

# Travel In & Out of Japan

Janelle Jimenez & Mark Brandstetter

## When & How to Travel

### • **Taking Leave from Work:**

- Nenkyu (年休) - Yearly Leave, all JETs get 20 days paid vacation.
- Daikyu (代休) - Replacement Leave, instead of getting paid overtime, some JETs get replacement hours for working on weekends.
- Summer Leave (夏期休暇) - 1 day off from June-September your first year, 2 days off your subsequent years.
- Special Leave (特別休暇) - By the discretion of your workplace, special leave for language study programs (during school holidays) and other seminars.
- JET Conferences - If your workplace allows it, the various JET Conferences (especially if you are a CIR) can be excellent beginnings/ends to a vacation.
- Every situation is different so talk to your supervisor well in advance before requesting time off! Some workplaces only allow you to take vacations during school vacations.

### • **When to Travel:**

- Golden Week - A week long national holiday during the end of April/start of May when most of Japan is on holiday. It can be an EXTREMELY expensive time to travel if you do not plan in advance.
- Obon Festival - Another expensive, yet convenient, time to travel.
- New Year's - Although Christmas is not a holiday in Japan, New Year's Day is!
- Random 3 day weekends - Marine Day, Autumn Equinox, and a whole bunch of others!
- School holidays - Some schools will only allow you to take extended vacations during school holidays, but some schools just give you the whole week off.

### • **Tips on Traveling:**

- Always bring your passport or gaijin identity card (*gaikokujin tourokusho* 外国人登録書) - you need these to check into hotels.
- Always bring more than enough cash! Many places do not accept credit cards, your ATM card will probably not work in the next prefecture over, and even if it does--ATM's stop dispensing money early.
- Dragging heavy luggage around trains/buses/subways is crazy, and in fact, some buses won't even let you bring big bags on the bus. Very few subways have escalators or even elevators. Do what all Japanese people do: send your big luggage to the airport ahead of time, then send it back home when you return to Japan! It only costs 2000yen (\$20)
- Always bring back *omiyage* (お土産) aka souvenirs
  - If your co-workers know you are missing work for a vacation/business trip, you MUST bring back a gift! It's bad form, otherwise.
  - The best gift is **individually-wrapped food**: every airport, bus stop, rest area, and tourist location will have shops selling regional delicacies.
- Use GPS in unfamiliar areas. All mobile phones in Japan are equipped with it. Most streets have no names, there are usually no numbers on buildings either.
- When flying out of Japan, check Narita (NRT) and Kansai (KIX) even if you live on the opposite end of Japan. Some flights are several hundred dollars cheaper when originating from a different airport.

- In the middle of nowhere with no travel agents to be found? Thanks to Japan's excellent and cheap bank transfer (*furikomi* 振込) system, you can use travel agents all over Japan without a credit card. Also, many websites let you reserve flights for 7 days without payment. You can also pay for many online packages and tickets at convenience store kiosks.

## Travel in Japan:

### • **Transportation**

- Airplanes - Depending on where you live, this can be a quick and relatively inexpensive means of domestic travel.
- Local/Express Trains
- *Shinkansen* (新幹線) aka Bullet Trains
  - Depending on where you live, this can be a very convenient means of travel
- Highway Buses (*kousoku basu* 高速バス) - Excellent way to get around Japan - cheap, roomy, but slow.
  - Overnight bus (*yakou basu* 夜行バス)

### • **Cars**

- Buying a car
  - Kei-car/Compact car (*keijidousha* 軽自動車) aka "K-car," "Yellow Plate"
    - Small engine - below 650cc
    - Cheap annual tax
  - Regular-sized car aka "White Plate"
    - Faster and safer in case of accidents
    - Generally more expensive--the annual vehicle tax (37,500yen), higher insurance, most expensive gasoline prices
  - Other concerns:
    - *Shaken* (車検) Vehicle Inspection
      - Always expensive
      - Makes resale of car impossible sometimes
    - Snow tires - You must change to snow tires/summer tires in most areas.
- Renting a car
  - Rent a car for a weekend
  - Monthly rental
    - costs like 20,000 yen plus insurance
- Leasing a car
  - Anecdotal evidence suggests, it can be cheap, based on Japan's interest rates. may not have pay back too much.
  - You can get a newer, flashier car, and not have to worry about shaken.

### • **Places to visit in Japan:**

- Hokkaido (Yuki Matsuri), Yakushima (look at ancient forest, inspired setting for Princess Mononoke?),
- Kyoto, Osaka, Nara, Kobe area. They are all quite close.
- Okinawa. visit the smaller islands for great beaches, scuba, delicious regional cuisine, awamori.
- Mt. Aso, Mt. Fuji, Japanese Alps, Mt. Daisen, etc.
- Open up discussion for volunteers to make suggestions

### • **Places to Stay:**

- Hotels - Can be very expensive and disappointing
- Business hotels - Cheaper than regular hotels, but often tiny
- Capsule hotels - "Wacky Japan" experience that's great for single travelers, but men and women often forced to stay on different floors.

- Manga cafes - Can be extremely cheap, but require you to sleep in an arm-chair or couch.
- Saunas - Cheap, but usually do not allow women. Sleep is in a communal tatami room or arm-chair room.
- Love hotels - Not exactly cheap, cannot be booked in advance, but are usually roomy and have fun amenities like karaoke machines and video game systems.
- Ryokan - Can be extremely expensive, but a great way to experience traditional Japanese food and culture
- Youth Hostels - Not very common, often have early (10pm) curfews.
- With other JETs you are meeting today, even perhaps, sitting next to! (that's what I'm doing!)

### Travel Out of Japan:

- **Countries to Visit:**

- Korea - Closest neighbor, if you live in West Japan it can often be cheaper to go to Korea than Tokyo.
- Taiwan - Great foodie destination.
- Hong Kong - There are often deals for very cheap flights--shopper's paradise.
- The Philippines - There are often deals for very cheap flights, great beaches and diving spots. Every year there's volunteer opportunities with Habitat for Humanity that JETs organize.
- Thailand - As it's a popular destination, it can get pretty pricey - avoid Japanese travel agency packages. You will NOT like them. Also another great place to do volunteer work with fellow JETs.
- Cambodia - A great number of JETs spend Christmas at Angkor Wat, you should consider it too!

### Useful Travel Websites:

- **Airfare, Hotels & Travel Packages:**

- <http://www.no1-travel.com/> - Great agency for booking airfare. Booked most of my trips with the same agent for 3 years. Basically the English version of H.I.S. Travel (<http://www.his-j.com/>)
- <http://www.skygate.co.jp/> - Great for airfares, allows 7-day hold period without payment. Japanese only.
- <http://travel.rakuten.co.jp/> - Hotels and packages in English/Japanese
- <http://www.toyoko-inn.co.jp/> - The "Comfort Inn" of Japan, small, clean, cheap, dependable chain hotel near major stations in practically every city.
- <http://www.japanican.com/hotels/> - A new hotel & ryokan booking site made easy and in English by JTB Travel.
- <http://www.jtb.co.jp/> - JTB, the grand daddy of travel agencies. Japanese only.
- <http://www.jalan.net/> - Hotels, packages, and onsen bookings. Japanese only. Janelle's personal favorite.

- **Trains & Buses:**

- <http://www.hyperdia.com/cgi-english/hyperWeb.cgi/> - Excellent website that gives you the trains you need to get on ALL over Japan. Includes JR and private lines.
- <http://www.jorudan.co.jp/english/norikae/e-norikayin.html> - Japanese Train Route Finder, similar to above.
- <http://www.jr-odekake.net/> - Japan Railways website, Japanese only.
- <http://www.bus.or.jp/e/> - Japan Bus Web, useful site that helps with the extensive highway bus system that traverses Japan
- [http://www.j-bus.co.jp/new\\_module/index.html](http://www.j-bus.co.jp/new_module/index.html) - Bus website that allows you to make online reservations. Japanese only.

- **General:**

- <http://www.japantravelinfo.com/> - Official website of the Yokoso! Japan tourism campaign
- <http://www.tripadvisor.com/> - Good reviews on hotels and locations, including some excellent user guides to locations in Japan (see the one on Off-the-beaten-track West Japan, by Janelle!)
- <http://www.jnto.go.jp/> - Japanese National Tourism Organization, has a travel planner and some great guides to festivals and events.
- [http://www.ryokan.or.jp/index\\_en.html](http://www.ryokan.or.jp/index_en.html) - Japan Ryokan Association, customs, rules, and what to expect out of a stay at a Ryokan
- <http://www.couchsurfing.org/> - A website that allows you to stay at people's homes, or host travelers, for free. Quite a few JETs are members of this program.