

Nature & Culture in Japan

► TOKYO ► KARUIZAWA ► MATSUMOTO ► JAPAN ALPS ► MAGOME ► KYOTO

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

An exciting 13 night tour of history, architecture, contemporary culture, and wild nature! Come and join your Tour Leader, wildlife expert and Japan enthusiast Oscar Huygens, for an exciting adventure mixing the very best of Japanese culture in the vibrant cities of Tokyo and Kyoto, with 5 days amongst nature hiking in the stunning Japanese Alps.

We alternate visits of Tokyo, Nara, and Kyoto, Japan's most famous cities, with one to three day hikes in the beautiful mountains of Central Japan and a stay in Matsumoto, the gateway to the Japanese Alps, and home to one of Japan's best preserved samurai castles.

In the stunning Kiso Valley region we hike the old Nakasendo highway which functioned as a postal route during the Edo period. This path winds between the well maintained post towns of Nagiso and Tsumago through fields, rice paddies and past local houses. This amazing day is topped off with a night in the quaint town of Magome with a stay in a traditional Japanese inn with ryori style fireplace.

The group for this tour is limited to just **8 people**, allowing you to see Japanese nature up close and to share Oscar's expertise. The tour combines mountain hikes with visits to places of cultural interest and if you are lucky you may see monkeys, serows (an endemic goat-like ungulate) and of course, bears. An exciting mix of history, architecture, contemporary culture, and nature!

Accommodation will be a mix of Western style (mostly in the cities) and traditional, with futons laid out in beautiful Japanese tatami rooms. You will also have the option

of a "homestay" with a Japanese family in Matsumoto. The food will be exquisite, and the pace and variety of experiences will be such that, without becoming overtired, you will truly feel like your Japanese sampler could not have been more complete!

Day-by-Day

Day 1 - Tokyo (D)

The tour group convenes in Tokyo. Oscar will come to Tokyo Narita Airport to meet you and escort you back into Tokyo and on to our hotel. The hotel is in a great location in the historic 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. This area is also fantastic for souvenir shopping!

You will have a group meeting tonight at 7pm, followed by an included meal - a great way to meet your fellow travellers.

Day 2 Tokyo (B)

Today we will discover Tokyo and its multitude of diverse faces: the world's largest fish market at Tsukiji; tradition at Asakusa, one of Tokyo's oldest quarters, and at the Yasukuni and Meiji shrines; modern Japanese fashion at Harajuku; and finally the buoyant nightlife in Shinjuku. Overnight in Tokyo with numerous restaurant options on our doorstep.

Day 3 - Karuizawa (B&D*)

A free morning in Tokyo, then an afternoon transfer by mini-bus to the Karuizawa area, in Nagano prefecture. Nagano, with its numerous mountains, is often called the roof of Japan. We will stay in a mountain inn on the forested slopes of a volcano. The food will be delicious, and your futons will be laid out on tatamis in beautiful

traditional Japanese rooms. The inn also features a natural hot spring, the use of which is a Japanese experience all by itself!

Day 4 Karuizawa (B&D*)

Full-day but relatively easy hike up the beautiful slopes of the Asama Yama volcano, just inside the Joshin Etsu Kogen National Park. Throughout the day Oscar will introduce you to the ecology of the area. We will stop along the way to scan the slopes for wild serows, an endemic Japanese ungulate, walk through dwarf bamboo thickets and subalpine larch forests, and picnic above the tree line with magnificent views of the Asama volcano. The more intrepid can then loop around on a more difficult hike on a beautiful ridge with magnificent views of the surrounding mountains and plains. We all return for a second night at the mountain inn.

Day 5 Matsumoto (B&D)

Transfer by private vehicle to Matsumoto. Rather than use the tunnels and miss the scenery we will take the high roads and drive over the Central Prefectural Highlands. We will make a short hike along the way to visit a bear trap still used by the bear research group Oscar helped found, and to talk about the recurring conflicts between bears and humans in Japan. Availability permitting, optional first night of a 2 night homestay with a Japanese family. The alternative accommodation for these 2 nights is a modern hotel in the centre of this lovely city. Whatever your choice, another sumptuous dinner is included tonight.

Day 6 Matsumoto (B)

We will go back in time and visit Matsumoto's famous 400 year old samurai castle. Lunch in a typical Japanese restaurant and free time in the afternoon to explore this pleasant town.





Day-by-Day continued

Day 7, 8, & 9 Japan Alps (B&D*)

We will begin with a steep climb up to a ridge just above the tree line (2500 m) on the first day and enjoy incredible views of the surrounding mountains along the way and from the top. With luck we might see wild monkeys, serows, or even bears! We will then settle down in front of a great Japanese meal in a mountain lodge where we will also spend the night. The next day is less strenuous as we hike along the ridge to the next lodge, enjoy fantastic scenery the entire day, and continue to search for wildlife. Second night in a mountain lodge and return to the valley bottom the next day to check into a traditional Japanese onsen with great accommodation, including an outdoor hot spring. For these 3 days Oscar will prepare an exciting alternative program, including hikes in lower mountains with views of mount Fuji, should adverse weather or snow conditions render the Japanese Alps inaccessible to us.

Day 10 Magome (Kiso Valley) (B&D)

Transfer by private vehicle back to Matsumoto from where we take a Ltd Express train to Nagiso. From Nagiso we will take the famous hiking trail along the old postal route towards Tsumago. Tsumago is probably the best preserved post town on the old Nakasendo trail which used to connect Edo (Tokyo) and Kyoto. On arrival in Tsumago we will then either continue on by foot to Magome or take a local bus. In Magome we will stay in a traditional family run inn in the centre of the old town. A tasty evening meal is included this evening in our minshuku.

Day 11 Kyoto (B&D)

This morning we will take a local bus back to the main station and then transfer to Kyoto by Ltd Express train and then our first experience of Japan's superfast Shinkansen bullet train. Kyoto is Japan's famous old Imperial capital city and we spend three nights here to make the most of its treasure trove of World Heritage sites. Our first afternoon will include visits to the famous "Pure Water" Kiyomizu Temple and Sanjusangendo temple. An evening in Kyoto with a exquisite included meal will top off our first night stay in this magical city.

Day 12 Kyoto (B)

The next day we will visit the famous Ryoanji zen gardens and the celebrated Golden Pavilion early in the morning to beat the crowds. You then have a free afternoon - options include exploring the old streets of Gion or trying your hands at a local craft. Oscar will be on hand to assist you with organising anything you would like to do. Buses are the most convenient was to see Kyoto's many sights and we have included a two day bus pass so you

can get around like a true Kyotoite!

Day 13 Kyoto (B)

Today there is an optional unguided day trip to Nara, one of the other ancient capitals of Japan where you can combine visits of the deer park, the Kofukuji temple, the awe inspiring Todaiji, the world's tallest wooden building and the giant Buddha it houses, and, if time allows, the Kasuga Taisha shrine with its thousands of lanterns. On our third and final night of the tour in Kyoto we hope that you join with Oscar for a farewell meal in the evening: A chance for one last night of good food and drink before heading home.

Day 14 Sayonara (B)

Sadly the tour is over and we all have to say our farewells and go our separate ways. Your transfer ticket to Kansai Airport is included and Oscar will supply you with a reserved seat ticket to make sure you're in good time for your flight home.

**Please note that where an evening meal is included in the mountainous areas it will be breakfast and either lunch or dinner depending on the day's itinerary.*

NB - Actual itinerary may vary depending on weather conditions and lodging availability. There is an alternative program should bad weather and the conditions in the mountains preclude us from hiking in the Northern Japanese Alps.

Accommodation

The following accommodation is used on the Nature & Culture in Japan tour.

Tokyo Sunroute Hotel Asakusa
Comfortable business hotel in a superb location.
Tel. 03 3847 1511

Karuziwa Komoro Mountain Lodge
A traditional inn located on the slopes of a volcano with natural hot spring bath.

Matsumoto Richmond Hotel
Business hotel with large rooms in a central location
Tel. 0263-375-000
or
Traditional Home Stay (2 nights) **

Japan Alps Jyonen & Yamabiko Mountain Lodges
Charming lodge style accommodation located in the Alps.

Magome Tajimaya Minshuku
A traditional Japanese inn with a ryori fireplace and onsen.
Tel: 0264-592-048

Kyoto Sunroute Hotel
Comfortable hotel in a central location.
Tel. 075-371-3711

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.

**** An optional "Homestay" opportunity is available in Matsumoto. You will stay for 2 nights with a Japanese family on a twin share basis. This option is not available for 1 night only. Please let us know if this is of interest.**

What's Included

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

- ✓ 13 nights accommodation
- ✓ All transport between destinations in Japan including airport transfers on arrival and departure
- ✓ Meet and greet upon arrival at Narita Airport
- ✓ Breakfast everyday
- ✓ 9 Dinners/Lunches ***
- ✓ Tokyo transport pass
- ✓ Luggage forwarding between Matsumoto and Kyoto
- ✓ Entrance to Matsumoto Castle
- ✓ Kyoto 2 day bus pass
- ✓ Entrance to selected Kyoto temples/shrines
- ✓ Full time services of your Tour Leader, Oscar Huygens
- ✓ InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

NOT included

- ✗ International flights
- ✗ Local transport (buses, subways, taxis) at any destination except if covered by the Tokyo/Kyoto transport passes.
- ✗ Any entrance fees including those for shrines, temples and museums
- ✗ Drinks

**** Please note that two meals a day will be included (breakfast and either lunch or dinner), depending on the day's itinerary.*





More Tour Information

Bathroom arrangements

During the tour we will stay in a variety of different accommodation, some Western-style, others Japanese-style. At Western style-hotels your room will have full en-suite facilities (attached bath, shower and toilet).

However, at Japanese-style night stops bathroom and toilet facilities will 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!!

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, we may ask single travellers to share a room (same sex share) at Japanese-style night stops.

Your Tour Leader

Oscar Huygens is a wildlife biologist with a specialization in the ecology and conservation of Asiatic black bears. He received his doctorate from the University of Shinshu, in Central Japan, and, with over 60 bear captures and 8 scientific papers published on the subject, he certainly seems to know a lot about nature in Japan, and will be quite happy to share this knowledge with his guests!

He is also there to ensure that you get the most out of your trip and that the whole adventure goes smoothly. He 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.

Flexibility

Our tours aim to be as flexible as possible, so there is no set-in-stone itinerary for each day. Each morning Oscar 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

Most transport for this tour will be by minibus. However, you will have to carry your bags for short distances. 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.

Hiking

This tour does include a considerable amount of hiking and so you will need good hiking boots, waterproofs and you will need to be of reasonable fitness. No technical expertise is required and the views and nature are well worth it!

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). 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 you will be able to use your mobile across most of Japan. If you do not have a 3G handset you may wish to hire a mobile for the duration of your stay. For this service InsideJapan Tours recommends **Go Mobile** as offering the best service and the best rates. You can book a mobile phone to be delivered to your first hotel in Japan and at the end of your trip you simply pop it in the post back to Go Mobile. All phones have a 3 mega-pixel camera and can send and receive email.

7 days rental costs from 2995yen which includes 15 minutes of local calls. Further information about the service can be found at www.gomobile.co.jp and an on-line booking form can be found here:

https://www.gomobile.co.jp/order_form_in.e.php

Please be sure to enter our agent code - **INSIDEJAPAN** - to receive your discounted price.

Even if you have a 3G handset you may wish to consider this service as the call charges will be a LOT lower and you do not have to pay to receive calls. The push-email facility (as available on Blackberry handsets in the West) is also very useful and can make keeping in touch very easy!

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!





Luggage

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



Most transport for this tour will be by minibus - luggage space is limited and so suitcases are NOT appropriate for this tour. You will have to carry your own bags for most of the trip. Please pack as lightly as possible using soft bags such as duffel or sports bags. You will also need day sacks for the hikes in the mountains. Clothes washing facilities are available in Tokyo, Matsumoto and Kyoto (extra charge payable at the hotel).

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

We will be spending 6 days in Japan's northern island of Hokkaido and you should be aware that it will be extremely cold here. Night-time temperatures can get below minus 20 degrees centigrade. There are many days on which the temperature drops below 0 degrees centigrade all day long. You will need heavy overcoats, caps, gloves, scarves, etc. in addition to sweaters and jackets. Our accommodation will of course be heated but for the outdoors you will also need shoes that are suitable for walking on snow or ice.

The obvious things!

- ✓ Underwear
- ✓ Socks
- ✓ T-shirts / Polo Shirts / Casual shirts
- ✓ 2 pairs of long trousers (Jeans, Cords, Chinos etc.)
- ✓ Gloves
- ✓ Warm hat
- ✓ Waterproofs
- ✓ Night wear
- ✓ Fleece jacket, warm jumper or sweater
- ✓ Warm coat /Ski Jacket
- ✓ Comfortable shoes or trainers
- ✓ Good hiking boots
- ✓ Small hand towel (for drying your hands)
- ✓ Scarf
- ✓ 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
- ✓ Comb or Brush
- ✓ Condoms or Contraceptive Pills
- ✓ Hair products (gel, spray etc.)
- ✓ Lip balm
- ✓ Razor & shaving gel
- ✓ Tampons and Pads

Your tour leader carries a well stocked first aid kit so you do not need bandages, plasters (band aids) or other similar products. However, 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 recharger / spare camera batteries (charged!)
- ✓ Inflatable travel pillow
- ✓ Phrase books or Dictionaries
- ✓ 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 tours.
- ✗ **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), 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.

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. You actually get a better rate for cash at the airport than for travellers cheques. 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 and 7-11 Convenience store in the country has an ATM that will except your foreign issued cards.** Just be sure that you know your 4 digit PIN. 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 and 7-11 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 tour 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 100,000 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 tippie 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

During 2007 the yen reached record lows against the pound and weakened considerably against the US dollar. However, 2008 has seen a considerable shift in the currency markets which sadly has pushed up the cost of travelling in Japan. However, after 15 years of 0% inflation Japan is still an affordable destination and is a world away from the crazy prices of the bubble era.

Exchange rates as of 16th December 2008:

- 1 Australian Dollar AUD = 61 yen
- 1 British Pound GBP = 135 yen
- 1 Canadian Dollar CAD = 73 yen
- 1 Euro EUR = 124yen
- 1 United States Dollar USD 89 yen

Be sure to have a look at the rates before you travel as the levels are unlikely to continue indefinitely.

Tipping

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 tip staff in hotels or taxi drivers. However, if you feel your Tour Leader has done an outstanding job on your tour a tip is always appreciated!

Every day prices

Loaf of bread	200 yen
Big Mac Meal	620 yen
Litre of milk	180 yen
Banana	100 yen
Litre of Petrol	145 yen
Snickers	120 yen
500ml beer	290 yen
Shop sandwich	230 yen
Umbrella	500 yen
Newspaper	150 yen
Bottle of water	120 yen
Subway journey	160-310 yen
Taxi (per car for 2km)	680 yen
Starbucks Tall Latte	360 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!

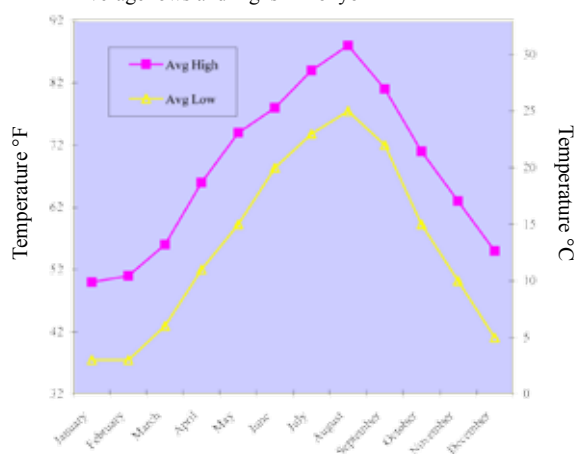
Temperatures in the Japan Alps can reach as low as -25 °C in winter with very heavy snowfall. Be sure to take all this into account when packing for your trip. If you are heading up into the mountains you will need warmer clothing.

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

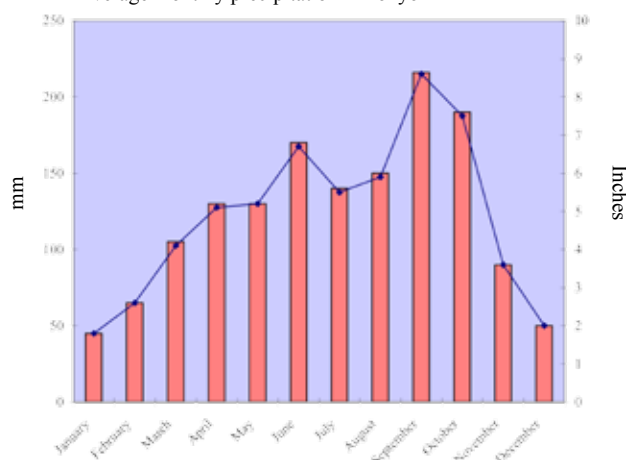
amounts of rain in very short spaces of time, so you do get a lot of dry days as well as the very rainy ones!

In many ways, October is the best month to travel in Japan. Still warm, but not hot and humid anymore, the weather in October is very comfortable for traveling. In northern regions and higher elevations, trees are turning colors.

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: Kamikaza 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.

