



Japan



It is only comparatively recently that Japan came out of the shell of its isolation, but the country of genteel geisha girls and pink cherry blossoms has made up for lost time. There are few people in the western world who have not driven a Japanese car, eaten sushi or played on a GameBoy or Sony Playstation.



Japanese cherry blossom © naitokz

The nation of Japan consists of an island archipelago stretching from northeast to southwest off the coast of mainland China, Russia and Korea, separated from its Asian neighbours by the Sea of Japan. Between 1639 and 1859 Japan elected to cut itself off from trade or traffic with the rest of the world, except for some marginal contact through the southern Kyushu island ports. Since opening up its doors once more, just 150 years ago, the densely populated islands have developed in leaps and bounds and much of the country is now covered by sprawling neon-lit cities and the world's most sophisticated public transport networks.

Modern it may be, but Japan still retains plenty of its mystical oriental charm. From the etiquette demanded in social situations, to the minimalist décor behind rice paper screens, Japanese culture is alive and well and cannot be ignored, which makes a visit to Japan a fascinating experience.

The modern metropolises are dotted with a myriad of ancient shrines and temples; the countryside is riddled with hundreds of volcanoes and hot springs overlooking pastoral paddy fields; parks are festooned with rigidly raked white gravel Zen gardens or coated with layers of lilac and cherry blossom.

Japan's islands are mountainous in the interior - 75 percent of the country's landmass is made up of mountains - and most of the people are tightly packed within the limitations of the coastal plains, particularly on the main island of Honshu. Tokyo, the capital and largest city, situated on Honshu's east coast, has a population of 12 million. Despite this seething mass of humanity Japan is well ordered. Everything runs on time, and crime levels are almost non-existent. It is still possible to find beautiful vistas and wide empty spaces in the countryside, and when you are forced to mingle with the urban throngs you will find the Japanese to be charming, courteous and friendly to foreign faces.

Basics

Time: Local time is GMT +9.

Electricity: Electrical current is 100 volts, 60Hz in the west (Osaka, Kyoto, Nagoya, Hiroshima); 100 volts, 50Hz in eastern Japan (Tokyo, Sapporo, Yokohama). Flat two- and three-pin plugs are used.

Money: The currency is the Japanese Yen (JPY), which is equal to 100 sen. Major credit cards are accepted in the larger hotels and stores, but most Japanese operate with cash. Cash and travellers cheques can be exchanged in banks, post offices and currency exchange bureaux. Banks are usually open Monday to Friday 9am to 3pm.

Travellers cheques offer the best exchange rate and are best taken in US dollars. ATMs do not accept all credit and debit cards; only the international ATMs in post offices, airports and some major stores.

Currency Exchange Rates				
JPY1.00	JPY5.00	JPY10.00	JPY100.00	JPY1,000.00
A\$ 0.01	A\$ 0.07	A\$ 0.13	A\$ 1.33	A\$ 13.30
C\$ 0.01	C\$ 0.06	C\$ 0.11	C\$ 1.14	C\$ 11.37
€ 0.01	€ 0.04	€ 0.07	€ 0.73	€ 7.30
NZ\$ 0.02	NZ\$ 0.08	NZ\$ 0.16	NZ\$ 1.63	NZ\$ 16.32
R 0.08	R 0.41	R 0.83	R 8.28	R 82.79
£ 0.01	£ 0.03	£ 0.06	£ 0.64	£ 6.37
US\$ 0.01	US\$ 0.05	US\$ 0.10	US\$ 1.02	US\$ 10.15

Note: These rates are not updated daily and should be used as a guideline only.

Language: Japanese is the official language. Most Japanese people will have studied English at school, but few can speak it well or understand what is said to them.

Entry requirements for Americans: United States citizens require a passport to enter Japan. No visa is required for stays of up to 90 days.

Entry requirements for UK nationals: British citizens require a passport. If holding a passport endorsed British Citizen or British National (Overseas), no visa is required for a stay of up to 90 days. In all other cases, a visa is required.

Entry requirements for Canadians: Canadians require a passport to enter Japan. No visa is required for a stay of up to 90 days.

Entry requirements for Australians: Australians must have a passport to enter Japan. No visa is required for a stay of up to 90 days.

Entry requirements for South Africans: South African nationals must have a passport. A visa is required.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders: New Zealanders must have a passport to enter Japan. No visa is required for a stay of up to 90 days.

Entry requirements for Irish nationals: Irish nationals require a passport. No visa is required for a stay of up to 90 days.

Passport/Visa Note: All travellers must hold onward or return tickets and all documents required for their next

destination, as well as sufficient funds to cover intended period of stay. If holding an APEC Business Travel Card a visa is not required provided the back of the card states it is valid for travel to Japan, upon arrival a visit pass will be issued.

Health: No vaccination certificates are required for entry to Japan. There have been recent outbreaks of the deadly bird flu, but no human infections have been reported. Travellers to Japan are unlikely to be affected, but live animal markets and places where contact with live poultry is possible should be avoided, and all poultry and egg dishes well cooked. Medical facilities are very good, but medical assistance in Japan can be very expensive and visitors have to pay the whole cost up front. Travellers should ensure that they have adequate medical insurance before travelling. The possession of Vicks inhalers and other common medications used for allergies and sinus problems are banned under the strictly enforced anti-stimulant drugs law, and visitors are advised to check with the Japanese embassy if in doubt.

Tippling: Tips and bargaining are not expected in Japan, however a service charge of between 10 to 15% is generally added to hotel and restaurant bills.

Climate: The weather throughout the four main islands that make up Japan is generally temperate, with four distinct seasons. The weather can get very hot during the summer months. June, July and August are hot and humid and after June the country experiences its wettest months. In the south winters are cool but sunny, but as one moves further north temperatures drop and snow falls. The island of Hokkaido in the far north of Japan is bitterly cold in the winter, with snow guaranteed.

Safety: The vast majority of visits to Japan are trouble-free. It is generally a very safe country with low levels of common crime, and is stable, highly developed and modern. Travellers should, however, still be vigilant about personal safety and belongings. Typhoons are common particularly from June to October and travellers should take note of storm warnings along the coastal regions if travelling during this period. Japan is in a major earthquake zone, and earthquakes of varying sizes occur very frequently.

Customs: The Japanese are formal and reserved and visitors are expected to behave politely. Their system of etiquette is one of the most complex in the world, with a strict code of conduct for almost every situation. It is important to avoid causing 'loss of face' by insulting or criticising someone in front of others. Bowing is the customary greeting. The possession of common prescription, or over the counter medicines, particularly for allergies and sinus problems, are forbidden under Japanese law, and it is highly advisable to check with a Japanese embassy before travel.

Business: Business in Japan can be highly formal and greetings are usually rather ritualistic due to the hierarchical society; a third party introduction is useful. A polite bow is customary; the more senior the person, the deeper the bow. Business cards are exchanged often, using both hands. It can be useful to have cards printed with both English and Japanese, and one should present the card with the Japanese side facing the recipient. Punctuality is very important and dress is formal. Women can encounter some sexism as traditionally women are seen as caregivers and wives. Gift giving is an important aspect of Japanese society and in a business context gifts are usually given after the first or second meeting. It is wise to consult someone locally on what is appropriate in order not to cause offence. Business hours are usually from 9am to 5pm on weekdays; some businesses are open on Saturdays from 9am to 12pm.

Communications: The international access code for Japan is +81. The outgoing code depends on what network is used to dial out on (e.g. 001 for KDD) followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 0011 for the United States). City/area codes are in use, e.g. (0)3 for Tokyo and (0)82 for Hiroshima. Local calls can be made from any public phone, but only some allow international calls. Telephone cards are sold at kiosks and from vending machines. The local mobile phone operators use technology that is not always compatible with international networks, but 3G has roaming agreements with most international networks, and local handsets can be hired from the airport and various other locations. Internet cafes are widely available.

Duty Free: Travellers to Japan over 20 years do not have to pay duty on 3 bottles of alcoholic beverages; 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g tobacco, or a proportionate mix of these (non-residents are permitted twice the amount); perfume up to 59ml; and gifts and souvenirs to the value of ¥200,000. Prohibited items include all types of firearms and ammunition, narcotics, pornography, meat products, counterfeit money, all plants and vegetables with soil, fresh fruit, vegetables, and plants or parts thereof.

TOKYO

As a modern city Tokyo, the capital of Japan, could be described as too good to be true. People dress in the latest gear, excellent restaurants serve up delicious food of all varieties, and the trendiest nightclubs keep things hopping. The public transport system is punctual and one of the most efficient in the world; and shops and vending machines provide necessities and luxuries both day and night. Best of all, experiencing the best of what this city has to offer is inexpensive and often free. All this is achieved in a city that is home to 12 million people, amid the confusion of bumper-to-bumper traffic, flickering neon signs and a crush of humanity packing subways and sidewalks. In the crush and rush Tokyo remains, remarkably, one of the world's safest cities with a low crime rate and local people who are only too willing to spare the time and effort to assist a stranger.



A bright and busy Tokyo street © Gaetan Lee

With such a dense population, Tokyo is an urban maze of buildings that jostle for space in an unplanned jumble of grey concrete, which makes it ugly and drab. The city fills a huge area that seems to go on forever, with no specific city centre, but rather a succession of districts grouped together. In the back streets, where timber houses line narrow lanes, there are reminders that this is exotic Japan: kimono-clad women prune bonsai trees and colourful neighbourhood festivals take place.

The more one explores Tokyo the more it becomes obvious that one cannot judge a book by its cover. Inside the modern buildings the cultural life of Japan is very much alive and well. Interiors reflect the tranquil minimalist Asian style and taste of Japan.

The city is an exuberant experience for visitors. It also hosts many museums and is the largest repository of Japanese art in the world. Then, of course, it would take forever to exhaust the shopping possibilities in this megalopolis.

Attractions

Imperial Palace

Japan's Imperial Palace is regarded as the heart and soul of Tokyo, standing on a huge site that still bears the remains of Edo Castle, stronghold of the Tokugawa shogunate. The present palace was completed in 1888 and is still home to the emperor of Japan. The palace is off-limits but its grounds and surrounds provide a much-needed green open space for the city with Higashi Gyoen (East Garden), site of the Edo Castle keep, open to the public. On 2 January and 23 December each year visitors are able to enter the inner grounds and see the Imperial family make public appearances from the balcony. Guided tours of the palace are offered, but are only in Japanese, although an English pamphlet and audio guide are provided; these must be reserved in advance through the Imperial Household Agency. In spring the gardens are ablaze with cherry blossom, particularly along the castle moat.

Transport: Subway to Tokyo station; **Opening time:** East Garden is closed on Mondays and Fridays. Otherwise it is open daily from 9am to 4pm (until 3.30pm between November and February). Gardens closed from 28 December to 3 January and when Imperial Court functions take place; **Admission:** Free

Yasukuni Shrine

To the north of the Imperial Palace lies the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, built to commemorate the Japanese war dead and now regarded as home to the souls of about two and a half million who perished in conflict, mostly in the Pacific War of World War II. Soldiers fought in the knowledge that their spirits would find rest and honour at Yasukuni in the after-life. The shrine has caused controversy for various political reasons over the years since it was built in 1869 in honour of supporters of the emperor, killed in the run up to the Meiji Restoration. More recently, with regard to the country's constitution that requires the separation of State and religion, cabinet ministers have been criticised for attending anniversaries of Japan's defeat in World War II held at the shrine. The shrine is confined behind a huge steel torii gate, opening onto a long avenue lined with gingko and cherry trees. The Worship Hall itself is a simple Shinto style building. North of the shrine is the Yushukan Museum, containing war memorabilia, some of which is disturbing and thought-provoking such as the human torpedo and kamikaze suicide attack plane.

Website: www.yasukuni.or.jp; **Transport:** Subway to Kudanshita Station; **Opening time:** Shrine open 24 hours daily. Museum open daily 9am to 5pm (November to February); 9am to 5.30pm (March to October); **Admission:** Museum: ¥800, concessions available

Edo-Tokyo Museum

Tokyo's museum dedicated to detailing the city's history, art, culture and architecture through the medium of visual displays is an impressive, not to be missed attraction. Edo was the old name for Tokyo from its foundation in 1590 when it became the seat of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun. Exhibits include a replica of an ancient Kabuki theatre, maps, photographs and portrayals of the lives of the city's merchants, craftsmen and townspeople in days gone by.

Address: 1-4-1 Yokoami, Sumida-ku; **Telephone:** (0)3 3626 9974; **Website:** www.edo-tokyo-museum.or.jp; **Transport:** Train to Ryogoku Station on JR Sobu line (West Exit) or subway to Ryogoku on the Oedo line (A3/A4 exit); **Opening time:** Daily from 9.30am to 5.30pm, closing at 7.30pm on Saturday. Closed on Monday; **Admission:** ¥600, concessions available

Akihabara

Tokyo's electronic wonderland has become world-renowned. In a small area near Chuo-dori Avenue, west of Akihabara Station, are clustered more than 250 electrical appliance and electronics shops, many of them now dealing in computer hardware and software, where expert staff can answer queries and visitors can browse through the showrooms of major manufacturers. There are duty-free shops and various events to draw attention. The suburb has been specialising in electrical equipment since the 1940s and is now regarded as the world's biggest and best electrical equipment enclave.

Website: www.akiba.or.jp/english/index.html; **Transport:** Subway to Akihabara Station; **Opening time:** Stores are open from 10am to 7pm daily

Senso-ji Temple

The Asakusa neighbourhood of Tokyo draws visitors to admire the city's oldest temple, Senso-ji, founded in AD628 with a quaint legend attached to it. The story goes that two young brothers fishing in the nearby river netted a golden image of Kan'on, the Buddhist goddess of mercy, and were inspired to enshrine it in the temple. The statuette is still inside, but never shown to the public, though pilgrims flock here every day seeking the favour of the goddess. There are also numerous festivals associated with the shrine, and a hugely popular firework display is held on the Sumida River every summer. Tourists enjoy the visit to the temple mainly because the approach is a

colourful pedestrian lane, Nakamise Dori, lined with shops and souvenir stalls. Nearby, the Demboin Garden is a good spot to grab a break from the city crowds.

Address: 2-3-1 Asakusa Taito-ku, Shitamachi (downtown); **Telephone:** (0)3 3842 0181; **Transport:** Subway to Asakusa station; **Opening time:** Daily 6am to 5pm; **Admission:** Free

Tokyo Disney Resort

Plenty of fun is to be had for the young and young at heart at Tokyo's Disney Resort, virtually a carbon copy of the theme park found in California in the United States. The resort consists of Disneyland Park and DisneySea Park, along with several hotels. Visitors can expect attractions like the Jungle Cruise, Space Mountain and Toontown, which are all included on this huge site.

Telephone: (045) 683 3333; **Website:** www.tokyodisneyresort.co.jp; **Transport:** The park is reached via the JR Keiyo Line or JR Musashino Line from Tokyo Station; disembark at Maihama Station (South Exit) where there is a Disneyland Welcome Centre; **Opening time:** Check website for details, as hours vary according to season and day of the week. Generally open daily 8am to 10pm with shorter hours in winter; **Admission:** Entry to each park: ¥5,800 (adults), ¥5,000 (children ages 12-17), ¥3,900 (children ages 4-11). Several other ticket options are also available, including multi-day passports that allow entry to both parks

Tokyo National Museum

Close to Ueno Station, enclosed in the Tokyo Metropolitan Imperial Gift Park, the National Museum boasts the largest collection of Japanese art in the world. Exhibits range from antique kimonos and delicate pottery to woodblock prints and archaeological finds. The vast collection is displayed on a rotating basis with at least 4,000 artefacts visible at any time, so the museum always has something new to offer. The museum consists of five different buildings containing numerous galleries, so one needs sufficient time to do it justice. The Imperial Gift Park also contains some other cultural institutions, including a zoo, the Metropolitan Art Museum, Bunka Kaikan Cultural Hall, the Western Art Museum and the National Science Museum.

Address: 13-9 Ueno Park, Taito-ku; **Telephone:** (0)3 3822 1111; **Website:** www.tnm.go.jp; **Transport:** JR Line to Ueno or Uguisudani Station; **Opening time:** Daily 9.30am to 5pm, depending on season; closed Mondays. On Fridays from March to December open until 8pm; Saturdays and Sundays from March to September until 6pm; **Admission:** ¥600 (adults), ¥400 (students), free for scholars

Mount Fuji

The dormant volcano of Mount Fuji, 62 miles (100km) southwest of Tokyo, has been revered since ancient times and no exploration of Japan is complete without visiting the mountain that is known fondly as 'Fuji-san' by the locals. Its symmetrical 12,388ft (3,776m) cone towers and Mt Fuji, with its snow-crowned summit, have become as symbolic of Japan as the country's own flag. Closest town to the volcano is Fuji Yoshida, from where buses leave frequently for Fuji's 'fifth stage' (the usual jumping-off point for hikes up the mountain) from outside the train station. There are six trails to the summit, of which the Kawaguchiko Trail is the easiest, being quite manageable even by children and the elderly as long as they have stamina and good shoes. Overnight huts are available. Official climbing season is from 1 July to end of August - in winter snow makes the ascent too dangerous.

Telephone: 55 572 0259 (Fuji Visitor Centre); **Transport:** Fujikyuko bus from Tokyo's JR Shinjuku station to Kawagutiko station. From Kawagutiko, take the bus to Fuji Gogome

Kamakura

The city of Kamakura, about 30 miles (50km) southwest of Tokyo at the base of the Miura Peninsula, was the political powerhouse of Japan in the middle ages and the seat of government for most of the 13th century. Because of its historic importance Kamakura boasts numerous monuments, temples and shrines of interest to tourists. As an added bonus the city sports some sandy beaches and good hiking trails in the nearby wooded hills. Kamakura's many sights are too numerous to detail individually, but most important of them all is the Great Buddha. This bronze statue of the seated Amida Buddha is located in the grounds of the Kotokuin Temple, and standing at almost 44ft (13.35m) high, it is the second largest Buddha statue in Japan after that found in the Todaiji Temple in Nara. The Kamakura Great Buddha was cast in 1252 and was originally contained in the temple hall. A tidal wave (tsunami) washed away the temple in the late 15th century, but the Buddha prevailed and since then has stood in the open.

Website: www.kamakuratoday.com/e; **Transport:** JR Yokosuka Line from Tokyo Station, or the Enoden Railway, an unusual streetcar-like train service

Yokohama

While visiting Japan's largest city, Tokyo, it is quick and easy to pay a visit to the country's second largest metropolis as well: Yokohama can be reached in less than 30 minutes by train from Tokyo, lying south of the capital. The main reason for visiting Yokohama is to marvel at its futuristic new city centre, and perhaps take a stroll through Japan's largest Chinatown. Yokohama's Chinatown, entered through four colourful gates and teeming with restaurants and shops, was developed after the city became one of the first Japanese ports to be opened to foreign trade after generations of isolation ended in 1859. Chinese traders flocked to the city, establishing a cultural neighbourhood. Minato Mirai is the new central city area around the harbour, characterised by the Landmark Tower, rising to 971ft (296m). Visitors can ride to the tower's observation deck in the world's second fastest elevator, travelling at 41ft (13m) a second, for a view that on a clear day stretches as far as Mount Fuji.

Telephone: (0)45 441 7300 (Tourist Information Center, Yokohama Station); **Website:** www.city.yokohama.jp/en; **Transport:** Toyoko Line from Shibuya, JR Tokaido Line or JR Yokosuka Line from Tokyo or Shinagawa Station

Tokyo Tower

This tower is modelled in the vein of the Eiffel Tower in France, only in true Japanese style, it is more colourful and serves a technological purpose. Tokyo Tower functions chiefly as a television and radio antenna. At 1,091 feet (332m), it is the tallest structure in Tokyo, in Japan in fact, and a great vantage point from which to take in the city. At the base of the tower, tucked snugly under its 'legs', is the four-storey Foot Town. Inside Foot Town visitors will find shops, restaurants, a wax museum, the Guinness Book of World Record Museum, an aquarium and the Mysterious Walking Zone, which is not as spooky as it sounds. It's a display of holographic technology and imagery. The top floor of Foot Town is an interactive art gallery, featuring optical illusions which can be manipulated by visitors.

Address: 4-2-8 Shiba-Koen, Minato-ku; **Telephone:** 03 3433 5111; **Website:** www.tokyotower.co.jp/english/;
Opening time: 9am to 10pm

Meiji Jingu

A hop, skip and jump away from the Harajuku Station, the Meiji Jingu is an easily accessible shrine and worthwhile stop in Tokyo. Built as homage to the Emperor Meiji and his wife, the Empress Shoken, this monument is located in a 175 acre (70ha) evergreen forest and consists of two main areas. In the inner Naen, a garden featuring shrine buildings and a treasure museum holding articles from the Emperor and Empress. In the outer cloister, the Gaien, the Meiji Memorial Picture Gallery presents murals depicting significant events over the Meiji rule. It also consists of a sports arena, the National Stadium, and the Meiji Memorial Hall, which was an important political meeting place during the Meiji era. Today traditional Shinto weddings are held in the Hall and newcomers to Japan are always intrigued when witnessing the unique Shinto wedding procession.

Address: 2-2-23 Moto-Akasaka, Minato-ku; **Telephone:** 03 3403 1171; **Website:** www.meijijingu.or.jp/english/

Kabuki-za

While there are many places in Japan from which to view Kabuki theatre, the Kabuki-za, as the name implies, is the principal venue for such performances and a major hub for the art form. The building itself is an architectural wonder, using western material but built to mimic a traditional Japanese structure. Visitors can pay to see individual acts of plays or to see the entire performance. Because the theatre has become popular among tourists, an English voice-over explains the show to tourists. The Kabuki-za is scheduled for demolition in May 2010 and the Kabuki-za Sayonara Kôen (farewell performances) are scheduled for January to April 2010.

Website: www.shochiku.co.jp/play/kabukiza/theater/; **Opening time:** 11am - 3.45pm matinees; 4.30pm - 9pm evenings ; **Admission:** 15,000yen. 11,000yen. 4,200yen. 2,500yen, depending on if matinee or evening and how many acts seen.

Airports

Narita International Airport (NRT)

Location: The airport is located 40 miles (66km) north-east of Tokyo.

Time: GMT +9.

Contacts: Switchboard: + 81 (0)476 322 802. Flight Information: +81 (0)476 34 5000.

Transfer between terminals: A free shuttle bus connects the two terminals.

Getting to the city: Trains, buses and taxis connect to the city centre. Each airport terminal has a separate railway station. Terminal one uses Narita Airport Station and Terminal 2 is Airport Terminal 2 Station. Different train services on the JR or Keisei lines serve Tokyo and surrounding destinations. The journey to Tokyo takes one hour; if possible book a seat in advance but remember to use the correct departing airport station. Terminal 1 Tel: JR +81 (0)476-33-1655, and Keisei: +81 (0)476-32-8501. From Terminal 2 for JR and Keisei +81 (0)476-34-6005 and +81 (0)476-34-8763. Depending on line fares are roughly US\$30. Buses connect to the domestic airport and hotels in the city centre; the journey takes between one and two hours from the pick up at departure lobbies of terminals 1 and 2. Tickets should be bought at the ticket counter for about US\$31. Fixed fare taxis are available and a concierge directs passengers to available cars. Fares are determined by city zone but are between US\$150 and US\$240 (Tel: +81 (0)476-34-8755) . The tourist information desk in the arrivals hall can help travellers with their transport needs.

Car rental: Rental cars can be organised at the airport, though most visitors wisely avoid driving in Tokyo and instead take the efficient public transport.

Airport Taxis: Fixed fare taxis are available from outside the airport's arrival area, and there are assistants available at the designated fixed fare taxi stands in the airport. Fares into the city start at JPY 15,000.

Facilities: The facilities at New Tokyo Airport are extensive and include shops (including duty-free), banks, ATMs, currency exchange bureaux, massage, baby changing areas, a pet hotel, beauty salons and left luggage. A variety of restaurants catering for Japanese, Chinese and Western tastes are available, including a new revolving Sushi Bar. Both terminals have shower facilities and Day Rooms (bedrooms which can be hired by the hour). There are Internet cafes situated throughout the airport, as well as wireless Internet.

Parking: There are several multi-storey car parks at the airport.

Departure Tax: None.

Website: www.narita-airport.or.jp/airport_e

Kansai International Airport (KIX)

Location: The airport is located 30 miles (50km) south of downtown Osaka.

Time: GMT +9.

Contacts: Tel: + 81 (0)724 55 2500.

Getting to the city: Taxis are available, but the journey takes around an hour and the fare is likely to be very high, so most passengers take the bus, train or high-speed ferry to Osaka. Minibuses go to the major hotels, departing from International Arrivals. The airport shuttle bus service connects to the ferry terminal for the ferry to Osaka.

Car rental: Car hire companies Avis, Hertz, Nippon, Nissan and Toyota are among those represented at the airport. Driving in Osaka is difficult, however, and most visitors opt to use the efficient public transport system.

Facilities: There are extensive facilities at Kansai Airport including over 100 shops, about 35 restaurants, bars, ATMs and bureaux de change. A Vodafone shop rents out mobile phones, which are compatible with local networks. Other facilities include massage, free wireless Internet access, a nursery and childrens room. A porter service is also available.

Parking: Parking is available.

Departure Tax: None.

Website: www.kansai-airport.or.jp

Japan Climate and Weather

The weather throughout the four main islands that make up Japan is generally temperate, with four distinct seasons. The weather can get very hot during the summer months. June, July and August are hot and humid and after June the country experiences its wettest months. In the south winters are cool but sunny, but as one moves further north temperatures drop and snow falls. The island of Hokkaido in the far north of Japan is bitterly cold in the winter, with snow guaranteed.

Tokyo has four distinct seasons, similar to New York. The summer months (June, July and August) are hot and sticky while winter can be freezing. Tokyo is best visited in spring or autumn.

Tourism

Tourist Information Centre, Tokyo: +81 (0)3 3201 3331 or www.jnto.go.jp

Japan Embassies

Japanese Embassy, Washington DC, United States: +1 202 238 6700.

Japanese Embassy, London, United Kingdom: +44 (0)20 7465 6500.

Japanese Embassy, Ottawa, Canada: +1 613 241 8541.

Japanese Embassy, Canberra, Australia: +61 (0)2 6273 3244.

Japanese Embassy, Pretoria, South Africa: +27 (0)12 452 1500.

Japanese Embassy, Dublin, Ireland: +353 (0)1 202 8300.

Japanese Embassy, Wellington, New Zealand: +64 (0)4 473 1540.

Foreign Embassies in Japan

United States Embassy, Tokyo: +81 (0)3 3224 5000.

British Embassy, Tokyo: +81 (0)3 5211 1100.

Canadian Embassy, Tokyo: +81 (0)3 5412 6200.

Australian Embassy, Tokyo: +81 (0)3 5232 4111.

South African Embassy, Tokyo: +81 (0)3 3265 3366.

Irish Embassy, Tokyo: +81 (0)3 3263 0695.

New Zealand Embassy, Tokyo: +81 (0)3 3467 2271.

Japan Emergency Numbers

Emergencies: 110 (Police); 119 (Ambulance).

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