

ASIA · CULTURE · FOOD · CITY BREAKS · HISTORY · HIKING · WINTER SPORTS

 Japan

Japan's appeal lies in contrasts that sit side by side: Kyoto's temples and Tokyo's neon, cedar-lined pilgrim trails and bullet trains that leave to the minute, conveyor-belt sushi and multi-course kaiseki. Mount Fuji, Hiroshima and the Japanese Alps fit a two-week first trip, and superb public transport makes travelling independently remarkably easy.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Japan and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 28 August 2026.

 CAPITAL Tokyo	 CURRENCY Japanese yen (JPY) £1 ≈ JP¥211	 LANGUAGE Japanese	 BEST TIME Mar–May, Oct–Nov
 DAILY BUDGET £60–£280 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type A, B 100V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 14h direct ~£700–£1,350 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+9 standard time

Japan's classic first trip follows the shinkansen line along the so-called Golden Route: Tokyo, then Hakone or the Fuji Five Lakes for views of Mount Fuji, then Kyoto with day trips to Nara and Osaka, and on to Hiroshima and the island of Miyajima. Two weeks covers it comfortably. Return visitors branch out to Takayama, Kanazawa and the Alps, the Kumano Kodo trails on the Kii Peninsula, the art islands of the Seto Inland Sea, Hokkaido's powder snow and summer flower fields, or Okinawa's subtropical beaches. The country stretches about 3,000 km, so pick regions rather than racing.

Travel feels effortless: trains are punctual, streets are spotless and convenience stores sell good food around the clock. A weaker yen has made Japan better value for British visitors than its reputation suggests, with business hotels from around £60 a night and set lunches under £10, though Kyoto prices climb steeply in cherry-blossom and autumn-leaf seasons. Crowds concentrate at famous sights; arrive early, or step one street away, and they thin dramatically. Signage is bilingual in cities, but English is limited in the countryside. Many are struck by how quiet public spaces are, even at rush hour.

Top 5 highlights

- 1** SACRED SITE

Kyoto's temples and shrines

Around 1,600 temples and hundreds of shrines: walk Fushimi Inari's tunnels of vermillion torii at dawn, see the gold-leaved Kinkaku-ji and Kiyomizu-dera's wooden stage, and wander Gion's lanes in the evening.
- 2** NATURE

Mount Fuji

Japan's highest peak at 3,776 metres. Most visitors admire it from Lake Kawaguchiko or Hakone, clearest in winter; the summit trails open from July to early September for an overnight climb to watch sunrise.

3

HISTORY

Hiroshima and Miyajima

The Peace Memorial Park, Atomic Bomb Dome and museum tell the story of 6 August 1945 with restraint and power. A short ferry ride away, Itsukushima Shrine's great torii appears to float at high tide.

4

ARCHITECTURE

Shirakawa-go

A UNESCO-listed village of steep-roofed thatched gassho-zukuri farmhouses in the mountains of Gifu; stay overnight in one to see it after the day-trippers leave, and combine with Takayama's old merchant quarter.

5

ADVENTURE

Kumano Kodo

Ancient pilgrimage trails through the cedar forests of the Kii Peninsula, linking the three Grand Shrines of Kumano; walk the Nakahechi route over several days, sleeping in family-run inns with hot-spring baths.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Tokyo

≈ 37 million people

The world's largest metropolis feels like a string of villages: Asakusa's temples, Shibuya's crossing, Shinjuku's izakaya alleys and old-fashioned Yanaka. Easy for first-timers and worth four days at least.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Osaka

≈ 19 million people

Japan's kitchen, louder and looser than Tokyo, with street food in Dotonbori and Kuromon Market. A cheaper base for Kyoto, Nara and Kobe, all within an hour by train.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Nagoya

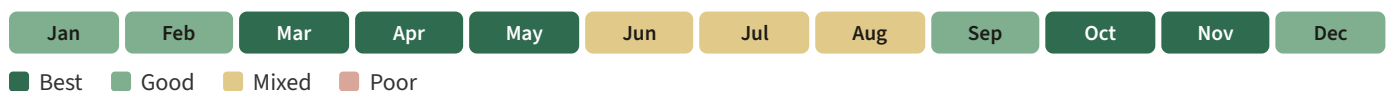
≈ 9.5 million people

An industrial city many skip, but Nagoya Castle's rebuilt Honmaru Palace, Atsuta Shrine and the Toyota museums reward a stop, and it is the gateway to Takayama and the Kiso Valley.

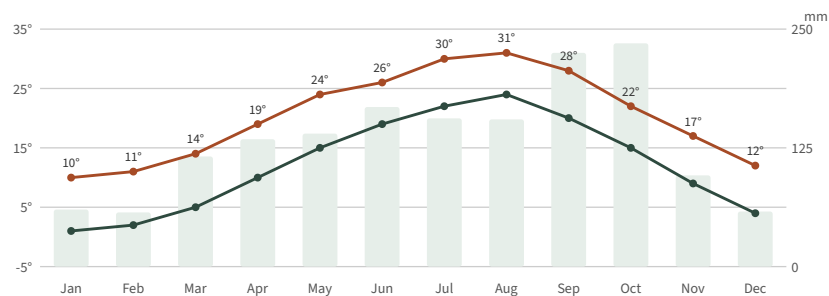
Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Japan

Best time: **Mar–May, Oct–Nov.**

**Average climate in Tokyo**

— High °C
 — Low °C
 ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb	Sapporo Snow Festival For a week in early February, Odori Park and the Susukino district fill with huge snow and ice sculptures, illuminated after dark, alongside stalls selling Hokkaido seafood.
Mar–Apr	Cherry blossom season (hanami) From late March, sakura bloom sweeps north through the country; join locals picnicking beneath the trees in Tokyo's Ueno Park or along Kyoto's Philosopher's Path.
Jul	Gion Matsuri Kyoto's month-long festival peaks with the Yamaboko Junkō parades on 17 and 24 July, when towering wooden floats are hauled through the city centre by teams of men.

How much does Japan cost?

SHOESTRING £60 per person / day ≈ JP¥12,689 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £130 per person / day ≈ JP¥27,492 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £280 per person / day ≈ JP¥59,214 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Sushi

Vinegared rice topped with raw fish; nigiri at a counter is the pinnacle, but kaiten-zushi conveyor-belt chains serve excellent fish at a fraction of the price.

Ramen

Wheat noodles in broth that changes by region — Fukuoka's milky tonkotsu pork, Sapporo's miso, Tokyo's soy-based shoyu — often ordered from a ticket machine by the door.

Okonomiyaki

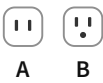
A savoury cabbage pancake grilled on a hotplate: Osaka mixes everything into the batter, while Hiroshima layers it with noodles and a fried egg.

Getting around

The shinkansen makes Japan easy: Tokyo to Kyoto takes about 2 hours 15 minutes, and trains depart to the minute. The nationwide Japan Rail Pass rose steeply in price in 2023, so compare it with single tickets or regional passes. Load a Suica or ICOCA card, or its phone-wallet version, for metros, buses and convenience stores. Cheap domestic flights reach Hokkaido and Okinawa, and hiring a car suits rural Hokkaido and the Alps.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



100V — bring a UK-to-A/B adapter

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance: **119**

Fire: **119**

Police: **110**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

DIALLING CODE

+81

TIME ZONE

UTC+9 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

DRIVING

On the left

TIPPING

Tipping isn't customary and can cause confusion; good service is simply expected. Upmarket ryokan and restaurants may add a service charge to the bill.

ETIQUETTE

Remove shoes where you see a raised step or slippers, keep phone calls off trains, don't eat while walking along busy streets, and never stand chopsticks upright in rice.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Tokyo Haneda Airport (HND), Tokyo; Narita International Airport (NRT), Tokyo; Kansai International Airport (KIX), Osaka

Visas & entry for Japan

Shown for a British passport.

Visa on arrival

You can get a visa on arrival in Japan for tourism or business for up to 90 days. You do not need to apply before you travel.

If you need a multiple-entry visa, you must ask the immigration officials when you arrive.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Dengue

Hepatitis B

Japanese encephalitis

Bat Lyssavirus

Tick-borne encephalitis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Japan

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Tue 3 Nov 2026	Culture Day
Mon 23 Nov 2026	Labour Thanksgiving Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Mon 11 Jan 2027	Coming of Age Day
Thu 11 Feb 2027	Foundation Day
Tue 23 Feb 2027	Emperor's Birthday
Sun 21 Mar 2027	Vernal Equinox Day
Mon 22 Mar 2027	Substitute Holiday
Thu 29 Apr 2027	Showa Day
Mon 3 May 2027	Constitution Day
Tue 4 May 2027	Greenery Day
Wed 5 May 2027	Children's Day
Mon 19 Jul 2027	Marine Day
Wed 11 Aug 2027	Mountain Day
Mon 20 Sep 2027	Respect for the Aged Day
Thu 23 Sep 2027	Autumnal Equinox Day
Mon 11 Oct 2027	Sports Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Japanese

ENGLISH	JAPANESE	SAY IT
Hello	こんにちは	<i>kon-nee-chee-wah</i>
Thank you	ありがとうございます	<i>ah-ree-gah-toh go-zai-mass</i>
Please	お願いします	<i>oh-neh-gai shee-mass</i>
Excuse me	すみません	<i>soo-mee-mah-sen</i>
How much is this?	これはいくらですか？	<i>koh-reh wah ee-koo-rah dess-kah</i>

Know before you go

Cards are widely accepted in cities, but rural inns, shrines and small restaurants can be cash only; 7-Eleven and Japan Post ATMs reliably accept foreign cards.

Send big suitcases between hotels with a luggage-forwarding (takkyubin) service; on the Tokaido, Sanyo and Kyushu shinkansen, oversized bags need a reserved seat with luggage space.

Avoid Golden Week (late April to early May), Obon (mid-August) and New Year if you can, when Japanese families travel en masse and trains and hotels fill up.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.