

## A Northern Soul

▶ TOKYO ▶ NIKKO ▶ SENDAI ▶ HIRAIZUMI ▶ NARUKO ▶ MT. HAGURO ▶ NIIGATA ▶ SADO ISLAND ▶ TOKYO

### Japan Facts

**Population:** 127 million  
**Capital City:** Tokyo, pop. 8.23 million (23 wards)  
**Language:** Japanese  
**Religion:** Shinto & Buddhist, 1.5% Christian  
**Currency:** Japanese Yen  
**Time:** GMT + 9 hours  
**Electricity:** 100V  
**International Dialling Code:** 81



### Tour Overview

To the North-East of Tokyo the Tohoku region stretches out for nearly 700 miles, a gentler Japan than that of the western coast; one characterised by its paddy fields, ancient mountaintop monasteries, friendly rural towns and villages. 'A Northern Soul' will connect you with the Japan few tourists ever visit.

The Northern Soul tour brings you some of Japan's most unique experiences; stunning temples in Nikko; Naruko Onsen, a remote hot spring resort set in a beautiful valley; quiet reflection and contemplation at temple lodgings on Mt. Haguro; the laid back little big city of Sendai.

The context for all of this is set with two nights in Tokyo to start your Northern Soul adventure. This is modern urban living on an enormous scale. The view from the top of Shinjuku's Government Metropolitan building says it all with concrete as far as the eye can see in every direction: This is the world's largest conurbation and home to 35 million Japanese. The streets are constantly buzzing with activity; the neon lights ablaze as soon as dusk descends and the suited salary-men who helped drive Japan's economic revolution pour out of the offices and into the bars, restaurants and hostess clubs.

You'll return to Tokyo on the 14th day of the tour. But until then you'll leave life at a hundred miles an hour behind and step into a different world. At Mt. Haguro's temple lodgings you will have all the time in the world to relax. You'll awaken to a Buddhist vegetarian breakfast and the chanting of the temple monks at morning prayer and fall asleep breathing cool clean air under star filled mountain skies. We'll also be venturing across the Japan Sea to Sado Island, a place with a unique history being first an island of harsh exile and then the site of Japan's own gold rush. Today the island has a flourishing local arts scene which includes beautiful

Okessa Odori singing and dancing, pulsating taiko drumming and traditional Noh drama.

With two nights in Nikko, a town surrounded by beautiful mountains and 400 year old cedar trees, home to Toshogu shrine as well as a stay in a hot spring ryokan in the remote Onsen resort of Naruko, a Northern Soul is a chance to get away from it all.

We won't, however, be leaving modern Japan behind completely; in between the rural retreats we will visit Sendai, the largest city in the Tohoku region and Niigata, a lively port town on the Japan sea coast.

Sumptuous evening meals are included at most destinations as well as three rides on the world renowned high-speed 'Bullet' train. With your Tour Leader always on hand to assist, you are sure to get the most out of this fascinating trip.

Ideal for anyone returning to Japan or for first time visitors who are looking for something different, A Northern Soul is your chance to go beyond the regular tourist haunts and experience some of what lies at the heart of Japan. A 14 night adventure to treasure.

### Day-by-Day

#### Day 1 - Tokyo (D)

The tour begins today in Tokyo, Japan's electric capital city. You'll be arriving at Narita Airport and your Tour Leader will be there to meet you and escort you into Tokyo. Many of our customers choose to come in a day or two early to get over jet-lag and get the most out of the tour. Whatever the case, up to two days before the tour starts we will have someone there to meet you. The tour hotel is situated in the Asakusa area, the former downtown and entertainments district of Edo, as Tokyo was formally known. This friendly district still maintains a traditional atmosphere and is home to Senso-ji, the city's oldest temple. Tonight, we

will be indulging in a first night's dinner of your Tour Leader's expert choice. Options include okonomiyaki - a kind of savoury pancake, or at an izakaya, a Japanese style pub. Food is on us so this is a great chance to start getting to know the other members of the group.

#### Day 2 Tokyo (B)

Today will begin with a buffet breakfast at a nearby hotel before we embark on a full day tour of the city. We'll cruise down the Sumida River, take a relaxing stroll through Hamarikyu tei-en, a tranquil garden that is just a few minutes walk from the lively Ginza shopping district, and explore the precincts of Meiji Shrine. Of course, if exploring independently is more your thing then that is no problem at all! Just ask your Tour Leader if you need any recommendations or advice. Tonight dinner isn't included so we recommend heading out to indulge in some of the myriad of culinary delights available.

#### Day 3 - Nikko (B&D)

Today we'll be making an early start for an optional excursion to the city's morning fish market. The auctions of giant tuna fish make for most entertaining viewing and there is an extraordinary variety of marine life to behold. The Japanese are serious about their fish and here you'll get to see where it all comes from. If all this fish makes your hungry, why not have a sushi breakfast at one of the market's tiny sushi bars. Don't worry though, if this isn't to your taste the usual breakfast will still be available.

After breakfast we will be making the two hour journey by direct train to Nikko. Our pension is located right next to the splendid Toshogu shrine complex and after arrival we'll drop our bags off before exploring the shrines and temples. Don't miss the famous "see no evil" monkeys hidden in amongst the bright vermilion shrines. In the evening we'll be enjoying a sumptuous dinner at our hotel.





## Day-by-Day continued

### Day 4 Nikko (B&D)

After breakfast we'll have the chance to explore some of the national park around Nikko. We'll head by bus to the Chuzenji lake area and visit the 97 metre high Kegon-no-taki waterfalls. There are plenty of activities available at the lake - you can take a relaxing boat cruise, go for some great walks and hikes or have a soak at the hot spring area of Yumoto. We will be back at the hotel in good time for dinner - another course of superb French cuisine.

### Day 5 Sendai (B&D)

From Nikko we'll take the local train to Utsunomiya from where we'll pick up the Tohoku Shinkansen ('Bullet' Train) bound for the area's largest city Sendai. Accommodation is at the hillside Tenryukaku ryokan, a traditional Japanese style inn famous for its beautiful location, fine food and radon baths. The ryokan is situated next to the mausoleum for Sendai's founding father Date Masamune and makes for a good base for visiting the castle ruins and exploring the town itself. A top quality dinner will be served tonight at the ryokan.

We also have a volunteering option in Sendai - please ask us for details.

### Day 6 Sendai (B)

Our second day in Sendai will give us the chance to visit the famous island studded bay of Matsushima. Spared the destruction of 2011's tsunami due in no small part to the hundreds of tiny islands, this is a beautiful area and the boat trip around the bay is well worthwhile. The small town of Matsushima also has a pleasant temple complex to wander around with a fine collection of Japanese art. In the evening you'll be free to sample some of the local cuisine in Matsushima or Sendai.

### Day 7 Hiraizumi (B&D)

Today we'll travel one hour north by Shinkansen to Hiraizumi. Now a sleepy rural backwater, the town boasts a long samurai history stretching back through the ages. We'll be arriving in good time to be able to drop our bags before a full day of sightseeing, exploring some of the many temples of Chuzonji. Highlights include the wonderful gardens of Motsuji and the 900 year old golden temple of Konjikido. A superb dinner is included at our Japanese-style hotel.

### Day 8 Hiraizumi (B&D)

A second day in Hiraizumi will give us a chance to head out to the Geibikei gorge for a boat ride with a difference (we won't be telling you in advance so as to not spoil the surprise!!) and to do some walking in the beautiful surroundings. Dinner is again served at the hotel.

### Day 9 Naruko Onsen (B&D)

Our journey continues on 1h40 to the hot spring village of Naruko Onsen. Naruko is a stunning mountainous area with spectacular scenery. You'll have a chance to walk down Naruko Gorge as well as see Naruko's geyser. You may also be interested to check out the area's famous Kokeshi dolls at the local museum or revive your tired feet in the station's foot onsen! Dinner including some delicious Chinese dishes and breakfast are included at our ryokan.

### Day 10 Mt. Haguro (B&D)

From Naruko Onsen station we'll take a series of scenic local train lines westwards before taking taxis to Mt. Haguro, one of the three spiritual mountains known as Dewa-sanzen and home to the Yamabushi or mountain priests. Here we will be staying at a Buddhist temple lodging (shukubo). For those of you with plenty of energy we'll be climbing the 2446 steps to the summit of the mountain where a well earned cup of hot 'sake' will be waiting for you! In the evening a dinner of shoujin ryori, the traditional vegetarian Buddhist cuisine, will be served at our *shukubo*.

### Day 11 Niigata (B)

Today will begin by taking the bus from just outside our shukubo to Tsuruoka Station. It will then be on by express train to Niigata where we will arrive in good time to take a leisurely lunch. Niigata is a modern port city famed for its good food and drink and in the afternoon you'll have time to take in some of the down town area with its interesting mix of old streets, modern department stores and the attractive Hakusan park.

### Day 12 Sado Island (B&D)

This morning will see us board the ferry bound for Sado Island. The crossing takes 2h30 so even for those land-lovers amongst you there shouldn't be too many problems with sea-sickness!

Sado ga Shima (Sado Island) is an incredible place. The sixth biggest of Japan's islands, Sado was used as the place of harshest exile for opponenets of the ruling dynasties. Dangerous political oponents were banished here to live side by side with subversive artists, playwrights and actors; and thus developed Sado's uniquely rich culture and heritage. In the afternoon we will do some touring of the island. This will include the driving the breathtaking skyline road as well as visiting the fascinating gold mine which in its day was one of the most productive in the world. We will be staying in a Japanese style hotel in the port town of Ryotsu with sumptuous evening meals included on both nights.

### Day 13 Sado Island (B&D)

Today we will have a full day to explore this fascinating island by private minivan. Sado is home to the famous Koto drummers and we will begin today with a Taiko lesson at the Taiko Centre. We can then have a ride on a Taraifune boat rowed by a real Sado maiden! Next is a Bunya puppetry performance - a highlight of any visit to Sado! The day will end with a visit to a Sake Brewery, and perhaps a few tastings! Dinner will again be served at the hotel - the final included evening meal on what is a true gourmet tour!

### Day 14 Tokyo(B)

We'll be taking an early ferry across to the mainland before picking up the Shinkansen train to Tokyo. Total journey time will be around 6 hours giving you time in the late afternoon to perhaps go gift shopping or to check out some sights you missed first time round, such as the amazing view of the city to be had from the 45th floor of the nearby Tokyo Metropolitan Government building. We'll be staying in the

heart of the bright lights of Shinjuku, a complete contrast from the Asakusa district where we began our adventures two weeks ago! We hope that you might join with your Tour Leader for a farewell meal in the evening. A chance for one last night of good food before heading home.

### Day 15 Sayonara (B)

Sadly the tour is over and we all have to say our farewells and go our separate ways. Your Tour Leader will be providing you with a reserved seat ticket for the Narita Express and will make sure you're in good time for your flight home.

## Accommodation

The following accommodation is used on the A Northern Soul tour:

**Tokyo Toyoko Inn Asakusa Kuramae**  
Well located business hotel in Asakusa  
Tel. 03 3841 1045

**Nikko Oedo Onsen Nikko Kirifuri**  
A classic Japanese style resort hotel. Traditional style rooms, fabulous hot spring baths and a wide variety of Japanese cuisine.  
Tel. 0288 50 1212

**Sendai Ryokan Tenryukaku**  
Classic Japanese inn with great views and radon baths  
Tel. 022 222 9957

**Hiraizumi Hotel Musashibo**  
Japanese-style hotel with delicious banquet meals and silky smooth hot spring baths  
Tel. 0191 46 2241

**Naruko Ryokan Bentenkaku**  
Hot spring ryokan with classic Japanese rooms and great cuisine  
Tel: 0229 83 2461

**Haguro Katsukane Shukubo**  
Buddhist temple lodging at the base of Mt. Haguro and featuring quality shoujin ryori  
Tel. 0235 62 2273

**Niigata Toyoko Inn Niigata Eki Mae**  
Business hotel attached to Niigata Station  
Tel. 025 241 1045

**Sado Island Yoshidaya Ryokan**  
Classy Japanese-style hotel. Fantastic food and onsen baths  
Tel: 0259 27 2151

**Tokyo IBIS Hotel Shinjuku**  
Good business hotel in a fantastic location  
Tel. 03 3361 1111

*Please note that accommodation is subject to change. Final details of the accommodation will be included in your Info-Pack which will be sent out approximately 4 weeks prior to the tour start date.*





## More Tour Information

### What's Included

The following elements are all included in the price of your tour:

- ✓ 14 nights accommodation
- ✓ All transport between destinations in Japan including airport transfers on arrival and departure
- ✓ Breakfast every day
- ✓ 10 evening meals
- ✓ Sumida River Boat Cruise
- ✓ Tokyo transport pass
- ✓ Nikko transport pass
- ✓ Touring on Sado Island
- ✓ Luggage forwarding between Naruko Onsen & Niigata, and Niigata & Tokyo
- ✓ Full time services of your Tour Leader
- ✓ InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

### NOT included

- ✗ International flights
- ✗ Additional local transport
- ✗ Entrance fees to shrines, temples, museums etc.
- ✗ Lunches, 4 evening meals, drinks
- ✗ Baggage handling - you will be expected to carry your own luggage

### Bathroom arrangements

During the tour we will stay in a variety of different accommodation, some Western-style, others Japanese-style. At most night stops your room will have full en-suite facilities (attached bath, shower and toilet). However, at some Japanese-style night stops bathroom and toilet facilities may be shared. Usually bathroom facilities are available to use privately but not always! Japan has a long history of communal bathing and therefore these kind of facilities are not unusual. However, men and women always bathe separately so no need to worry about that!!

The *shukubou* temple lodging at **Mt. Haguro** has communal facilities (men and women separate). All other accommodation has full ensuite.

### Policy on single rooms

InsideJapan Tours do not charge a single supplement for most of our tours. In the Western-style hotels all single travellers will be provided with a single room. However, in Japanese-style accommodation it is traditional for people to share a room. Therefore, single travellers may have to share a room (same sex share) at Japanese-style night stops.

### Your Tour Leader

Our tours are led on the ground by a Tour Leader, a Japanese speaking Brit, Aussie or American who is there to ensure that you get the most out of your trip and that the whole adventure goes smoothly. The Leader travels with the group and stays at the same hotels and ryokan so please feel free to ask for help or advice at any time. Your Tour Leader is not a guide so may not know every historical detail of every shrine, temple or palace; equally however, s/he is available pretty much all day everyday and will even accompany (willing) tour members to karaoke...

### Flexibility

Our tours aim to be as flexible as possible, so there is no set-in-stone itinerary for each day. Each morning your Leader will outline what he is going to do that day and will be available if you need advice about doing any other activities.

### Meals

There are a number of meals included on all our tours. Please let us know if you have any special dietary requirements.

### Transport on tour

Please note that all transfers are by public transport making use of Japan's first-rate transport network. All the hotels and *ryokan* have been chosen for their location close to the nearest station. However, you will have to carry your bags for short distances and some stations do not have escalators. Please see the 'Luggage' section for more information on what luggage to bring and a handy packing check-list.

### Early check-in

Upon arrival you may well be tired after a long international flight. Hotels in Japan operate strict check-in policies. If you have an early flight arrival please ask us about early check-in options.

### Visas

Entry visas not required by UK, USA, CAN, AUS & NZ citizens. For other countries please check with the Japanese embassy or consulate in your home country.

### Power and Plugs

Japan uses 100v with two pin flat blade plugs. Travellers from the USA will find that their plugs will fit into some Japanese sockets but not all. Plug adaptors are readily available in electronic stores in Japan and are not expensive. US appliances will work in Japan even though the voltage is slightly lower than North America. Travellers from the UK should purchase a plug adaptor before arrival in Japan as three pin adaptors are somewhat hard to find once you arrive. Please note that

due to the much lower voltage UK electrical appliances will not work unless they have a variable voltage power-pack (such as a lap-top computer, most mobile phones, digital cameras etc). If you are bringing a digital camera make sure it has a power-pack or it will NOT recharge!

### Mobile Phones

Until recently overseas mobile phones have not worked at all in Japan. However, with the advent of 3G if you have a 3G enabled handset and your phone contract includes 'roaming', you will be able to use your mobile across most of Japan.

If you do not have a suitable handset or wish to avoid high roaming charges, you may wish to hire a mobile for the duration of your stay.

You can arrange phone rental on arrival at Tokyo Narita Airport, Tokyo Haneda Airport and Osaka Kansai Airport. Do note that phones are subject to availability and do sometimes run out at the very busiest times.

Alternatively, for our clients in North America we have teamed up with **Travel Cell** who provide rental cell phones which can be booked in advance:

<http://www.travelcell.com/tcap.asp?ag=IJT28>

When placing an order either use the custom link above or please mention InsideJapan Tours code (IJT28).

### Crime and personal safety

Japan is perhaps the World's safest country and personal crime is almost unheard of. You are extremely unlikely to have anything stolen whilst you are in Japan and the likelihood of being threatened in any way is almost nonexistent. It is not uncommon to leave your wallet, phone, camera or lap-top in a bar or restaurant and return hours later to find your lost property waiting for you.

However, you should still take the usual precautions: Keep large amounts of money out of sight and consider using a money belt; in your hotel room keep your valuables packed away and when out and about keep an eye on your bag and other personal effects.

Japan is also a very safe country for women to travel in and there is a very low risk of being assaulted in any way. Most areas are safe to walk alone at night but it is best to be with another person. Women can sometimes find themselves the subject of unwanted attention from drunk Japanese salary men. Such men are best ignored or a firmly delivered "Go away!" will usually embarrass them into leaving you alone.





## Luggage

20Kgs  
(44lbs) max /  
12kgs (26lb)  
recommended  
1 main bag + 1 day  
bag + overnight  
bag



You will have to carry your own bags for most of the trip. Large cases **WILL** be an inconvenience to you and will slow down the whole group. A compact case WITH WHEELS or a good quality rucksack is appropriate for this tour. DO NOT bring holdalls or sports bags for your main luggage.

If you are travelling for a long time (such as a round the World ticket), then make sure you have a smaller bag as well as your large bag. Japan has a superb system of luggage forwarding (*takyubin*) meaning there is no need to carry around all the items you have with you for a year long trip! Instead you can forward them to your final hotel and they will be kept safely until you check-in. The cost of this service is between 1200 yen (for a medium sized bag) up to 1830 yen for a very large suitcase. There are no weight limits so you don't need to worry about this.

We highly recommend making use of the luggage forwarding service during your stay in Japan. For this reason we suggest you bring an overnight bag with you. This can be a smallish rucksack, a sports bag or any piece of luggage so long as it is not too big!

## Packing check-list

On this page you will find our packing check-list. This is not fully comprehensive but you should find nearly everything you could possibly need to bring on a trip to Japan! There are also a few things to keep in mind when packing.

### Clothing and footwear

Comfortable casual clothing is all that is required. Outside of business situations the Japanese are very relaxed about dress so formal attire is unnecessary. It is always possible that some of the nights outside of Kyoto and Tokyo might be cool or even cold so a jumper or fleece jacket and a light waterproof jacket are advisable. Everyday you will be doing a fair amount of walking so a pair of good quality, comfortable walking shoes is also recommended.

### The obvious things!

- ✓ Underwear
- ✓ Socks
- ✓ T-shirts / Polo Shirts / Casual shirts
- ✓ 2 pairs of long trousers (Jeans, Cords, Chinos etc.)
- ✓ A pair of shorts
- ✓ Sun hat
- ✓ Warm hat (Spring, Autumn and Winter)
- ✓ Light waterproof
- ✓ Light sweater (the air conditioning can be cold!)
- ✓ Night wear
- ✓ Fleece jacket, warm jumper or sweater (Spring and Autumn)
- ✓ Warm coat (winter only)
- ✓ Comfortable shoes or trainers
- ✓ Walking shoes / boots
- ✓ Open-toed sandals
- ✓ Small hand towel
- ✓ Swimwear (if you want to go to a public pool). Western ladies find it very hard to find swimwear to fit in Japan so it is best to bring your own
- ✓ Day sack / small back pack
- ✓ Overnight bag

### Documents

- ✓ Your passport!!
- ✓ A copy of your passport
- ✓ Credit cards
- ✓ Your travel insurance / health insurance documentation

### Toiletries / Health products

Nearly all toiletries are widely available in Japan. However, many people prefer to use their own brands so you will need to bring these with you.

- ✓ Tooth brush, Tooth paste
- ✓ Contact lens equipment or Glasses
- ✓ Deodorant (most people do not like Japanese brands so be sure to bring your own!)
- ✓ Shower gel / Shampoo (these are provided at every night stop but you may prefer your own)
- ✓ Tampons and Pads
- ✓ Mosquito repellent
- ✓ Sunscreen and After-sun cream
- ✓ Comb or Brush
- ✓ Condoms or Contraceptive Pills
- ✓ Hair products (gel, spray etc.)
- ✓ Lip balm
- ✓ Razor & shaving gel

You may wish to take a well stocked first aid kit containing bandages, plasters (band aids) and other similar products. In addition you may wish to bring:

- ✓ Pain killers (Aspirin, paracetamol, Ibuprofen etc.)
- ✓ Motion sickness tablets

### Miscellaneous

- ✓ Paper / notebook (for writing your diary!)
- ✓ Pen / pencil
- ✓ Reading material - a good book never goes amiss!
- ✓ Earplugs (good on the plane and if you are sharing a room)
- ✓ Sunglasses
- ✓ Camera
- ✓ Camera charger / spare camera batteries and memory card (if small)
- ✓ Inflatable travel pillow
- ✓ Phrase book or dictionary
- ✓ Laundry detergent (available in Japan but you may prefer your own brand)
- ✓ Plug converter (for recharging your digital camera)

### You do NOT need

- ✗ **An Umbrella** - these are available everywhere in Japan for a very low cost
- ✗ **A large towel** - towels are provided at all night stops on our itineraries
- ✗ **Films** - for those purists still using film cameras you can buy extra film for far less in Japan than in the UK or USA
- ✗ **Regular Batteries** - All standard battery sizes are available to buy in convenience stores for less than the UK price
- ✗ **A hair dryer** - these are provided at nearly all night stops. Hair dryers brought from the UK will not work due to the lower voltage in Japan.





## Money and currency

### What money to bring

The Japanese Yen is the currency in Japan and you should make sure that you have access to plenty of it during your stay as Japan is still very much a cash society. There are several different ways to get your hands on those precious yen and it is just a case of deciding which suits you best.

### Obtaining money

#### Travellers Cheques

You can change travellers cheques at banks across Japan as well as at the airport upon arrival. However, it can be a time consuming process. We recommend bringing travellers cheques only if you intend to change all of them for yen at the airport (where the exchange takes next to no time and you receive a much better rate than for cash), or if you wish to keep them as emergency back-up. It is probably best to bring your travellers cheques in US Dollars or Pounds Sterling as you can change these anywhere. Euro, Australian Dollars and Canadian Dollars are also widely accepted. You can bring JPY travellers cheques but you will be hit for charges changing them back to your home currency should you decide not to use them.

#### Japanese yen in cash

This is one of the best ways to bring yen to Japan. You can purchase yen from most banks or in the UK from the post office. You can then be sure to arrive in Japan well equipped with currency. Again, make sure you don't bring more than you plan on spending as you will have to pay to convert any leftovers into your home currency. The best rates for obtaining yen are to be found online. In the UK try **Thomas Exchange** - <https://www.thomasexchange.co.uk/currency.asp> - or **Best Foreign Exchange** - <http://www.bestforeignexchange.com/services-travel-money-by-post.php>

#### Foreign Currency in cash

You can bring your home currency in cash to change at the airport or at banks and post offices during the tour. However, you get a better rate for travellers cheques at the airport than for cash. It is also much quicker to change cash at the post office than it is to change travellers cheques at a bank. However, not all post offices and banks offer this service so you can end up spending time trying to find one that does!

#### Credit / Debit cards

Possibly the most convenient way to manage your money in Japan is to use your credit or debit card to withdraw cash from ATMs. **Every post office in the country has an ATM that will accept your foreign issued cards.** Please be aware that post office ATMs usually only open business hours (8am to 6pm). Just be sure that you know your 4 digit PIN. ATMs are also available at 7-11 convenience stores. These accept all cards with Visa or Mastercard / Maestro Cirrus

logo. It is also advisable to notify your card issuer before you travel that you will be in Japan, otherwise there is a possibility that the transaction will be blocked for security reasons.

In conclusion we recommend using a combination of a couple of methods to manage your money whilst you are in Japan. We suggest bringing a substantial amount of JPY in cash to Japan or changing a large amount of money at the airport. If you need more we suggest using your credit or debit card to make withdrawals from the post office ATMs.

### How much money will I need?

This is the \$1000 question so to speak! Everybody spends a different amount when they visit. However, nearly everyone finds Japan a lot less expensive than they were expecting. Eating out is very reasonable and as food is one of the biggest expenses (and pleasures!) when travelling, this helps keep costs down.

Local transport, which is generally NOT included in our holiday packages, is also not expensive with the highest fare on the Tokyo subway being just 310 yen. Entrance fees to shrines, temples and museums are also very reasonable with most being in the region of 200-300 yen. Occasionally you will need to pay as much as 1000 yen but this is not the norm.

As a rough guide we recommend 80-100 thousand yen per person as a good amount to cover basic costs on a 2 week trip. This should cover your meals, drinks, local transport and any entrance fees. What this won't cover are souvenirs and other purchases you may wish to make. Beer and drinks can also add up very quickly so if you like a tittle of an evening you may need to budget a bit more.

### Emergency Funds

When travelling abroad it is always advisable to have emergency funds tucked away somewhere in case of unexpected occurrences. In Japan this is not such an issue as it might be in other parts of Asia but it is perhaps best not to rely on your plastic for this money. We recommend keeping £100 / \$200 of cash on one side. This can be in your home currency or in yen but make sure it is there and don't spend it! You never know when you might need those extra funds.

### Exchange Rates

Since the start of the financial crisis in 2008 the Japanese yen has remained at historically very high levels. However, 20 years of zero inflation in Japan have helped Japan to remain an affordable destination despite the unfavourable exchange rate

### Exchange rates as of early 2012:

- 1 Australian Dollar AUD = 79 yen
- 1 British Pound GBP = 119 yen
- 1 Australian Dollar AUD = 75 yen
- 1 Euro EUR = 98 yen
- 1 United States Dollar USD 77 yen

Be sure to have a look at the rates before you travel as rates can be quite volatile.

### Tipping

As a rule there is no tipping in Japan. This means that at restaurants you should not leave anything extra on top of the bill and you should not generally tip staff in hotels or taxi drivers. If you are staying in a high class ryokan then it is polite to tip your maid 1000-2000 yen on the day of arrival. Please give your tip in a discreet envelope.

### Every day prices

Soft Drink (Pepsi, Fanta etc)	120 yen
Loaf of bread	200 yen
Big Mac Meal	620 yen
Litre of milk	180 yen
Regular 35mm film (36 exp)	600 yen
Banana	100 yen
Litre of Petrol	123 yen
Snickers	120 yen
500ml beer	290 yen
Shop sandwich	230 yen
Umbrella	500 yen
Newspaper	150 yen
Bottle of water	150 yen
Subway journey	160-310 yen
Taxi (per car for 2km)	680 yen
Starbucks Tall Latte	370 yen
New iPod Nano (8GB)	10,800 yen

Entrance to a shrine/temple/museum: Usually between 200 yen and 600 yen per person.

Lunch: Sit-down lunch around 1000 yen, sandwich / *onigiri* / snacks from a convenience store around 500 yen. Beef bowl from Yoshinoya is 400 yen.

Dinner: Multi-course meal around 3000 yen per person, bowl of noodles up to 1000 yen per person, hot "*bento*" (box) dinner from a convenience store around 800 yen per person.

Of course, as in every country you can pay a LOT more for food if you like. Some restaurants in Tokyo and Kyoto will set you back as much as £250 / \$500 per person! However, if your tastes are not too extravagant then there is no reason to spend large sums on your meals.





## Climate

Japan has four distinct seasons with winter being quite cold but dry, spring warm with regular rainy days, summer very hot and humid and autumn warm and wet for the first few weeks and dry towards the end. There is also the risk of typhoons from July through to around the middle of October.

Below you can find a chart of the average temperatures in Tokyo through the year. This is a good indicator of the kind of temperatures you can expect to experience during your trip. However, Japan is a geographically very diverse country and this does have an effect on the temperature. The western regions of Honshu and Kyushu island can be quite a lot hotter than Tokyo. The reverse goes for

the northern regions of the country which can get a lot colder than Tokyo. Much of Japan is mountainous and of course, the higher elevation you go, the colder it gets!

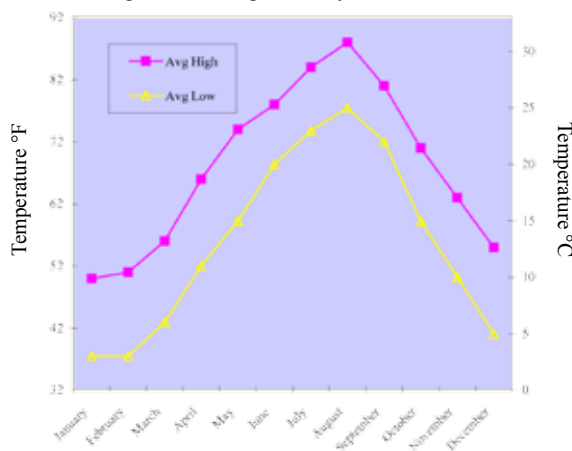
Temperatures in Hokkaido can reach as low as -25 °C in winter with very heavy snowfall. The same goes for the Japan Alps and other mountain regions of Japan. Be sure to take all this into account when packing for your trip. If you are heading up into the mountains you will need warmer clothing. Even in summer the temperatures can drop quite low during the night.

You can be sure that it will rain during your stay in Japan! In fact average rainfall is nearly double that of the UK so it really does

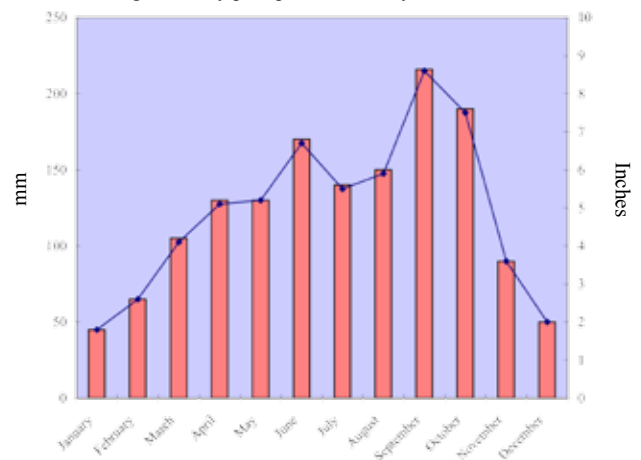
rain a lot. The wettest month of the year is September. However, this is mainly because of typhoons dumping huge amounts of rain in very short spaces of time, so you do get a lot of dry days as well as the very rainy ones!

Rainy season in Tokyo officially begins on 8th June and runs through until 20th July. However, the period of heaviest rain tends to be the last week in June and the first week in July. As with all these things though, exactly how much rain will fall in rainy season is very hard to predict and some years you really wouldn't know it was rainy season at all!

Average lows and highs in Tokyo



Average monthly precipitation in Tokyo



## Recommended Reading

There is no shortage of reading matter for Japan whether it be non-fiction books about Japan, Japanese fiction or non-Japanese fiction about Japan. Here are some of our top recommendations for both reading and viewing.

### Novels

- Matsuo Basho: Narrow Road into the Deep North
- Haruki Murakami: Norwegian Wood, Dance Dance Dance, The Wind-up Bird Chronicle
- Banana Yoshimoto: Kitchen
- Murasaki: Tales of Genji
- Soseki: Botchan/ I am a cat
- Junichiro Tanizaki: The Makioka Sisters, In Praise of Shadows
- James Clavell: Shogun
- Arthur Golden: Memoirs of a Geisha
- Liz Dalby: Geisha
- Pico Iyer: The Lady and the Monk
- Natsuo Kirino: Out
- Giles Milton: Samurai William

### Non-fiction

- John Lowe: Old Kyoto - A Short Social History
- Will Ferguson: Hokkaido Highway Blues - Hitching in Japan
- John Bester and Junichi Saga: Confessions of a Yakuza: A life in Japan's underworld
- Dr. John Nathan: Japan Unbound
- Stephen Addiss: How to Look at Japanese Art

- Kakuzo Okakura: The Book of Tea
- Donald Richie: The Inland Sea
- Nicholas Bornoff: Pink Samurai
- Robert Whiting: You've Gotta Have Wa
- Patrick Smith: Japan - A Reinterpretation
- Alex Kerr: Lost Japan
- Jeff Yang et al: Eastern Standard Time
- P. Sean Bramble: Culture Shock Japan

### Recommended Viewing

- Takeshi Kitano: Zatoichi, Hanabi, Dolls
- Studio Ghibli: Spirited Away, Princess Mononoke
- Akira Kurosawa: The Seven Samurai
- Tetsuya Nakashima: Kamikaze Girls
- Sofia Coppola: Lost in Translation
- Rob Marshall: Memoirs of a Geisha
- Katsuyuki Motohiro: Summer Time Machine Blues
- Shunji Awai: All about Lily Chou-chou (Riri Shushu no subete)
- Kinji Fukasaku: Battle Royale
- Hideo Nakata: Ringu

Check out <http://www.midnighteye.com/> for the latest and best in Japanese cinema.

