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Chapter 1

Default

1.1 Contents

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1.2 Introduction

(1) Introduction

Budget travel in Japan is a relative term. It is possible to travel cheaply in Japan, if you define cheap as less expensive than most people travel. The stories about \$5.00 cups of coffee and \$150 taxi rides from the airport into Tokyo are true, but you can get to Tokyo from Narita Airport for \$10.00, and the \$5.00 coffee is at a nice coffee shop in Tokyo where you can actually sit down for a while, relax, and listen to music -- something not easy to do in Tokyo for free.

This information is written primarily for a non-Japanese tourist travelling in Japan. It is not primarily for a foreign resident. For that reason, there are descriptions of how to get from city A to town B, but not how to buy a commuter pass for the trains; how to find a place to stay for the night, but not how to find an apartment.

It's also written primarily for the non-Japanese speaking traveller, even though there are notes included that are of interest only to people who can speak or read Japanese. I, the editor speak enough Japanese to make hotel reservations over the phone, but it's not fluent. My ability, or lack thereof, has certainly slanted my opinions of what's easy, difficult, or impossible.

I've taken information here from past articles posted to usenet, adding the authors to the contributors list if I've still got that info, Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO) publications, JTB publications, and my own (still limited) experiences in Japan. Not everything written in the first person ("I") was written by me.

I've tried to include dates on things that may change like phone numbers, addresses and prices. Remember that they're all variable. Some, like the Kyoto Tourist Information Center are unlikely to change often, but a few years ago, all phone numbers in Tokyo got an extra '3' added at the beginning. I've tried to quote prices in Yen, but an occasional U.S. dollar may slip through. If so, your guess is as good as mine about the exchange rate.

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Note: these E-mail addresses may well be obsolete, I don't follow these people around.

1.3 Getting Information

(2) Getting Information

1.4 Outside Japan

(2.1) Outside Japan

The Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO) has offices in several U.S. cities. They can supply a collection of maps, pamphlets, and other information that can be very useful including:

- Calendar Events in <current month>
- Economical Travel in Japan--Tips for Budget Travellers
- Japanese Inn Group
- Minshukus in Japan
- Pensions in Japan
- Railway Timetable (English, express trains only)
- Reasonable Accomodations in Japan
- TIC Tourist Information Centers
- Travelling Companion: Japan
- Your Guide to Japan
- Youth Hostel Listing

The Japan Youth Hostel organization also publishes a YH book that is reported more useful than the JNTO book even though in Japanese only. See the section on lodgings for more info.

They also have maps of the larger cities and brochures on many more rural areas. The more specific you can make your information request, the more useful information they will send. If you ask for specific areas, like climbing Mount Fuji, or the area around Ise, they can probably be very helpful.

USA

One Rockefeller Plaza, Suite 1250, New York, N.Y. 10020 (212) 757-5640
 401 North Michigan Ave, Chicago Ill 60601 (312) 222-0874
 360 Post St. Suite 401, San Francisco CA 94108 (415) 989-7140
 624 South Grand Ave, Los Angeles CA 90017 (213) 623-1952

Canada

165 University Ave, Toronto Ont. M5H 3B8 (416) 366-7140

UK

20 Savile Row, London (071) 734-9638

Australia

115 Pitt St. Sydney N.S.W. 2000 (02) 232-4522

Hong Kong

Suite 3606 Two ExchangeSquare, 8 Connaught Place Central 525-5295

Thailand

Wall Street Tower Bldg
 33/61 Suriwong Road, Bangkok 10500 (02) 233-5108

Korea

10 Da-Dong Chunk-Ku Seoul (02) 752-7968

France

4-8 rue Sainte-Anne 75001 Paris (01) 42-96-20-29

Switzerland

13 Rue de Berne 1201 Geneva (022) 318140

Germany

Kaiserstrasse 11, 60311 Frankfurt am MAINfaq (069) 20353

Brazil

Av. Paulista 509-S/405, 01311-Sao Paulo (11) 289-2931

(list dated March 1987, updates in May 1995)

1.5 Inside Japan

(2.2) Inside Japan

There are three Tourist Information Centers specifically geared toward foreign tourists, in Narita Airport, Tokyo, and Kyoto. TICs are open 9:00 am to 5:00 pm weekdays, 9:00 am to noon on Saturday and closed Sunday. The Narita TIC is open 9:00 am to 8:00 pm every day.

The TIC in Narita's Terminal 1 (the old terminal) has been closed. The hours above are for the Terminal 2 office located in the arrival lobby.

The Tokyo TIC is near the Yurakucho station on the Yamanote line, one station south of Tokyo. They have most everything the overseas JNTO offices have, and probably more. They also can recommend places to stay in Tokyo. They won't however, call the hotels for you, a potential problem if your Japanese is limited.

Narita Airport (Terminal 2) (0476)34-6251

6-6 Yurakucho 1-chome Chiyoda Ku Tokyo (03)3502-1461

Kyoto Tower Building, Higashi Shiokojicho
shimogyo ku Kyoto (075)371-5649

The Kyoto TIC is, in my opinion, more organized, at one time they would call the hotels, but I've heard they won't do that any more. I was last in Kyoto in 1987, so somebody please send more recent information.

Neither TIC is really geared for the budget traveler. They will often steer westerners to western style hotels with English speaking staff unless they have a pile of money for a really nice ryokan. They do have information on cheaper places and can help, you may have to ask once or twice for something cheaper.

Teletourist Service of the TIC in Tokyo and Kyoto gives taped information of current events in Tokyo or Kyoto. Tokyo: 3503-2911 (english) or 3503-2926 (french) Kyoto: 361-2911 (english). This information is from March 1987.

Japan Travel Phone is a nationwide toll-free service operated by JNTO. It's available 9am to 5pm daily. Call 0120-222800 for information on eastern Japan, 0120-444800 for western Japan. Within Tokyo, a local call: 3502-1461 or 371-5649 in Kyoto. This information is from March 1987.

There is an English-language rail information service in Japan: it is called JR East Infoline and the number is 03 (Tokyo) 3423-0111. This information is from May 1995.

Most large towns have some kind of tourist information center, but are geared mostly toward Japanese nationals traveling in Japan. You may not find English speaking staff (but you might! In 1990, a woman who spoke very good English worked at the Matsumoto TIC in Nagano prefecture). Depending on how often foreign tourists arrive, they may

be a little perplexed about finding you an appropriate place to stay, but they can be useful.

If an area gets foreign tourists every now and then, and most do now, the TIC likely to have some list of places to stay which are more or less willing and accustomed to having non-Japanese guests, and probably won't normally send non-Japanese anywhere else. The TICs in Tokyo and Kyoto are like this too. This can be either positive or negative depending on what your Japanese abilities are and what kind of travel experience you're looking for in Japan.

You can go to JTB offices, or any other travel agent, for transportation or hotel reservations. They aren't likely to represent many budget hotels, and you can't count on anybody there speaking anything but Japanese.

1.6 Guidebooks

(2.3) Guidebooks

The Lonely Planet guide is more or less the standard for budget travel in Japan, and many other countries. A 4th edition has been released in 1991 which is said to be much better than the previous edition. Moon Publishing's "Japan Handbook" by J.D. Bisignani is also good, a new edition was released recently (1995). These two references mostly overlap, so there's not a big reason to have both. The author of the Moon book seems more enamored with rural Japan than the author of the *old* LP edition. [I have only the old moon guide, but have looked through the new one, and the new LP in bookstores, they still seem pretty much equivalent - ed.]

There are also Fodor's and several other guide books that can be found in just about any decent bookstore in the U.S. These tend to not be oriented toward the budget traveller.

There are at least two series of guidebooks published in Japanese, the Ace Guides, (E-su Gaido) published by JTB, they have good information on sights and recommended itineraries, but no special budget travel information. The Blue Guides are pretty similar. JTB also publishes several guides which may be of interest, Pensions, Kokumin Shukusha, Minshuku, Business Hotels, and Hot Springs. These guides are available at some of the Kinokuniya Bookstores in the U.S. For example: San Francisco has many, Seattle, just a few.

There are specialty books on specific areas - lots on Tokyo and Kyoto, some on other areas around Japan - in both English and Japanese. A traveller who wants to limit to a specific area might find the information in these guides more complete.

1.7 Internet

(2.4) Internet

The web page

<http://www.ntt.jp/japan/>

has some good general information about Japan, including a section on Tourist Information. It includes a link to JNTO, and a HTML version of their booklet "Your Travel Companion - Japan". It's basically the same information JNTO sends in the mail, but it's a start.

The Railway Technical Research Institute has some information on the Japanese Rail system at <http://www.rtri.or.jp/index.html>, but it's not really geared toward travellers.

There is an office of the Japan Railways group in New York City, with an E-mail address of japanrail@aol.com.

1.8 Transportation Around Japan

(3) Transportation Around Japan

For most long distance travel in Japan, trains are often the best choice. There are also busses, planes, and ferries, but in most cases the trains are faster, cheaper, and more frequent.

In Tokyo, as well as some other cities, it often pays to buy a full day subway ticket. One contributor writes that in Tokyo, an all day pass runs about the same as three one way tickets. Prices are reported on the ticket machines - in Japanese. [I've never bought one, so no more details yet - ed]

1.9 Train Schedules

(3.1) Train Schedules

JNTO offices and TICs have a book of train schedules in English for the entire country. It's about 30 pages and covers the long distance express trains only. The book that lists all train schedules (and busses, ferries, and planes) is the size of a telephone book and in Japanese only. Many local TICs will have a smaller express schedule for the local line in English.

If you can read Japanese, the big train schedule can be a tremendous help. The index is a big map of Japan, so if you can read the names of the places you want to go, finding the links between them should be not too difficult even if your reading is only marginal. But you will need some reading ability. The Japanese name is "Jikokuhyou". Matching Kanji with no Japanese reading ability is possible too, but I think it would get tedious pretty quickly.

The JR train types are, in order of decreasing speed and expense.

Japanese Name	Official Translation
Shinkansen	super express (the "bullet" trains)
Tokkyuu	limited express
Kyuukou	express
Kaisoku	rapid
Futsuu	local

Kaisoku and futsuu cost the standard JR fare based on distance. The other types have a supplement added based on distance and the type of train. In 1993 the "nozomi" Shinkansen began operation on the line between Tokyo and Osaka. I don't know if its fares are higher. "Bullet" is not used in Japanese to describe the Shinkansen, that's a foreign (maybe just American) description. If you look up "bullet" in an English-Japanese dictionary (dangan) and ask for that at a train station, the results are unpredictable.

1.10 The Japan Rail Pass

(3.2) The Japan Rail Pass

The Japan rail pass is for those entering Japan on a tourist visa or (reportedly) Japanese citizens who are permanent residents abroad and visiting Japan. [I can only verify the tourist visa, don't blame me if you're a Japanese citizen and have trouble with a JRP - ed.] It is not usable by those living in Japan, and I've heard of passport checks, especially when buying tickets for long distance trains. It allows unlimited travel on JR trains, busses, and ferries. Sleeping cars and a few extra cost options are either not available or cost extra. The fastest "Nozomi" Shinkansen has been reported as one of the "not available" trains. Reports are that sleeping cars are OK, just pay the difference that the sleeping car costs over the normal ticket, and you get no credit towards a Nozomi ticket.

Note that most busses and ferries are not JR. Where reserved seats are available, reservation charges are included in the JR pass. I've heard stories about the JR pass being no good for a couple of JR ferries, but have no details. I would expect it to be the case if only private sleeping rooms are available on the ferry.

You should note that you have to purchase the Exchange Order for the JRP outside Japan. Your friendly JNTO office will be able to provide some travel agencies which sell the Exchange Order. This Exchange Order can be exchanged for the real JRP at special exchange offices, located at 16 major JR stations. At this occasion you have to show your passport to validate your temporary visitor status. Passports or other ID are not generally checked after that point, but they might be.

the JR pass comes in 1, 2, and 3 week versions, and last I checked (August 1993), the JR pass was 27800, 44200, 56600 yen for the 1, 2, and 3 week respectively in the ordinary version which is good enough for most human beings. A round trip Shinkansen ticket from Tokyo to

Osaka is about 26,000 yen, Hiroshima is 37,000 and Hakata (Northern Kyushu) is 42,000 (july 1991). That can give a general idea of some of the distance you need to travel before the pass starts to pay off.

There is also a green car version if you must go first class. The seats are larger with more legroom and probably TV service at your seat. The regular class is just fine unless you're really big by American standards. I have no complaints with the regular seats on shinkansen and express trains at 183cm tall (six feet for those of us still measuring in the middle ages).

If you're going to use a major city as a base for lots of short or day trips, think twice about the JR pass, in many cases private lines run the same trip cheaper and faster than JR.

(one way fares June 1991)

Tokyo -> Odawara, Hakone entrance

JR Local	Y1420	1:25	
JR Shinkansen	Y3570	0:40	
Odakyuu Express	Y1250	1:10	from shinjuku

Tokyo -> Nikko

Tobu express	Y1769	1:43	from asakusa
JR Local	Y2470	2:30	one transfer from ueno

Tokyo -> Kamakura

JR Local	Y930	0:55	
Odakyuu express	Y660	1:53	from shinjuku; train splits once, be in the right car; transfer at fujizawa to enoden railway. See, the private lines aren't <u>always</u> better.

You can find similar examples between many of the interesting places around Kyoto, Osaka, Nara, Ise.

Also, the JR pass is not good for Tokyo or Osaka subways.

The point I'm trying to make in all of this is consider also the cost in time or added tickets when you're evaluating if the JR pass is a good deal for you. In my last three trips to Japan, it was great once, and twice it would have been a bad deal. The first time, I went as far as Hiroshima then back to Tokyo, the other times, I didn't cover as much territory. Your own itinerary is the only way to determine if the JR pass is a good deal or not.

If you can read Japanese, do what I did, and get the telephone book sized timetable and figure out your major travels and their cost and if you would really use JR for a particular link. If you're near even, get the pass anyway just for convenience. You might also find that it would work well for say, one week of a two week trip, and in the other

week you wouldn't use it enough to make up the difference between the one week and two week passes.

One more point to consider: If you have, say a week in Japan, arrive on Saturday and leave the following Saturday. That's 8 days by the reckoning for the valid periods of a JR pass. Give a little thought if you want to have the pass valid the first day or the last day of your trip since you can't have both. Most flights from the U.S. arrive in the late afternoon, and unless you're covering a lot of ground on that first day, you probably won't want to activate the pass for your arrival day.

1.11 Local Trains

(3.3) Local Trains

If you don't have a JR pass, you'll probably do more travel by local trains than express. It is possible to get from Tokyo to Osaka by local train in less than 10 hours for about 8,000 yen, but the ticket seller will probably think you're crazy when you buy the ticket. The shinkansen does the same trip in 3 hours for about 13,500 yen. This is obviously an extreme case, but for trips of two hours or so on a local train, the cost difference percentage is larger and the time savings is smaller. Shinjuku to Koufu is 124 km and by limited express takes about 90 minutes for 4610 yen, A local train does it in about 150 minutes for 2160 yen. A Kaisoku runs on holidays only but takes about 105 minutes for the same 2160 yen.

Decide what your time is worth, or how long you want to sit and look out the window, or how long you don't want to sit and look out the window. Don't forget that on futsuu and kaisoku trains, you don't generally have reserved seats. If it's crowded, you may stand the whole way too.

Schedules are posted at train stations and published in the big timetable, rarely in any language but Japanese.

Keep in mind that around Tokyo and the entire area between Nagoya and Osaka, private trains may very well go where you want faster and cheaper than JR. The previous section on the JR pass mentions a couple of the options.

1.12 Youth 18 Ticket

(3.4) Youth 18 Ticket

[from a contributor -ed.]

Another discount for travelling on the trains in Japan, at least during the summer months, is the "Youth 18" ticket. It is only available within Japan, and is valid from the 23rd of July to some

time at the end of August; and also around Christmas/New Year for about a month. The tourist office should have the exact dates. You buy the tickets at railway stations in Japan. They are intended for students to travel during school vacations. There may be age limits.

You get 5 tickets; each gives you a day's ride on any JR local train for around 2500 Yen, for any distance. This means you can go from Tokyo to Kyoto for 2500 Yen, one fifth of the Shinkansen fare. Also, there is an overnight local train from Tokyo to Kyoto and vice versa, so you can save a night's accomodation by taking it. This train is packed with Japanese students also taking advantage of the cheap ticket, and the trains aren't as comfy as the super-express.

1.13 Buses

(3.5) Busses

There are some long distance busses. Using the Tokyo to Osaka route as an example, the "Dream Bus" is reported to be pretty nice. It leaves Tokyo at about 9:00 or 10:00 PM and arrives in Osaka at 6:00 or 7:00 the next morning for about 8,500 yen. The large timetable has 6 pages of these long distance overnight busses, when you consider that it's a place to sleep for the night, depending on how well you sleep on a bus, they can be pretty economical. If you don't sleep well in such places, being wiped out for a while after a sleepless night might not be worth the savings.

There are also local busses that go all over the place. Except Kyoto, schedules and routes are difficult to find in any language other than Japanese. Most, but not all, busses are boarded at the middle door where you will find a ticket dispenser. The ticket will have a number on it. If you get on at the beginning of the line, you don't get a ticket. Up by the driver is a board with prices and numbers that correspond to the fare for each ticket number, or the highest fare is for no ticket. The fares, as you might expect, increase the farther you ride from the place you got on the bus. When you get off, exit through the front door and drop your ticket and the correct fare into the fare box next to the driver. Many of the fare boxes also have bill changers built in to them, but you drop correct change into the box itself.

Kyoto busses have a fixed fare that you can pay with money or with tickets from a vending machine. Popular tourist stops have announcements in English. Bus routes are numbered, and maps in English are available at the TIC. The MAINfaq caveat is that some of the routes are circular, and the clockwise and counterclockwise busses have the same number. You'll get where you want eventually, but might get a long tour like I did on my first Kyoto bus ride.

1.14 Ferries

(3.6) Ferries

[from a contributor - ed]

The ferry system is good and cheap, particularly some of the less-travelled, like the Shin-Nihonkai ferry from Tsuruga/Maizuru to Otaru (Hokkaido). If you have time, this takes 30 hours and will get you from Kansai to Hokkaido for around 5,000 yen, second class. There is no reason to book a higher class. The ships have cafeterias, a TV lounge, a coin laundry, (sometimes) a karaoke bar... a wonderful view of the coast, and clean, crisp air. And you can move! Friendly people, too.

The ships make their money by carrying trucks and cars, with passenger areas on the upper deck. The point here is that they are BIG ships, quite seaworthy, and (from dizzying experience) give a safe ride, even in a typhoon. They are my long-distance transportation of choice, though sadly, passengers services are dying out.

1.15 Where to Stay

(4) Where to Stay

There are dormitory places in Tokyo where you can stay for 1,000 yen per night -- if there's a vacancy. [can anybody supply an address?? -ed.] Tani House in Tokyo and Uno House in Kyoto are old favorites, and ran about 1500 yen in 1993. No meals, but there are kitchens. You can also stay in some very nice ryokan in Kyoto for 3500 per person (meals extra). [I've also received one strong recommendation AGAINST Tani House - ed.]

There are much fewer really cheap places to stay in Japan like there are in Europe or the poorer countries of Asia. A youth hostel is one of the cheapest and it's in the 3,000 ~ 3,500 yen range with two meals. There are both private and public youth hostels, no membership is required for the public places. JNTO has a youth hostel list.

[From a contributor, not my personal experience. - ed]

With a few notable exceptions (Yoyogi in Tokyo, Sapporo House in Sapporo) I have found Japanese Youth Hostels to be excellent -- far above average and an excellent value. There are more youth hostels in Japan than in any other country in the world. It is worthwhile to buy a YH membership in your home country -- it's kind of expensive here. Some hostels even give special discounts to foreign guests! The food is often very good, too, especially in small hostels where, in the off season, you end up eating with the family that runs it. They are great places to meet people, even if you speak no Japanese, because students often stay there. I've made a lot of friends that way.

I haven't seen the JNTO list of hostels. There is an excellent book published annually by the Japanese hostels. It gives a map and all of the usual YH symbols for what you can expect, plus some Japanese extras, like whether or not there's a hot spring available. The book runs about 1,000 yen, or is included with membership if you join here.

Sheet rental is 100 yen per night (you can bring your own to avoid this fee). Most standard YH rules apply, but not as strictly as other places I've been. Excellent value.

[back to me - ed]

A Minshuku is a small inn, usually Japanese style, where, to quote the official line, "The visitor is made to feel like one of the family." I've never felt like one of the family, but I have stayed in nice Minshuku. Meals are usually included, prices are about 6500 yen per person. JNTO publishes a list of minshuku which are more or less accustomed to having foreign visitors. Some of the Minshuku on the list are more like small business hotels. Other minshuku owners may be wary about foreigners, and may even refuse to allow foreigners, but a minshuku is just about the most pleasant way to stay relatively cheaply in Japan. [editor's opinion here] I've found the smaller the place, the more likely the owners are to spend time being friendly. The JNTO list includes how many rooms each minshuku has. There are guides published in Japanese that list location, cost, types of meals, construction, etc. of minshuku all over the country. Minshuku are more common away from large cities. Small cities (population "only" a few hundred thousand) may have several. Local tourist information offices in smaller cities will often be able to make minshuku arrangements when you arrive in town. A one or two day notice is probably better.

Anything written here about a Minshuku probably applies to a cheap ryokan also. I haven't figured out the difference between the two in many cases.

Business Hotels are basic, no-frills hotels. Many of the rooms have only a twin bed with basic other furnishings. There might be a TV, it may also cost 100 yen per hour to watch it. Business hotels are usually in larger cities, especially around major train stations. Prices vary according to location more than anything. The more convenient to a major train station, the more expensive they get. Many of the places listed in JNTO's "Reasonable Accommodations in Japan" are business hotels.

Some temples have lodging available, known as shukubo. I've never stayed in one of these, but would like to. I don't know of any references or where to find temples that accept guests. In Wakayama prefecture, Mt. Koya is the site of the headquarters of the Shingon sect of Buddhism. There are many shukubo on Koya san.

Pensions are named after the European Pensions, although you might find that they are more like a western-style Minshuku. Prices are in the range of 7,000 to 11,000 yen a night and include dinner and breakfast. Most pensions are architecturally similar to western style houses with the bedrooms on the second floor, a playroom and dining room on the first floor, a shared toilet and a Japanese style common bath. The dinner hour and breakfast hour are usually fixed; I've found 8:00 to 9:00 is common for breakfast and 6:00 to 7:00 for dinner. Newer pensions feature one or more of the following: "French" or "Nouvelle Cuisine" dinners, tennis courts, sometimes special activities related to the owner's interests such as para-gliding, horse-back riding, baking pastries, etc. There are guides published in Japanese that list location, cost, types of meals, and special features of pensions all over the country. Pensions are common near

"resort" areas near the sea, the lakes or the mountains.

A Kokumin Shukusha is a hotel that has some kind of government affiliation in its management. They are often in rural resort areas. They are relatively inexpensive, starting around 7500 yen per person with two meals. The rooms and other facilities are much better than the price might indicate. Meals are at fixed times in a large dining room, there may be an announcement over the hotel's PA system that it's time to come and get it. I have stayed at one Kokumin Shukusha, in 1993, and it was very nice for my 7700 yen or so. The usual way to make reservations is book and pay ahead at a travel agent, but it is possible to book directly by phone. I called from the U.S. which was unusual for the place, they wanted an address to send a confirmation, but my Japanese or their English was not enough to explain an American address.

If you have any religious affiliations (Christian, Buddhist, etc.) most "international" denominations/sects/etc. will house their "members" for a small fee (or even free) at the local church, temple, etc. or at a local member's home. There may be other international groups which offer similar hospitality, so check with your affiliations.

There are other somewhat more offbeat places to stay including:

Capsule Hotels: you get a tube with a bed to sleep on and TV to watch. They're cheap, about 2400 to 4000 yen, and mostly near major train stations in major cities. The price seems determined mostly by how close to how big a train station. Many (most??) capsule hotels won't accept women as guests, they have one restroom, bath, etc. only. Most of the guests are businessmen who missed the last train home.

Kenkou Rando, "health land." They're MAINfaqlly found out from the centre of town, and are huge overgrown bath-houses, which include baths (obviously) of many types, often with Chinese medicines. The standard Kenkou Rando also has a cinema (I've seen 20,000 Leagues under the Sea!!), a restaurant, children's playrooms, karaoke, etc, etc. You have to pay extra for food etc, and often it will be put on your "key" number for you to pay when you leave. At midnight, they turn the movie off, and (in the places I've visited) the seats in the cinema can be reclined, you can take a blanket from a pile and sleep. The standard price in 1990 was ~1500 yen, with a small surcharge (~250yen) if you stayed overnight. The most expensive stay I've had in Kenkou Rando was 2000 yen, but this place had some amazing features.

Love Hotels... one of Japan's most useful institutions. Of course you can spend the night there, even if you are alone, though the proprietor might worry a bit. Couples will obviously be welcome -- mostly. Some aren't keen on having overnight guests who don't fit the standard profile... But if you can't find someplace else and particularly if it's late at night they might give you a room for 6,000 or so.

If you want to put them to the use for which they are intended, you can see some rather charming aspects of Japanese culture. A standard room comes with a bed, table, radio, television, X-rated videos, a

stocked refrigerator, bath, toilet, garish lighting and decoration. There is a lot of variation. Some nice ones have very large baths, with windows, and assorted other accessories. They often go to hilarious lengths to protect the privacy of their guests. Note that there is also a "service time," during the day, maybe 10-5, when you can stay for about 3,500 for the whole period -- bring food and stay for the day...

-- from a second source --

My husband and I like to just get in the car and go on a trip. Sometimes that means arriving in a town late in the evening and not being able to find a cheap minshuku. When that happens, we look for one of those buildings with the garish neon lights and the curtained parking entrances. Love hotels seem to be located everywhere! and they always seem to have vacancies at night. They let you stay from 10:00 p.m. to (I think) 9:00 in the morning for something like 10,000 to 15,000 yen for two. Unlike minshuku, you get a private bath and toilet and a double bed to boot! :) (Apparently, they look at you a little strangely if you are alone or if you are with a friend of the same sex.)

1.16 Hotel Information and Strategy

(4.1) Hotel Information and Strategy

JNTO has lists of hotels that are fairly accustomed to foreign tourists. They state that English is spoken at all the places they list, but don't depend on it.

Most train stations in tourist areas have a hotel information office and/or a tourist information office. For budget lodgings like minshuku try the tourist information first. If both of these offices exist, they might be two people sharing the same window, but they'll give out different information. The hotel information office is more likely to send you to a business hotel than a minshuku. The prices of the two might be similar, but the minshuku is (in my experience) usually more pleasant.

1.17 Food

(5) Food

Food in Japan can be reasonable, but can also break the bank if you don't watch out. Good general advice for trying to stay on a budget is eat Japanese style and avoid western food. Japanese food easily gets as expensive as western, but it generally gets cheaper. This section has some rather sweeping generalizations about where and what to eat, treat them as such.

If eating at cheap places, avoid beef. Good beef in Japan is very good and very expensive. Cheap beef is often not very good and pork, chicken, fish, or shrimp is usually a much better value.

Noodles are one of the more economical meals in Japan. The standard dish is noodles in a pork broth topped with assorted vegetables, tenpura or meat. Dishes generally run about 500 - 1500 yen. Various regions of Japan tend to specialize in particular noodle types--soba in the central mountain district, especially Nagano prefecture; udon in kagawa prefecture on Shikoku; and ramen in Kyushu.

Restaurants in department stores are often some of the cheaper places to eat in a major city. Many stores have restaurants in both the basement and on one of the top floors. If there are both, the basement places are usually cheaper. Each restaurant will usually specialize in one style of food, Japanese, Chinese, Italian, ... Nearly all of them have models in the window so you can tell exactly what you're getting and how much it costs. If you don't speak Japanese, you can always have the wait person come out front while you point.

For a meal on the go, you can put together a good meal from the various food shops in the basement of the big department stores. There are often free samples that you can use to round out (or sometimes even replace) a meal.

Wait until about one hour before closing time at department stores or "large" supermarkets (esp. before their store "holiday" -- Tuesday or Wednesday for most stores) and you'll see a lot of prepared food marked down in price.

Check out shops around universities, since you can almost always find cheap "teishoku" geared for students.

If you like sushi, try "kaiten zushi" - "revolving sushi". This is the conveyor belt sushi where the chefs stand in the middle of the shop, surrounded by counters with a circular conveyor belt that carries small plates of sushi. Prices vary, and depend on the color of the plate. Kaiten zushi is about the lowest class of sushi, and it's not the same atmosphere of a more traditional shop, but it's probably one of the better sushi deals around. You can get take out sushi from the food basement of most department stores, but the kaiten zushi is fresher and probably no more expensive.

Supermarkets are not as good for the traveller as they are in the U.S. There are fewer prepared foods in Japan, so if you want a meal of fruit or raw vegetables, you can find that at a supermarket, but don't expect a salad bar or burritos with a microwave to heat them up.

Lots of convenience stores now have prepared food and microwaves to heat them. This can save one's life (more experience). But there is hardly any good Mexican food at all...

There's always McDonalds.

1.18 Etiquette

(6) Etiquette

The general advice is just be friendly and polite, and for the most part you'll do just fine in Japan. There are really only two areas where you must follow the local customs, shoes and bathing.

As many people know, Japanese don't wear shoes in the house, or schools, temples, and many other buildings. If you enter a building, you may well see shelves or cubbyholes full of shoes, and maybe a bunch of slippers either in a box or lined up inside the entrance. This area is called a genkan. Just put your shoes in the shelves and put on a pair of slippers, if they're available, otherwise just go on in stocking feet. If there's no place to store your shoes, it's probably OK to keep them on your feet. Many tourist attractions that have separate entrance and exit give plastic bags and you carry your shoes with you.

Once you're walking around the inn, house, whatever, be sure to take off the slippers before you walk on tatami, the straw mats that cover the floor in Japanese style rooms, the hallways are traditionally wood planks, or now tile, linoleum, etc. Just remember nothing but socks on the tatami.

When you go to the toilet, you may see a pair of ugly plastic slippers when you open the door. They're often red or pink, and may have "toilet" written in English. If so, leave your hall slippers outside the door and put these slippers on while you do your business. Switch back to the others when you leave the toilet.

If you take a bath in a bath shared by others, this may be your turn alone in a small bathroom, or with many others in a large bath, the important thing to remember is wash before you get in the bath tub, and no soap in the tub. The usual procedure is to leave your clothes in the basket or cubby in the changing room, go into the bathroom (not the toilet room, they've not related in Japan), wash and rinse thoroughly, then go soak in the tub for as long as you like. When you enter the bathroom, there will be a bunch of spigots, maybe hand held shower heads, along at least one wall, that's where you do your washing. The tub itself will hold somewhere between one person to one thousand people.

Men tend to just rinse off with a couple of buckets full of water before soaking in the tub for a little while, then getting out and washing, then back for more soaking. I've been told women generally keep to the traditional procedure. It's also considered polite to hold your washtowel over your genitals when walking around the bath. I was told at one time that you should wash above your waist with your right hand, below with the left. Men tend to be more lax about following all of these customs, I've been told by a friend that women tend to follow them more closely.

Not following the customs with shoes or bathing can cause hard feelings, they're some very strong traditions in Japanese culture. The following points are things to keep in mind, but not get worked up

over. Blowing your nose is considered rather disgusting, especially if you save the stuff in a handkerchief in your pocket or blow it in a restaurant. A handkerchief is for drying hands or wiping your forehead, not for preserving nasal mucus, carry a package of tissues. People tend to dress nicely in cities, jeans are a little out of place, shorts much more so. People don't eat while walking along the street, you eat in a place that sells food. Couples don't generally show much affection together in public. Except nose blowing, these points all seem much more relaxed around vacation areas, or even on weekends in other places.

1.19 Emergencies

(7) Emergencies

Phone Numbers: The phone number to call an ambulance or fire truck (or just report disaster) is 119. This is a free of charge number. You just push the emergency button (it's red) at the bottom of the phone and dial. The number for the police is also free of charge - it is 110. It's doubtful the person on the other end will speak any language other than Japanese.

For directory assistance the number is 104, but you have to pay for this one. Usually for one number they charge you 30 yen. If you are using a telephone card the 30 yen is deducted automatically.

Police are generally pretty helpful. If you get lost, a police box - they're everywhere in cities - is a good place to ask for directions. If I arrived in some out of the way place totally at a loss where to find a place to stay, I'd probably ask at the local police station.

1.20 Money

(8) Money

Japan is traditionally a cash society, but that is changing, and the pace of that change seems to be increasing. If you're eating and staying at budget oriented places, it's still best that you don't count on paying with credit cards. Business hotels usually accept plastic, minshuku that do are rare, but increasing. In general, the cheaper the place, the less likely your visa card will do any good. Visa and Master Card both exist in Japan, but are not universally interchangeable like they are in the U.S. Visa seems slightly more common, but this like many credit card things in Japan, may change.

It is illegal for a business to accept any currency other than Japanese yen, so you will have to change your home currency into yen. Not every bank is an authorized money changer, but those that are generally have a sign in English at their front door to that effect.

You will get a better exchange rate for travellers' checks than cash. (Cash requires more security than endorsed TCs) If you're traveling from the U.S., exchange rates are (in all cases I've seen) better in Japan than the U.S. Probably the best exchange rate you'll find is if you pay by credit card and the card company converts it - but your company may vary. If you're spending at places that take plastic you may want to use it. Banks all give pretty much the same rate, even the banks at the airports. Very large hotels and department stores in very large cities often have exchange counters and even their rates are close to the banks, but slightly worse.

A reader from Spain, and another from Germany comment that their best method was to carry TCs in Yen, so your best rate may vary depending on what banks in your home country do. U.S. banks don't like dealing in anything but dollars, and their fees remind you of that.

You may find the exchange rate slightly better than TCs by getting money from an ATM. The Cirrus network has locations in Tokyo, at least. [I tried an ATM once, it rejected my card immediately after asking for a number, don't know charges involved -ed] The prompts that lead you through getting money are all in Japanese. If you use an ATM, remember that many U.S. banks place a limit on daily withdrawals from an ATM. If you don't arrange to increase the limit, an ATM can be a poor source of cash in Japan.

ATMs are getting more widespread all the time, but there are still problems. Japanese ATMs that say "Visa" on them do not accept American Visa cards. The only exception to this are the special "Visa International" ATMs that Visa has set up in Japan at Narita Airport and a few other locations. If you want a cash advance, you will probably have to do it in person, and the teller will likely want you to try the machine first.

The Japanese banking system does require monumental patience at times. Sometimes, in remote locations you can be completely out of luck since not every bank can even exchange money. You may be able to plead being an ignorant foreigner, and that may get you some help, but it will take a long time with many hassels so plan ahead. Be sure to countersign travellers' checks exactly as the first signature. Deviation can lead to problems.

The crime rate is quite low, but probably increasing. Pickpocket crime is reported to be increasing, along with burglary, so limit cash or carry it in less obvious places and leaving cash in a hotel room might not be the best idea. Japanese out travelling often take lots of cash with them. Unless you tend to loose things, you might want to do the same. I see a lot of fanny packs in tourist areas. In cities men often carry a small zip up case with wallet and such while women usually carry purses.

My strategy is usually get travellers' checks in U.S. dollars, and exchange about a week's worth into yen at a time. Try your best to avoid converting money into yen then back into your home currency when you leave. You loose on exchange rates twice that way. Try to plan banking ahead of time. Foreign exchange banks exist out in the country, but might be hard to find.

1.21 Luggage Delivery and Storage

(9) Luggage Delivery and Storage

Travelling light is one key to a pleasant trip in Japan. Very little public transportation has allowance for large suitcases. A good guideline that's only a little restrictive is if you can't carry it on an airplane, it's too big to haul around Japan on public transportation.

There are luggage forwarding services in the Tokyo area that will ship baggage between Narita and Tokyo. If you are staying in one place long enough - it takes about a day - you can send everything from Narita directly to your first hotel, and only carry enough supplies for that first night. One such company is "ABC Kouku Tenimotsu Service" at (03)3545-1131. They have reportedly English speaking personnel on the phones. They don't have English speakers at the airport.

Luggage storage is often available while you take a one or two day trip elsewhere. If you return to the same lodging, they may often hold your luggage for the time you're gone. Storage is also available in many large train stations. Coin lockers usually have a limit of 3 to 5 days or so, but after that time, they don't throw your stuff away, they just move it somewhere else and you have to bail it out for approximately the coin locker price. In metropolitan areas, coin lockers often have a LED display of the price. As you shove in 100 yen coins, the price counts down to zero, and you get the key. At about 2:00 a.m. a new day's rent is added on the display, and you'll need that much to get the locker open when you come back. Think ahead about where you want to pick up your stuff. Sometimes you'll want the locker inside the paid area of the train station, some time you won't.

1.22 Other Helpful Hints

(99) Other Helpful Hints

Public restrooms are plentiful. You'll find them around tourist attractions, train stations, and public parks, some with impressive signs (in Japanese) that translate like "xx Township Municipal Public Restroom". In rural areas, don't be surprised if men and women use the same restroom. They are rarely stocked with toilet paper or paper towels. Carry a handkerchief to dry your hands, and little packets of tissues for other parts of your anatomy. If you need to find a place that supplies these accessories, or want a western style toilet, a fancy department store or hotel in a large city is your best chance, probably your only chance.

A word about Japanese toilets is probably in order here. Japan has

probably the most sophisticated toilet technology in the world, but a budget traveller is more likely to find a squat type toilet than one with water jet wash, blow dry, and urinalysis while you wait. You'll find a trough in the floor with a hood at one end. Stand with a foot on each side, squat down and do your thing. Some say this style is more sanitary with no body contact, some say the position is better for the job to be done. To others, it's undignified or comfortable. Just be prepared. Do lots of deep knee bends before your trip.

Public telephones ("Koushuu denwa") are also plentiful. Local calls cost 10 yen for 3 minutes. You'll get a warning beep when you're close to being cut off. You can put in lots of coins ahead of time and the phone returns the unused money, but doesn't make change for unused portions of a 100 yen coin. There are various colors of phones, but the green ones are the most useful, they take telephone cards, and the green phones with a gold faceplate can be used for direct dialed international calls. To dial an international call by KDD, dial 001 + country-code + phone-number. The country code to the U.S. is 1. There are cheaper long distance services, but KDD seems to work everywhere. Operator assisted international calls are expensive.

A new type of public phone is the grey phones. They have an LCD display and can be used to call overseas. They have a few other convenience features also. There is also a new competitor to NTT for service INSIDE Japan with blue phones. They are for use only within Japan, and are very inconvenient because (since they aren't NTT phones) they don't accept NTT cards, only coins (and some, VISA and other credit cards). However, if you're making a lot of calls within Japan, their rates are cheaper than NTT's.

Telephone cards are handy for long distance calls, especially for international. 100 yen at a time is deducted on international calls. You can buy cards for 500 or 1000 yen just about everywhere. From tourist attractions, they'll have interesting pictures. Japanese collect them and give them as gifts.

Electricity is 100 volts 50hz in Eastern Japan, 60hz in western Japan. The dividing line is the Oi river in Shizuoka prefecture about half way between Tokyo and Nagoya. The outlets fit standard 2 prong U.S. plugs. Hair dryers or electric shavers will probably work, but they'll be a little weak. Don't forget the part about packing light when you consider bringing electrical appliances.

There is no tipping in Japan.

1.23 JNTO or JIG listed lodgings

(Appendix A) JNTO or JIG listed lodgings.

Throughout this article, I've mostly discussed how to figure out where to stay, or where to eat, rather than recommending specific establishments. In this appendix, I list very brief info about some of the places to stay that are included in the information JNTO provides. Establishments listed here are generally Japanese Inn Group

members, or are listed in the JNTO publications such as "Reasonable Accomodations in Japan", or "Minshukus in Japan". You'll need to get these lists because I haven't included addresses or phone numbers here.

All of these places, by virtue of their JIG or JNTO listings, market to foreign tourists. Most are regular inns or hotels, catering mostly to Japanese guests, but a few market exclusively to foreign visitors.

This is not meant to be complete, it may also go out of date. I make no promises about the quality of the information, but welcome updates.

Name	Room Style	Building Style	English Spoken?	Quiet Area?	Date	Comments
Tokyo:						
Ryokan Katsutaro only	J	J	some	busy street	10/87	Foreigners ←
Hotel Suigetsu	J	W	varies	fair	10/87	
Mikawa Bekkan	J	J	??	mostly	3/93	
Mt. Mitake (Tokyo Pref.):						
Komadori Sanso	J	J	little	very	3/93	
Kyoto:						
Riverside Takase only	J	J	fair	very	10/87	Foreigners ←
Ise (Mie Pref.):						
Hoshide	J	J	??	fair	10/90	
Tsumago (Nagano Pref.):						
Fujiya	J	J	no	very	10/90	
Matsumoto (Nagano Pref.):						
Ikkyu	W	W	??	good	10/90	

1.24 Airport Transportation

(Appendix B) Airport Transportation

If you have access to a web browser, check out

<http://www.ntt.jp/japan/TCJ/AIRPORT/00.html>

for some information. They don't mention the cheapest train from Narita though.

1.25 Narita to Tokyo

(B.1) Narita to Tokyo

The New Tokyo International Airport is about 60 Km from Tokyo. There is a wide variety of ways to get from Narita to Tokyo, for a variety of prices. I have only used the train, so bus and taxi information are probably a little vague.

Both JR and Keisei run trains to Narita. The cheapest is the Keisei Tokkyu which goes to Ueno station. This is a standard commuter train with no special accomodation for suitcases, and costs about 1000 yen. You'll normally get a seat because Narita is the start of the line. The Tokkyu makes the trip in 75 minutes. The Keisei Skyliner is about 60 minutes, has reserved seats and presumably, more luggage space. The Skyliner is about 2000 yen.

If you have a JR pass, or need to make a quick connection at Tokyo station, the JR Narita Express goes there in 55 minutes, and has reserved seats and luggage space. If you're paying for it, it costs around 3000 yen. There are cheaper JR trains, but they don't compete well in speed or cost with Keisei. If you're not using a JR pass, but making Shinkansen connections at Tokyo station, the NEX might be cost effective depending on how the combination with the Shinkansen ticket works out.

There are busses to the Tokyo City Air Terminal (TCAT). When you're leaving Japan, you can check it at TCAT and be done with your luggage.

I don't know about arrival time. TCAT is not particularly convenient to subway lines in downtown Tokyo.

Shuttle busses run to several hotels in the downtown area.

Taxis cost a pile of money.

When you schedule transport out of Narita, count on at least one hour to get through customs and immigration. I would not recommend reserving actual tickets from your home country for your arrival day as it's hard to schedule things that precisely. Unless it's a busy period, reserved seats on most trains are available right up to departure time.

I've heard varying reports on traffic from Narita to Tokyo. Some say driving is no slower than the train. Others say it takes forever. In general, the train is less affected by weather or traffic jams.

1.26 Nagoya

(B.2) Nagoya

A bus runs from Nagoya airport to the Nagoya Bus Center, presumably near Nagoya station, for about 700 yen in about 45 minutes. From

Nagoya station connections on JR and Kintetsu (a large private railway that covers the Nagoya - Osaka region) are plentiful. JR has Shinkansen connections towards Tokyo, or to Kyoto. To Osaka, the Shinkansen is faster, but Kintetsu is much cheaper. Kintetsu to Kyoto is possible, but involves transfers, while the Shinkansen is direct over a shorter route with faster trains.

1.27 Kansai International Airport

(B.3) Kansai International Airport

Info Please???

<http://www.ntt.jp/japan/TCJ/AIRPORT/03.html> lists information about transportation from the Kansai International Airport to Osaka and a few surrounding cities. The info is not reproduced here because I don't want to step on JNTO's copyright.

1.28 What 2 Do On a Short Layover at Narita

(C) What To Do On a Short Layover at Narita

Many flights from the U.S. to other asian cities have layovers of various lengths at the "Tokyo" International Airport in Narita. So many people look for something interesting to do during that time.

You can just stay in the international no man's land inside the airport without going through entrance formalities. This area can be crowded, and is rarely comfortable.

Immigration can easily take one hour, but it depends on how many people have arrived at the same time, or shortly before you. With no baggage to claim, customs can be faster, but count on about an hour and a half before you're actually allowed to leave the airport. Once you enter the country through immigration, you have to exit through passport control also. Give yourself another hour or more to handle departure formalities. I've heard stories of long waits at passport control to leave, but have always breezed right through myself. You will also have to pay the 2,000 yen facilities charge.

I would probably stay put inside the airport for a stop of anything less than four hours. But then my shortest stopover at Narita has been ten days, so different people will have different thresholds. I do not know if there are showers or any similar facilities for those trapped inside the international area.

The city of Narita is very close by, the first stop out of the airport on both the Keisei and JR lines, fares are probably less than 200 yen. (See section B.1) Narita San is a large Shingon temple which is said to be nice for a visit. There are department stores near the

Narita train stations. I've read reports of a nice public bathhouse for about 2000 yen. It's rather expensive for a public bath, but I love Japanese baths, and after a long flight in the super dry air of an airplane, this might be my choice.

A little farther from Narita along both the Keisei and JR lines is the city of Sakura. I've heard nice things about the National History Museum in Sakura, but have never been there.

If you choose to go to Tokyo, you will spend at least another hour each way in something vaguely resembling an airplane (a train), not something I would do in the middle of two long plane flights, but at some point, a stopover becomes long enough that it's worth doing. A good Tokyo guidebook is probably a better source than this for finding something to your liking in Tokyo. Asakusa or the Museums in Ueno park are convenient from the Keisei station. The Ginza is convenient to Tokyo station, but the trains to get there are more expensive or slower (or both) compared to Keisei. For readers who like electronic gizmos, Akihabara is about half way between Ueno and Tokyo stations.

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1.29 Author/Ed/Compiler

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