

# Quick reference survival Japan Dos and Don'ts

## **DOs in Japan:**

### **Language**

- Learn a few basic kanji for bathroom navigation (押す = Push)、引く = Pull、出口 = exit、入口 = entrance、御手洗 (お手洗い)(トイレ) = toilet、男 = Men(s)、女 = Women(s)
- Learn a few basic phrases: **Sumimasen** (excuse me, pardon me), **Arigato Gozaimasu** (formal polite “thank you”), **Kudasai** (Please).

*Small manners go a very long way!*

### **It's the Law!**

- Carry your passport or registration card with you, **ALWAYS**, it's law and you might be asked to show it at any time and can be detained if you don't.
- Know which medications are considered narcotics or prohibited in Japan so you don't get jailed or deported for your ADHD meds: check with the embassy.

### **Toilet Troubles**

- Use the toilet slippers, correctly.
- Learn how to use the washlet / bidet toilets correctly (space-age type toilet)
- Know how to use a Japanese style toilet (squat type toilet)
- Carry a handkerchief or hand towel, there are no paper towels in public restrooms.
- Accept the free tissue packs if offered, they're handy! They can act as toilet paper in a public bathroom emergency situation.

### **Personal Care:**

- Wear clean socks with no holes! You might be unexpectedly taking your shoes off at any time, better safe than sorry.
- Bring extra deodorant from home.
- Bring your skin tone's foundation, and textured hair-care items from home.
- Buy your other personal care items like UV lotions, face washes, and skincare in Japan.
- Wash and rinse your entire body off first before entering a sento (public bath) or onsen. You need to be squeaky clean BEFORE you get in to shared water.
- Understand that medical care is first rate, but English is going to be a barrier and you can be turned away from clinics and hospitals.

### **Train Etiquette:**

- Remember to take your ticket after going through the entrance gate of the subway / train / shinkansen: **you'll need it when you exit!**
- The silver seats on trains are for the elderly, if you're on one and someone older comes, give them your seat. Same goes for pregnant women.
- Start getting ready to get off the train about 1 station before your stop so it doesn't get tight.
- Make sure your hands are held high (on a strap etc.) on a crowded train if you're male.

### **General Etiquette / Tips:**

- Understand that Japanese people expect you to be different so you don't need to be perfectly "Japanese", just show a little effort.
- Stand or walk on the appropriate side of the escalator according to your pace. Watch how others are doing it, follow suit.
- Take up the appropriate amount of space in public.
- Don't blow your nose loudly in public.
- **Wear a mask in public if you're sneezing and** coughing or sick. Buy them from any Conbini; population density requires next-level infection prevention.
- Go to a koban (police box) if you're lost
- Understand how to read prices and labels; no one's out to trick you, but tax included / tax excluded / lunch prices / dinner prices differ and can be a little tricky.
- When in Rome: take time to observe how it's done, and copy.

### **Technology and Communication:**

- Make a Line (app) account if you want to communicate with Japanese friends.
- **Download** the Google translate dictionary so you can use it off-line.
- Have your phone situation worked out before you get there.
- Install **Navitime** (Japan Travel by Navitime) to use transportation comfortably.
- Install **Gourmet Navigator** (GuruNavi) for finding specific restaurants

### **Money and Valuables:**

- Carry at least some cash, always.

### **Food and Restaurants:**

- Know how to lift your bowl up closer to your mouth when using chopsticks for better control
- Know the difference between vitamin supplement drinks and juice.

- Know the difference between sports / energy drinks and bottled water.
- Embrace the bento box for lunch or Conbini sando / onigiri
- If you're vegan and need food recommendations, use the HappyCow app / site.

### **Culture and Customs:**

- Learn the rules for riding a bicycle and get a bicycle
- Bring omiyage (small gifts) for co-workers if you've taken a trip somewhere and taken time off work
- Avoid the religious sect / cult members at train station that speak English surprisingly well: If you're outside a station and a smiling Japanese person approaches you with a pamphlet in their hands, or asks to pray for you, avoid.
- If you have children, and they're misbehaving in a non-child specific space, remove them from that space.

### **Lifestyle Musts:**

- Embrace the parasol
- Embrace the umbrella
- Wear your UV protection

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## **Don'ts in Japan:**

### **Transportation:**

- Don't use the "Women's only" train cars if you identify male. This is for the safety and comfort of women passengers.
- Don't take up two seats if you can avoid it. Bags go on laps, shelves, or the floor, not the seat beside you. This is especially important on crowded trains.
- Don't answer your phone on public transportation or speak loudly if with a friend.

### **Social:**

- Don't stand too closely to people. There are unwritten rules about personal space in Japan and it's best to maintain a comfortable distance, especially on trains or in crowded areas.
- Don't take photos of people without their approval. This is considered rude and disrespectful in Japan.
- Don't yell across a room. Speaking loudly is considered impolite in Japan.

## General Etiquette / Rules:

- Don't bring your porn with you: obscenity laws in Japan are different.
- Don't bring anything weed / thc / marijuana related & be REALLY careful about CBD products; they're regulated as well. Better to know before you go than to get deported or detained
- Don't physically push people out of your way. Use polite gestures (Japan has a good deal of non-verbal communication, learn those quickly) and phrases like "Sumimasen" to get people's attention rather than touching.
- Don't tap people, touch their bodies, or go in for a hug. No touchy (unless they initiate it).
- Don't point at people.
- Don't wear the toilet slippers back into the restaurant or izakaya.
- Don't worry too much about your tattoos, this is only really an issue in public onsen / hot springs, but cover them up in temples just to be polite.
- Poke your chopsticks into your bowl of rice or point at people with chopsticks
- Don't stare into other people's eyes a lot. This can be seen as a little rude or threatening in Japan, or a command to pay attention to you.
- Don't tip. It's not rude, but it's not customary or necessary in Japan.
- Don't eat or drink while walking. This is considered bad manners.
- Don't jaywalk. Obey traffic signals and crosswalks.
- Don't blow your nose loudly in public. This is considered rude and inconsiderate.
- Don't overindulge in vitamin supplement drinks. They can be strong and upset your stomach.
- Don't stand up before the toilet bidet stream is finished 😊

## Onsen/Hot Springs:

- Don't enter the onsen if you have any open wounds, tattoos, or infections.
- Don't shower with your bathing suit on, you're expected to get fully cleaned before entering shared water. You should be naked (or with the little onsen towel) before entering the onsen.
- Don't speak loudly or make noise in the onsen. This is a place for relaxation and quiet.
- Don't dive or splash in the onsen.
- Don't bring food or drinks\*\* into the onsen.

*\*\* Some onsen allow you to bring sake in and float in in a wooden tub, but don't bring cans of cola or such into the shared onsen*