expected to pay the guide's local transportation fee, any site admission costs, and cover an inexpensive lunch. This is a wonderful way for tourists to not only get around easily, but meet the local Japanese.

<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/essential/guideservice.html#volunteer>
http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/arrange/essential/list_volunteerGuides_a-n.html

21. PACKING LIGHTLY AND “SEND” LUGGAGE

If you plan to travel by train **Pack Lightly**. Trains have no porters, no checked luggage, and there is little overhead space for carry-on items. Bullet train stations have elevators, but other train stations have often have only stairs affording your luggage wheels useless. Most train stations have lockers, but only major stations have temporary storage windows or lockers large enough to hold large suitcase cases. How to get around this problem? Use **FORWARD LUGGAGE "takkyu-bin" to send all but an overnight bag to your next major stop**. This service is available from airports and hotel front desks or bell stations. If you are staying at a small family-run, budget "ryokan" (inn) in the city, you can usually arrange **Takuhaibin** with a nearby convenience store. Average bags normally go overnight between cities, two nights to the airport. The cost for an average sized bag is only about \$17. Delivery times and costs vary by distance, and there is a surcharge for sending luggage to and from the airport.

Here are links to delivery services at the international airports:

Narita Airport: http://www.narita-airport.jp/en/guide/service/list/svc_05.html

Kansai Airport: http://www.kansai-airport.or.jp/en/service/baggage/index.html#_03

Chubu Centrair Airport: <http://www.centrair.jp/en/service/sv-luggage/index.html#1174592>

22. WHAT TO PACK

An **Umbrella** or you can buy one. It can rain in Japan, especially in June and early July.

At least one pair of **thick socks without holes**: Since people remove their shoes when entering temples and shrines and since these places are not heated, you will spare your feet from the cold. Also, “holey” socks are considered impolite.

Summertime: Even though it may be hot outside, the air conditioning inside trains can be strong, always carry a light jacket or sweater. For women, no matter how hot it is, it is not proper etiquette to wear overly skimpy and revealing clothing at temples and shrines or in crowded public places.

23. BATHING

In 1890 on his visit to Japan Basil Hall Chamberlain noted how "CLEANLINESS is one of the few ORIGINAL items of Japanese civilization." That is, bathing and hot tubs DO NOT have their roots in China or anywhere else. Bathing in Japan has a 1,000 year history. To truly experience Japanese culture, you must take a bath. You can bathe at a city bathhouse

(<http://web.archive.org/web/20020213072259/http://202.221.249.1/tokyoq/baths/baths.html>) or in the comfort of your own "ryokan," (Japanese-style inn) but perhaps the best experience is at one of Japan's ubiquitous hot spring spas.

JNTO can provide information on hot spring resort areas all over Japan. They exist in the mountains and on the sea coast, amongst the snow in Nagano and in the Sulfur Springs of Beppu on Southern Kyushu Island.

There are many rules to follow when taking a bath. Most importantly, go into the bath without your clothes on (no bathing suites) and always wash yourself thoroughly BEFORE going into the "ofuro" hot-tub bath. There are separate facilities for men and women. Outdoor "ofuro," referred to as "roten-buro," often have breathtaking views, and some feature unique sand bathing. Usually it's best to go into the indoor tub first and then work your way outdoors, as your body adjusts to the temperature.

Most upscale spas have washing areas that include:

- A wooden (sometimes plastic) stool to sit on.
- A wooden bucket to dump water of varying temperatures over your head
- A shower massage
- A scrub brush for your body, and sometimes a foot scrubber
- Various types of liquid cleansing products -- shampoo, conditioner, liquid soap, body lotion.
- These are usually labeled in Japanese, but exactly like the products at home, so take a look at it and you should be able to figure out the difference between conditioner and shampoo.
- After your bath put on your "yukata" robe which you can wear throughout the ryokan.
- Put it on left-over-right (unless you are dead).

24. EATING

Soup: Making loud, "slipping" sounds while eating noodle soup is perfectly acceptable. Also you will not eat soup with a spoon. You will use your chopsticks for the noodles, meat and vegetables, and drink the soup by bringing the bowl to your mouth.

Sushi: When eating sushi, try not to soak your rice in the soy sauce. Dip the top portion with the fish into the sauce and put the sushi into your mouth with the fish top facing down upon your tongue, so you can savor the flavor

Rice: The Japanese don't pour sauces onto their rice. Leave any sauces in their serving dish and dip your food in lightly. When you have finished eating your rice, put the chopsticks down along the side of your plate. Usually chopstick holders are provided. **DO NOT PLACE YOUR CHOPSICKS STRAIGHT UP IN THE RICE.** This is how rice is served to the dead.

Pouring Drinks: If you're eating with other people, don't pour your own drink. Fill your neighbor's glass and wait for him or her to reciprocate.

Here is a great free Restaurant and Bar Guide to major Japanese cities:

<http://www.mesay.biz/magazine.htm>

There are some great Japanese food websites and blogs that I'd love to mention. Both are run by people actually living in Japan:

<http://neighborfood.wordpress.com/> - by my friend Takeshi Endo, who is the only person in Niigata City (on the Japan Seacoast) with an MBA from the United States (Boston University), who lives full-time in Japan. Here he is featured eating sushi with Chef Tony Bourdain: <http://jp.youtube.com/watch?v=8E939e9piME&feature=related>

www.tasteofculture.com – by sensei, cookbook author, consultant and Japanese food guru, Elizabeth Andoh, who runs a Japanese food and cultural program in Tokyo and Osaka.

25. ADDITIONAL POINTS OF ETIQUETTE

As a foreigner, having a generally courteous demeanor will cover a multitude of sins, but beyond food etiquette here are a couple of additional points:

Blowing Your Nose:

Blowing your nose in public places -- such as restaurants, the theater or on a group tour is considered rude. Try to sniffle until you get to a restroom.

Surgical Masks:

When traveling around Japan you may encounter people with their nose and mouth covered by a surgical mask. No, they are not trying to protect themselves from the city air. (Actually, Japan's air quality is the highest in Asia). They are protecting themselves from pollen if they have hay fever and protecting others from their germs if they have a cold. This is especially considerate on crowded subways.