

# Japan survival tips

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## selections from the KCP Student Handbook

health planning • packing • arriving • money • calling family and friends  
fun • adapting to a new culture • behavior and manners • relationships

### Health planning

Get complete physical and dental examinations before traveling abroad. Depending on your itinerary, your personal risk factors, and the length of your stay, your family doctor may offer you vaccinations against hepatitis B, tick-borne encephalitis, influenza, or Japanese encephalitis. Review and update routine immunizations as needed. However, if you are traveling to Japan from another country, check with the nearest Japanese Consulate for requirements.

If you wear glasses or contact lenses, take an extra pair along with a copy of your prescription in case your eyewear becomes lost or damaged.



If you take prescription medicine regularly, bring enough of a supply to last you for your entire stay. That medicine may not be available in Japan, or it may be very expensive.

**If you have a pre-existing condition that may affect your stay (serious illness or health problem), you must notify our office prior to your arrival in Japan.** You may be required to have a complete physical exam and have a doctor write a summary of your condition. You will not be disqualified for participation in this program unless it is determined that the study abroad experience could be a serious risk to your well being.

If you have a special medical condition which others should know about (diabetes, penicillin allergy, epilepsy, etc.), get a medic alert bracelet so that this condition will be known in an emergency.

If you are currently taking prescription medication:

- Make sure to bring an ample supply with you for the duration of the program.
- Have your physician write a note explaining your prescription.
- Bring a photocopy of the generic name of the drug in case you are questioned while traveling or by a customs agent upon entering Japan. If you are stopped at customs, you will need to prove the legality of the drugs with a signed prescription by your doctor.

Any study abroad experience can be stressful at times, and only those who are in good mental and physical health should participate, even for a short-term experience like the KCP program. For us to plan for your medical needs, complete, truthful information is very important.

### Medical kit

Although most medication and health-related supplies are available in Japan, it is a good idea to pack a small medical kit to take with you. Consider taking these items: aspirin (or anti-inflammatory), antihistamine, kaolin preparation, antiseptic, calamine lotion, band-aids, insect repellent, sun block cream or suntan lotion, and lip balm.

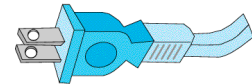
# Packing

## Climate

Japan has four distinct seasons. Summer can be very hot and muggy, reaching as high as 90% humidity, with a rainy season (*tsuyu*) from June to mid-July and a week-long stretch of monsoon. Fall (September to November) and spring are more moderate. In winter the temperature often drops below freezing. If it does snow in Tokyo, it usually won't last long. Most Japanese homes don't have central heating, so temperatures in the home can be very low.

## Electrical current

Electrical current in Japan is 100 volts. Most appliances made for the U.S., including hair dryers and electric shavers, will work in Japan, but at reduced efficiency. Appliance outlets accept flat, two-pin plugs similar to the U.S. and Canada. For any three-pronged appliances, bring a two-prong adapter.



Most U.S. electric clocks will lose roughly 10 seconds per minute, since they time themselves against the frequency of the current. Take along a battery-run clock instead.

## Luggage allowances

Most airlines let you take two pieces of luggage on international flights, each piece weighing no more than 70 lbs. The girth (length + width + height) of one piece of luggage usually cannot exceed 62 in. (106 in. for both bags). Ask your airline specifically about weight and size limitations (though restrictions are subject to change). You can also take one carry-on that must fit under your airline seat.

You'll need to manage all your luggage by yourself while in Japan. Having someone at home send belongings can be very expensive and is not recommended— you'll only have to cart all that stuff back home. Try to pack only essentials, leaving enough room in your bags for gifts or souvenirs purchased in Japan.

Look for more packing guidelines in the KCP Student Handbook.

## Arriving in Tokyo

If you arrive in Tokyo on the official program starting date, you will be greeted by a KCP staff member at Narita International Airport. When all students have arrived, we usually escort each of you directly to your lodging.

International flights generally arrive at Narita in the afternoon. KCP staff members will pick up students who arrive between 1 pm and 4 pm. If your flight arrives earlier than 4 pm, please be patient until someone from KCP arrives.

Upon arrival at Narita, you will proceed through immigration, collect your luggage, and pass through customs. So that someone from KCP will be able to find you, please stay close to the customs exit. A KCP staff member will have a photograph of you.

## Arriving early

If you are planning to arrive early, please inform KCP-Japan no later than a month before program start. It is your responsibility to make travel arrangements to and from Japan as well as accommodations before the program start date.

If you have never traveled to Tokyo or Japan before and are uncomfortable with your survival Japanese, we highly recommend that you make every effort to arrive on the program start date.

# Money



## Japanese money

The Japanese unit of money is called Yen. Yen coins are ¥1, ¥5, ¥10, ¥50, ¥100, and ¥500. Bills are ¥1000, ¥2000, ¥5000, and ¥10,000.

The most common way of exchanging money is to withdraw it from an automatic teller machine (ATM). Citibank is an institution that is well used to dealing with foreign currency exchange in its accounts.

Plan to take a small amount of Yen (¥) with you for your first week in Japan. To become accustomed to the relative value, pay attention to currency fluctuations before and during your stay in Japan. These appear in some daily newspapers; you can call your bank and ask for the exchange rate; or you can check a website such as the Universal Currency Converter, [www.xe.com/ucc](http://www.xe.com/ucc).

## Traveler's checks

Traveler's checks are safe but can be cumbersome. Shop around for the lowest service charges and fees, and purchase traveler's checks before you leave. Many stores don't take traveler's checks, so you will have to exchange your checks into Yen at a local bank in Japan.

## Credit cards

Tokyo is a thoroughly modern city in its money transactions. Credit and debit cards are a primary medium of exchange, and checks are not.

Credit cards are used at many major stores and restaurants in large cities such as Tokyo, but they are not accepted at most supermarkets and small shops. Unlike traveler's checks, there is no transaction fee. Select a card with a low interest rate and be sure to inquire about the rate for cash advances. Arrange for someone at home to pay the monthly bills. Make a note of your card number and the telephone number to call from Japan if you lose your card. Keep this information in a safe place.

Among students, the safest and most popular method of getting cash is to withdraw it from an ATM. It's much safer than carrying large amounts of cash with you. Before you leave, be sure to check the amount of your card's ATM surcharge and its credit limit.

## Bank debit cards

If your debit card has a Visa or Mastercard mark, you can treat it like a credit card.



Before you leave, on all your cards be sure to check the expiration date, the maximum withdrawal per day, and the transaction fee. Also, get the bank's toll-free customer service number (usually on your statement) and bring it with you.

# Calling family and friends

## Calling cards

It's a good deal to buy prepaid international calling cards in the U.S., and we encourage this so you don't have to set this money aside from your budget in Japan. If you do buy calling cards in the U.S., make sure you find out about the cost of international calls. Check around for the best deals.



If you bring a calling card from the U.S., please remember to bring the Japanese access code. You will need this in order to make a call.

## Cell phones

There are more cell phones in Japan than ground-based phones. Many students find that the convenience of a cell phone is more important than the additional cost. In order to establish an account, you must have your passport, be at least 20 years old, and have a major credit card in your name. If you are under 20, you must have your parents' written, signed approval. Do be sure to include the activation and cancellation fees (about ¥3000 for both) in your budget.

You may also purchase a phone with a prepaid plan. These are available without a student visa.



Cell phones offer distinct advantages: (1) in Japan, there is no charge to receive calls on a cell phone; and (2) you can take photos with the phone's camera and email them (with a USB port) to family and friends.



Calling *collect* from a cell phone is very expensive.

# Fun

## Free stuff in Tokyo

Explicit directions to these places are in the KCP Student Handbook.

### Free places to soak up atmosphere:

- For a good **view of the city skyline** go to the promenade that runs along the front of the Decks Shopping Mall in Odaiba.
- To see **more people than you've ever seen in one place**, try walking through Shinjuku Station at rush hour (just after 5 pm), standing at the Ginza Sukiwabashi crossing, or crossing the road next to the Hachiko Exit of Shibuya Station.
- For the **eccentric and bizarre** side of life, go to Harajuku on a Sunday.
- To feel bang up-to-date with the **latest technology**, go to Akihabara.

**Bird's-eye view of Tokyo:** The 45th floor of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building in Shinjuku has two free observation galleries with views of Tokyo, Mt. Fuji, and Yokohama.

### Shrines, temples, pagodas, palaces:

- Meiji Jingu Shrine
- Yasukuni Shrine
- Sensoju Temple
- Zojoji Temple

- Imperial Palace

**Gardens and parks:**

- Higashi-Gyoen, the East Gardens of the Imperial Palace (art gallery inside).
- Yoyogi Park has street entertainment on Sundays— great entertainment for no yen!
- Ueno Park.

**Free Internet— a must!** In the T-Next Toshiba showroom in Shinjuku, get up to one hour of free 'net!

**Sumo Wrestling Museum** near the JR Ryogoku Station.

**Sony Building in Ginza:** try out the latest electronic toys, gadgets, organizers.

**Toyota Mega Web in Palette Town:** in the Odaiba car showroom, view cars of the future.

**Hundred-¥ Shops:** Miss the dollar store? Short on cash but must shop? Try the 100-¥ stores in nearly every district. The one in Shibuya near the Tokyo Station has 5 floors!

**Food:** Free samples galore in the basement floor of the Nakamise Shopping Arcade.

**Athletic facilities**

You may want to join an athletic club while you're in Japan. There are many athletic facilities located throughout Tokyo. Prices start at around US \$50 to \$100 per month. Many of these facilities include weight rooms, swimming pools, and Jacuzzis. The best way to find an athletic facility is to ask the KCP student coordinators or your host family. Be sure to ask about student discounts.

Many of the good sports and aerobics clubs in Tokyo are expensive, but some offer student discounts. A cheap alternative is the Waseda Cosmic Sports Center, reachable by bus from KCP. Basketball, volleyball, table tennis, badminton, and a swimming pool are available.



Most athletic facilities will not allow entrance with street shoes, so bring a pair of clean indoor shoes with you.

**Japanese sports**

These websites may be helpful:

Sumo	Nihon Sumo Kyokai	<a href="http://www.sumo.or.jp">www.sumo.or.jp</a>
Judo	Kodokan Judo Institute	<a href="http://www.kodokan.org">www.kodokan.org</a>
Kendo	All Japan Kendo Foundation	<a href="http://www.kendo.or.jp">www.kendo.or.jp</a>
Aikido	Japan Aikido Association	<a href="http://www.dokidoki.ne.jp/home2/unoaiki">www.dokidoki.ne.jp/home2/unoaiki</a>
Karate	Japan Karate Federation	<a href="http://www.karato.co.jp">www.karato.co.jp</a>
	Shotokan Karate-do Internat'l Federation	<a href="http://www.skif-yudansha-kai.com">www.skif-yudansha-kai.com</a>
Kyudo	All Nippon Kyudo Federation	<a href="http://www.kyudo.jp">www.kyudo.jp</a>
Baseball	Nippon Professional Baseball	<a href="http://www.npb.or.jp">www.npb.or.jp</a>
Golf	Golf courses accepting foreigners	<a href="http://www.successtories.com">www.successtories.com</a>

**Adapting to a new culture**

Expect to experience culture shock when you arrive in Japan. It is a completely normal reaction to an unfamiliar environment. Culture shock is a personal experience; each individual may experience it

differently. Likewise, effective ways to deal with culture shock may differ from one student to another. Here are the general stages most people experience when encountering a new culture.

### **Anticipation**

In this early stage, you are busy with preparations and farewells. You are also preoccupied with thoughts of the host culture and how you will adjust.

### **Arrival**

This is a time filled with excitement, expectations, and vivid initial impressions.

### **Culture shock**

After some time, the novelty of being in a new place wears off. You may experience mental fatigue, irritability, isolation, and frustration in coping with the language barrier and cultural differences.

### **Adjustment**

As the culture becomes more familiar, you begin to settle into your new environment and establish friendships. Your language ability improves, and you feel more confident.

### **Integration**

You become comfortable with the culture. You feel at home and accepted.

### **Return anxiety**

Just as you are finally settled, you must prepare to leave your new friends. You realize how much you have changed and wonder if people at home will understand these changes.

### **Re-entry shock**

You are expected to return to your previous role, but you are not the same person. Your family and friends may not fully understand your experiences nor share your enthusiasm.

### **Coping with culture shock**

Although you can't avoid culture shock, the more you can prepare yourself for it, the less traumatic the transition will be. Consider these suggestions for dealing with culture shock.

- Acknowledge your symptoms. Dealing with them as they arise helps you adjust much more quickly. Ignoring your symptoms doesn't make them go away.
- Don't try to cope all alone. Fellow student participants may be experiencing similar things. Use this opportunity to make friends and share your feelings.
- Find an outlet for the normal feelings like frustration, irritability, anger, and loneliness. Writing or calling home, keeping a journal, getting exercise, or listening to music are some good outlets.
- Don't rate Japanese customs as better or worse than your own; try to accept them as equally valid.
- Pay attention to your physical health. You are better able to meet each day's challenges if you get enough sleep, eat right, and get exercise.
- Keep your sense of humor, especially when you make an embarrassing mistake. It eases the tension for everyone involved.
- Be prepared to encounter some Japanese people who may have negative stereotypes about you as a foreigner. As they get to know you, they will see you are different from these stereotypes.
- Resolve personal or family problems before leaving so you can focus all your energy on your studies and adapting to a new culture.

- Talk to others who have recently visited Japan, to get their insight into adjusting to the culture.
- Inform yourself. Learn as much as possible about the Japanese culture and current events before getting there.

### **The ugly American**

Because of the indiscretion of a few boorish tourists, many people around the world consider Americans abroad as rude, offensive, ignorant, or uncaring of others' customs. The stereotypical Ugly American expects to be served; believes that home is always better; has a constant need to express how Americans would do it— usually better; is loud and impatient; complains about inconveniences; and is wasteful and careless of money, material objects, energy, and the environment.

To avoid being an Ugly American (and to dispel the myth), respect patterns of polite behavior that may be new to you. Observe those around you; ask questions. Find a trusted person who can explain things to you. Above all, don't complain— this habit endears you to no one.

## **Behavior and manners**

For the most part, Japanese society is more formal and conservative than U.S. society. The Japanese people are more likely to accept you if you show respect and humility.

### **Expressing appreciation**

Remembering to thank people is one of the most important keys to success abroad, even for small favors. One common mistake people make in groups is that they expect someone else to say thanks. Do your part.

Write thank-you notes to express appreciation for a special invitation and so on. This is important. Of course, you don't actually need a formal thank-you note; a picture postcard is fine, for example.

### **Tipping**

Tipping is unnecessary and unfamiliar in Japan.

### **Shoes**



Take off your shoes when entering a Japanese home or temple. Slippers are often provided; however, only bare feet or socks are allowed on *tatami* (straw mats).

When changing shoes, don't touch the floor with your feet. When you take off your shoes, place them neatly together.

### **Bowing**

Bowing is a traditional greeting in Japan. A handshake is also acceptable.

### **Using chopsticks**

Never place your chopsticks so that they stick up directly out of your rice. (This is the traditional way of offering rice to the dead.) Also, never pass food between your chopsticks and another's chopsticks. (This resembles the traditional funeral ritual of placing the bones of the dead in a mortuary urn!)

### **Responses**

After food has been placed on the table and you sit down for dinner, it is very common to say, "*itadakimasu*," literally translated, "I will receive." At the end of a meal, it is common to say, "*gochisosama deshita* (Thank you for the great meal)," a polite and respectful way to offer thanks. If you feel uncomfortable at first saying these phrases before and after dinner, try listening to your host family and you may gradually feel more comfortable.

## **Attitudes toward women**

Women in Japanese society are still viewed as people who need more protection and care. Although this is gradually changing, it may be different from what you are used to at home. Please respect this aspect of Japanese culture. Female students especially may find their freedom more restricted than at home. For example, a member of the host family may wait up until a female student returns home from an evening out, or a curfew for a female student may be earlier than for a male student.

## **Gaijin**

Words you will hear frequently while in Japan are *gaikokujin* or *gaijin*. Literally translated, this means "outsider" and is commonly used to refer to foreigners.

## **Names**

Japanese people rarely use first names when addressing colleagues or acquaintances. Last names are used more often, with the polite attachment *san* (Mr./Ms.) or *sensei* (for physicians, teachers, politicians) after the name.

Always use *sensei* when addressing your instructors.

## **Visiting**

If you are invited to another family's home, it is polite to bring an *omiyage* (a small gift such as cakes, fruit, or snacks) and to greet the whole family.

# **Relationships**

## **Meeting people**

This is probably the source of greatest frustration to American students abroad. In most countries, it's hard to meet local students. For homestay students, take advantage of the opportunities you have to spend time with your host family and their circle of relatives and friends. In any new situation, use your discretion when meeting people.

Do be careful of individuals wanting to develop your acquaintance quickly— they may have an ulterior motive. Meet people in public places during the day, preferably with a friend or two of yours.

## **Tolerance**

You are likely to encounter a significant range of attitudes regarding gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues while abroad. These attitudes may vary widely. Whatever your own sexual orientation, please keep in mind that there may be gay, lesbian, or bisexual students in your program group and in groups you encounter. Some may just be coming to terms with their sexual identity. Sensitivity to this diversity within your own group as well as the diversity of host culture can help enrich your overall study abroad experience. Sensitivity to racial, religious, or other differences is also commendable.

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual students who are not familiar with the legal status and cultural attitudes about sexual orientation in Japan may want to visit this website on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues when studying and living abroad: <http://www.indiana.edu/~overseas/lesbigay/links.html>.