

にほん やす たび 日本で安く旅しよう！

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We have way too much knowledge to fit into one session and these notes. I've no doubt at all that we've inadvertently left some important things out – sorry!

Flights

Jetstar flies to Kansai airport and Nagoya airport. They aren't necessarily cheapest (since we can get student discounts which Jetstar doesn't have, so shop around. However, with Jetstar, you can avoid dealing with travel agents. Often cheaper alternatives require a stopover somewhere.

If you're after a return ticket with a long turn-around time then you'll have to pay more. (e.g. Leave Australia in March, Depart Japan in February). It's probably cheaper to buy two one-way fares in that case.

For a ticket with about a 12-month turn around you'll be looking at about \$1800 (with student discounts).

Money

Use an ATM. Post office and Citibank ATMs will usually accept your Cirrus/Maestro branded ATM card – except for some out in the country. Exchange rates are competitive and not an issue.

Credit cards:

Be careful! Many Japanese businesses and banks block the use of foreign issued credit cards, so even if it is a Visa/Mastercard, there is the possibility that you might not be able to use it.

Japan is largely a cash based economy. These days more and more places accept cards. Don't use cheques.

Travel insurance

Don't forget travel insurance. You can get this online. One starting point might be the YHA website if you plan to join the YHA. (see websites list).

Accommodation

Cheapest places are youth hostels, temples and business hotels (a small room with a bed and bathroom). Some people manage to talk themselves into free accommodation when travelling in the countryside.

Youth hostels can vary in quality. Some are almost the same as a ryokan (traditional Japanese inn) where you'll sleep on a futon on the tatami. Others are very modern. Others are small one-bedroom operations in somebody's house. The cheapest option at a youth hostel is to sleep in the dormitory. These are often sex-segregated but sometimes they are mixed. A one-night stay can range from ¥1500-5000. Get a YH card before you go.

Another (novelty) option is love hotels – plenty in the big cities. Another (novelty) option is capsule hotels. Often they are male only. Consist of a capsule which you squeeze into – slightly larger than a coffin. There are usually amenities like baths, TVs and massage chairs (outside the capsule).

It's a good idea to book your first accommodation before you arrive. For a YH, this can usually be done over the net.

Trains

JR Pass – not valid on pretty much all subways. JR Pass provides unlimited travel on Japan Rail trains, including bullet trains, but not the Nozomi bullet trains. The Nozomi bullet trains are the fastest and run west from Tokyo. However, the Hikari and Kodama bullet trains also run these route.

Most people end up getting a JR pass, but check to see that it will be worth it. Use Hyperdia to calculate how much your potential train fares will cost (see websites). There's also a JR West Pass, East Pass, etc. Again, use Hyperdia to work out whether it's worthwhile.

You have to apply for a JR pass outside of Japan. You then exchange your voucher for a JR pass at a major station in Japan.

Seishun 18 Kippu

See wikitravel: http://wikitravel.org/en/Seishun_18_Ticket

Nara Day Pass

If travelling to Nara from Kyoto, buy a Nara Day Pass. It costs about ¥1600 and saves

you about Y200. This is available from the little office at the ticket gates of Kyoto subway stations (ask for a nara yuki no wan dei chiketto OR nara yuki no ichi nichi chiketto (奈良行きの「1 Day」チケット)

If travelling to Nara from Kyoto and if you don't have a JR pass, don't catch the Kintetsu company's tokyuu. It costs about double the price of a kyuuoku and it only saves about 20min.

Kansai Thru Pass

Kansai Thru Pass is a rip-off. Costs Y5000 for a 3 day pass. You'd have to do a hell of a lot of train travel to justify buying it. It's be cheaper to buy a fresh ticket each time you board. Check Hyperdia for ticket prices.

<http://www.surutto.com/conts/ticket/3dayeng/>

Tokyuu tickets

If you catch a tokyuu ("Limited Express"), then often you will require a Tokyuu-ken (Limited Express ticket) in addition to the standard fare.

There are many different railway operators in Japan. JR requires you to have a tokyuu-ken. Operators that do not require a tokyuu-ken include Hanshin and Hankyuu in Kansai.

Icoca and Suica cards

These are stored value cards. They run on a similar system to what is in Singapore and Hong Kong. They do not save you any money. However, you might find them convenient, because once you put enough money in your card, you won't need to buy subway tickets each time. To use one of these cards, you swipe it on the marked spot on the ticket gates.

The Suica card works in Greater Tokyo. The Icoca card works in Kansai, but not on Kyoto subways. As of 2007, it worked in Kansai on the following railways: JR West (but pretty much only in Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe – don't take it out to any small towns), Osaka subways, Hankyuu, Hanshin, Nankai Railways, Keihan Railways.

Icoca and Suica are compatible, but as of 2007 some machines were not fully compatible – but it's still safe to use an Icoca card in Tokyo.

Women-only carriages

In major cities, women only carriages can be found. They are usually pink. They exist because groping is an issue. Often the carriages are only women-only during peak hours,

but it's probably a safer bet for males to just stay away from them.

Night Trains

They are available, but by no means cheap – however you can travel while sleeping (which will either save you a night's accommodation, or save you travel costs whichever way you look at – two birds with one stone).

These need to be booked well in advance (two weeks to 6 months in advance, depending on popularity).

How to use a train ticket machine.

Machines in different parts of Japan can be slightly different.

In Kyoto, work out your fare from the map above the ticket machines* and then put the required amount of money in. The buttons for the fares which you can afford will light up. Press the ticket value that you require. The ticket (and any change) comes out.

Ticket machines typically give change (even for Y10000).

If you buy the wrong fare, it doesn't matter. When you try to go through the ticket gate at the station where you alight, the ticket gate will close when it reads your ticket. You simply go and find the top-up machine, and put your ticket into it and it tells you how much extra to pay. Put the extra money in and it will give you a new ticket that should work.

Booking seats:

Most of the JR bookings officers at major stations understand enough English for very basic questions and bookings.

Language

In major cities you can get by with no Japanese at all. Most useful signs are in English and Japanese. Sometimes there are parts of Tokyo stations that have no English (seemingly due to space constraints) – but if this causes you problems, move to a different part of the station and your problem should be solved.

JR ticket machines are in Japanese and English.

Other train companies' machines are typically only in Japanese – but this doesn't matter because you put your money in and press the numbers (in Arabic numerals).

If you get out into the countryside, often signage is only in Japanese. In this case you will need at least an intermediate grasp of Japanese and kanji. If going to the

countryside, it's a good idea to get a list of the places you're going and the corresponding kanji.

All directional road signs are in English and Japanese (and Russian in some parts of Japan).

See list of useful travel vocab at bottom. These are included since they might not be available in a phrase book.

Japanese Domestic Travel

Student discounts:

It's pretty hard to get student discounts for travel unless you are enrolled in a Japanese university, since you will often need a 学生割引証明書 (Student Discount Certificate). These can only be obtained if you're enrolled in a Japanese university. For long-haul buses, you might be able to use your Australian student card at the ticket booth – just try it.

A good place to book for anything is a travel agent in a university – they seem to be less formal.

Ferries

Ferries don't exactly save you time or money directly. However, you can travel long distances and sleep overnight (as all the long distance ferries are overnights), thus saving you time. The lodging on the ferries ranges from sleeping on a tatami floor (cheapest) to first-class cabins.

It's pretty borderline as to whether ferries actually save you money (make sure you consider the cost of transport AND the cost of accommodation if you're making a comparison).

Major ferries leave Osaka for Shikoku and Kyushuu. JR operates the JR Beetle between Fukuoka and Pusan in Korea. There is a ferry that does Maizuru (northern Kyoto Prefecture) to Otaru (Hokkaido). See 'Useful Websites' for more details.

The JR Pass is not valid on the JR Beetle ferry.

The JR pass is valid on the JR Miyajima Ferry at Miyajima (near Hiroshima).

Buses

Local buses: local buses operate in pretty much every town and can often take you out

to remote places, if you want to go there. To use buses in non-tourist areas, it's good to have a strong grasp of intermediate Japanese. For route information, it's best to do a search on the internet (in Japanese).

You board a bus from the back door. Typically, to buy a ticket you will take a slip of paper from a machine at the back of the bus. This piece of paper has number on it. When you want to get off, look up at the screen near the driver and find your corresponding number. The value of your fare will be displayed as well. Place your coins into the slot next to the driver. Leave the bus.

It's handy to have plenty of coins in store for local bus travel. However, some buses give change from an automatic machine next to the driver. Place (for example) your 1000 yen note into the slot and coins will be dispensed. Your fare will not be deducted. You must pay the fare separately.

For long haul buses (*kousoku basu*), bus tickets are usually available from a booth located somewhere near the bus stop. Sometimes it's inside one of the buildings nearby. Often different bus companies share the same bus stop, but have different booths, so find out which booth is the correct one. JR buses are often booked at the train station bookings counter.

Usually long haul buses will operate every hour or two for popular routes. For not so popular routes, there might be a few services a day. For unpopular routes, there'll typically be one or two services a day (and these might be overnight buses).

An example of buses saving you money (and time) is in Kyushuu. Going from Oita to Fukuoka is cheaper and faster by bus than train. Going from Fukuoka to Nagasaki is faster and cheaper by bus than train. Of course, if you had a JR Pass, the train would be free.

The JR pass can be used on local bus services only if they are operated by JR (the buses will be marked with a 'JR' if they are operated by JR). The JR pass can be used on the following long-haul bus routes:

Local lines of JR bus companies (JR Hokkaido Bus, JR Bus Tohoku, JR Bus Kanto, JR Tokai Bus, West Japan JR Bus, Chugoku JR Bus, JR Shikoku Bus, JR Kyushu Bus) and some of JR highway bus services*.

- Sapporo-Otaru; Morioka-Hirosaki; Tokyo-Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka, Tsukuba Center; Nagoya-Kyoto, Osaka; Osaka-Tsuyama, Kasai Flower Center.

Trams

Many people are surprised to find out that trams operate outside of Melbourne. Trams operate in many Japanese cities. Some examples are Osaka, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Matsuyama. There are day passes, but like usual, when you find out the prices, work out if you'll actually make a saving. If in Hiroshima, try and get a pass that will include the ferry to Miyajima. From memory, there are two companies that run major ferries to Miyajima – JR and some other one. The other one is the one that has its fare included in a special pass with the trams. However, if you have a JR pass, the JR pass gives free travel on the JR Miyajima ferry.

Domestic flights

Some 'budget' airlines are Skynet Asia and Skymark. However I checked the fares 9th April, and they weren't cheap in comparison to fares in Australia. As an indicator, the fares were slightly lower than the cost of a bullet train ticket. Of course, with aeroplanes, there's the hassle of getting to the airport and checking in, and doing luggage, etc. This shows an advantage of the bullet train – no checking in, just go through the gates and jump straight into the train (or the queue waiting for the train).

Safety, theft

Crime can be an issue in Japan, but in general it is a safe place. In some cases, police will not respond, or will be slow to respond.

Umbrella theft and bicycle theft are common (don't leave your umbrella in the umbrella racks outside a shop).

This said, Japan is probably safer than Australia, but it is still a good idea to look out for your belongings, particularly if you're staying in a youth hostel (take a lock for your zips and for a baggage locker).

Internet Access

At internet cafes, youth hostels, hotels, airports. Not expensive.

Mobile phone

If you think you need a mobile phone, here are your options:

- Hire one at the airport
- Bring your own. Check with your carrier if your phone and plan will allow you to use your phone in Japan.

If you try to buy a SIM when you're in Japan, they might refuse to sell it to you unless you have an alien registration card, which you can only get if you're a resident. If you are a resident and you want to get a phone on contract, then you'll require the [alien registration card] or [a credit card and a National Health Insurance Record].

Customs

No tipping.

Don't use mobile phones in trains for voice conversations

When waiting for the train, copy the other people –notice that they (usually) stand neatly in a line.

Some temples and shrines have no photography policies. Obey the signs.

Bowing: don't forget to bow. Often a nod of the head and a smile is all that is needed.

Communal Bathing

Enter the change room, take off your clothes and put them in the basket.

Before getting into the bath, wash yourself first with soap. There will be taps and stools nearby the bath.

Ensure that there are no soap suds at all left on you.

Gently enter the bath.

Stay in the bath for as long as you like.

You must bathe naked.

Swimming in the bath would be extremely strange.

Bring your own towel (sometimes you can buy them there).

Soap is usually provided, but to be on the safe side, bring your own.

Food and drink

Much of Japan is covered in vending machines, from which you can buy anything from hot/cold coffee to beer and spirits to sports drinks. Vending machines can carry other items (such as rice, cigarettes, etc.).

Bottled drinks are much cheaper in Japan than in Australia, often at half the price.

Supermarkets sell large 1-2L bottles of popular drinks, which works out much cheaper

than buying from a vending machine.

Unless you travel to towns very remote, there'll also be convenience stores that you can buy food at. The type of food available at convenience store: Dumplings, steamed vegetables, onigiri, sushi, hamburgers, bread rolls, bakery items, sandwiches, chocolates, junk food, ice-creams, etc.

Should be able to get a decent meal for under 1500 any time of day. Depending on how much you eat, 5000~6000 per day is a safe amount to budget for, if you include snacks in between meals, soft drinks/coffee, etc. If you take in our recommendations (below) and/or are tight, you can survive on 4000/day.

Family restaurants are really cheap, but sometimes meals aren't 'traditional' Japanese. Izakayas have lots of small dishes, so you may get a surprise when you look at the bill unless you keep track of what you've eaten. Teishoku (set menus) give great value and it's common to be able to get one for around 1000. For 500~700 you can get cheap ramen or udon. If you're ever near a university (and there's lots of them in Japan), drop into their food courts and you might be able to score a cheap meal for 400~600! Sushi restaurants offer individual sushi ranging between 250~800, it's typical to eat about 5~10.

Nightlife

- Ageha: Supurb place but heavy entrance fee.
- Appears to be a lot of decent places in Shibuya.
- Roppongi: Well known for 'gaijin clubs'. If you wanna meet Japanese that wish to make international friends, tourists and other foreigners, then check Roppongi out.
- Karaoke: You can usually use a foreign student card to get a discount for karaoke. One hour can range from Y1500-3000.
- <http://www.clubberia.com/>
- <http://club.cyber-style.jp/>
- In Kyoto, try Kiyamachi Street (it has a canal running along it, and runs at 90 degrees to Shijo Street). Many clubs, izakaya and bars.

Holiday Periods

The major holiday periods are Obon, New Year and Golden Week. The main Obon period is around about August 15th-17th. The busy New Year travel period starts about Dec 30th and ends around Jan 3rd. Golden Week is April 29th – May 5th. Whilst booking

seats is not essential during these periods, don't expect to be sitting down on your transport and don't expect to be able to fit into, for example, the first train that you see arrive at the station.

Also expect tourist destinations to be crowded during these holidays.

Weather, clothing

The biggest downside of travelling in Winter is the extra clothing (thus, baggage) you must take. If you travel in summer, you can get by with just t-shirt and shorts (at least in Western Japan). In Western Japan, temperatures at night don't drop too much below about 27C.

Umbrellas can be purchased at any convenience store or 100 yen shop.

Summer (June-August)

June to mid-July is the wet season. If you don't like rain, then don't travel. However, it really doesn't rain that much as in other countries' wet seasons and travel is very much doable.

Temperatures at the height of summer (August) will be up around 35C in Western and Central Japan and cooling down as you head further north. Hokkaido rarely exceeds 30C in summer.

Kanto and everywhere west of Kanto is very humid in summer. Many Japanese carry sweat rags with them.

Winter (December-February)

It doesn't snow much in Western Japan on the Pacific coast, however there will be rare snow. Kyoto is known for its cold winters, but it snows only a few times a year and daily maximum temperatures are around 6C to 12C.

The Japan Sea coast (facing China) gets battered with snow and heavy snowfalls are common. Expect to be cold.

Heading south, Okinawa would be lucky to get below 20 for a daily maximum.

Heading north and east (from Kyoto), the temperature gradually gets colder and as you pass Sendai, you can expect it to get substantially colder. Expect snow and ice as you go even further north. Blizzards can also occur.

The town of Wakkanai in the extreme north gets covered in snow up to 2 metres deep for half the year.

Shopping

- Shibuya, Harajuku, Shinkuku in Tokyo
- Namba in Osaka, Sannomiya in Kobe, Shijo and the Teramachi arcades in Kyoto
- For electronics, Nipponbashi (“Den-den Town”) in Osaka, Akihabara in Tokyo.
Yodobashi Camera, Bic Camera, Ginza + showrooms are in Akihabara.
Mobile phones are interesting to look at, but it'll be extremely hard to buy your own one and have it work here. I noticed that DJ sets seem to be more commonly displayed in electronics shops in Japan. There's also (surprise surprise) lots of electronic dictionaries to choose from; it shouldn't be too hard to pick up a decent model for under \$300.
- Any city should have department stores and arcades
- Loft, Donki hote, etc are quite interesting.
- 100-yen shops may be useful (and cheap) for buying basics such as gloves (in Winter), giftbags etc.

Koji's tips

- Keep in contact with the Japanese friends you make through the Japanese Club!
Think of it as a mutual agreement: you look after them in Australia, they look after you in Japan.
- Budget carefully so that you don't run out of money half way through your trip.
- Plan your movements so that you don't waste time getting lost. Printed maps such as Google Maps are handy too.
- Go at your own pace. Some people like to take their time while sightseeing rather than rushing to see too many things in a short time; other people like to go and see as many things as they can possibly fit in.
- Recharging devices: Buy an adapter, and make sure your chargers work at 100~120V input. Also, don't forget to pack them into your luggage. It will be a shame if your camera or iPod runs out of batteries mid-trip.
- Pack as lightly as possible before departure. That way, you can buy more souvenirs/clothes/CDs and move around a lot easier.
- Things do go wrong: Add some emergency money into your budget, and make sure you have a reliable method of accessing your money. I used post offices rather than banks to access my money because the banks wouldn't accept my credit card. You might want to keep some money separate from you wallet; if it wasn't for a good samaritan I would've spent half my trip with no money.
- Don't use the limousine bus if you're going from Narita Airport to Tokyo. It's more

fun that way, and you save a fair amount of money too.

- Try to avoid national holidays such as New Year's and Golden Week unless you specifically plan to participate in them. With a lot of people on holiday things get a little hectic, and a lot of shops and services tend to be closed.

Useful vocab

Bullet trains:

(From fastest to slowest)

Shinkansens on Toukai/Sanyou route:

Nozomi

Hikari

Kodama

Non-bullet trains:

The translation here are the ones given in Japan. They aren't how we'd translate them.

The colour of the labels on the trains are given in brackets.

特急 Tokkyuu Limited Express (Red)

急行 Kyuukou Express (Yellow)

快速 Kaisoku Rapid (sign colour varies)

普通 Futsuu or 各停 Kakutei Local (sign colour varies, typically black and white)

Other variations exist, but vary from company to company.

学割 がくわり student discount

禁煙 きんえん no smoking

喫煙 きつえん smoking (as in a smoking permitted section of a train)

路面電車 ろめんでんしゃ tram

グリーン車 グリーンしゃ Green carriage (the first-class carriage)

特急 とつきゅう translated in Japan as 'Limited Express'

急行 きゅうこう translated in Japan as 'Express'

自由席 じゆうせき unreserved seat

指定席 していせき reserved seat

学生証 がくせいしょう student card

大人 おとな adult

小人 こびと child

特急券 とつきゅうけん tokkyuu ticket

乗車券 じょうしゃけん boarding pass (needed for all trains)

高速バス こうそくバス Highway bus/Long-haul bus